

# STEPPING OUT

THE SAME-SEX  
DANCE SCENE



**Marianka Swain** looks forward to a landmark Blackpool super-event

“It’s a huge responsibility,” admits Bradley Stauffer-Kruse, who, with partner Sören, is organising and hosting June’s combined ESSDA 2014 European Championships and Blackpool Same-Sex Dance Festival.

“This is the first time the UK has hosted the Championships, and we’re determined to make it the best ever.” It’s also a big step up for the festival, which, in just three years, has established itself as a major international competition and is now upgrading to the Winter Gardens’ mighty Empress Ballroom. “That means a same-sex couple will be crowned champions on the world stage of ballroom,” observes Sören. “It’ll be our moment to shine and to celebrate how much we’ve achieved in such a short time.”

Bradley puts that success down to the combination of “world-class facilities, our more-than-just-a-competition festival approach, and, of



course, location, location, location. We’ve always attracted top couples, and our pairing with the European Championships makes that status official. It’s like serving champagne with caviar – it’s totally our style!”

This year, the festival takes place over two days and a Senior class has been added to the line-up. Early registrations in all categories are strong, including several showdance teams entering for the first time, plus a university team competition is in the works. “This may even be bigger than the World Championships,” predicts Sören.

Boosting the event is its partnership with the Blackpool Pride Festival, which fortuitously takes the theme of “Dance” for 2014. That adds to

the packed social side: Friday night Welcome Party, Blackpool Pride Parade on Saturday and Pride Party on Sunday, plus social dancing between competition rounds, entertainment, LGBT history exhibition, market stalls and a dedicated family zone.

Sören is particularly pleased that the Pride Festival is also based at the Winter Gardens, “as we’ll have everything under one roof. It’s the perfect opportunity to sell the idea of same-sex ballroom to our own community – we plan to welcome, tempt and trick them in if we need to!”

The dance community is behind them, with two more major brands, Chrisanne and DSI, joining sponsors Supadance and *Dance Today*, and local backing from Visit Blackpool and new sponsor Houndshill Shopping Centre.

“In addition to their direct support, they

strengthen the visibility of same-sex dancing by lending their well-respected names to our cause,” explains Bradley.

Sören feels confident the event will deliver on this show of faith, with a strong organising team who have learned from the two previous festivals: “This is the moment we’ve been practising for.

“We hope to deliver the ultimate Blackpool experience for all participants – a spectacular weekend of dance and fun, showing off the best of Blackpool and creating a celebration of same-sex dancing for all to see.” ●

**WIN** We have three pairs of tickets to the ESSDA 2014 European Championships and Blackpool Same-Sex Dance Festival to give away. See page 7 for details.

**“THIS MAY EVEN BE BIGGER THAN THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS,” PREDICTS SÖREN”**