



Marianka Swain gets out her top hat and cane for a visit to the world of same-sex showdance

“Our first win was total beginner’s luck,” recalls Bradley Stauffer-Kruse, who, with partner Sören, has racked up more than 25 international medals since their 2006 showdance debut at London’s Rivoli Ballroom.

Their first routine, “The Skater’s Waltz”, was “a comedy yodelling version set in winter, where we Viennese waltzed as though we were skaters on an Alpine lake. Everyone was laughing and cheering and had never seen anything like it. It was a great feeling, as it made us realise we could entertain with our dancing.”

Buoyed by success, the pair created performance alter egos the Sugar Dandies, who made a real splash on *Britain’s Got Talent* in 2012. The reality

TV format suited them, explains Sören, as “showdance is actually similar to what each couple does on *Strictly* every week – it’s an opportunity to use ballroom and

Latin technique in a more creative and artistic way.

“You can choose your own music and theme, be more theatrical in costuming and add choreographic elements like lifts and other dance styles to create an individualistic

expression that goes beyond what you can do in a standard competition.” Bradley adds: “It’s the only time a couple has the floor to themselves to do whatever they want, which is both freeing and challenging!”

Showdance is a relatively new addition



The Sugar Dandies perform at Blackpool Tower Ballroom

“SHOWDANCE IS ACTUALLY SIMILAR TO WHAT EACH COUPLE DOES ON *STRICTLY*”

to same-sex ballroom competitions, first appearing at the World OutGames in Copenhagen in 2009. “It’s been part of every European and World same-sex championships since then, and of course we’ve included it at the Blackpool Same-Sex Dance Festival for the past three years,” says Sören.

Apart from major international competitions, where it’s now compulsory, the decision to feature showdance is up to individual promoters, but dancers can always count on an annual opportunity to strut their stuff at the Rivoli’s UK Same-Sex Showdance Trophy (www.showdancetrophy.co.uk).

Same-sex showdance is run along similar lines to the WDC version, “but fewer limitations,” notes

Bradley. “We like to allow for the broadest degree of expression and individuality, so the rules have purposely been kept less restrictive.

“Aside from practical guidelines, such as length of music, marking system and order of dancing, the main requirement is that the couple displays a significant amount of partner dance technique.” That technique could be based in any of the standard ten ballroom and Latin dances, or in related styles such as salsa, Argentine tango or American smooth or rhythm.

The judges mark on three criteria: technical, considering the quality of dance and demonstration of technique; artistic, taking into account delivery of choreography,

use of theme and costuming, and originality of the idea; and audience appeal, which reflects the entertainment and emotional value of the show, and the audience’s reaction to it. That combination of elements offers performers a unique opportunity, believes Sören: “We get the chance to use our ballroom and Latin skills in a different and less prescribed way, and really show our personality.”

Bradley particularly likes being able to tell a story through dance – “you can make people laugh or cry”. The prolific pair’s favourite performances include dancing dog show “French Poodle”, their dreamy “Cinderella” waltz “and, of course, our lyrical/pop foxtrot with lifts to ‘You Raise Me Up’ which got four yeses on *Britain’s Got Talent!*”

In addition to the category for couples, there’s also the growing field of team showdance, allowing groups of

dancers to create a formation team version. “In same-sex competitions, they can be all-male, all-female or mixed, as long as the latter displays a significant amount of same-sex partnering,” explains Sören.

At last year’s Blackpool ESSDA European Championships there were four showdance teams, “which was really great to see,” and showdance in general is beginning to attract more of a range of entries. “It used to be perceived as an A-class-only event, but it’s actually open to everyone, so we’re pleased dancers from all experience levels are beginning to try it.”

Bradley would love to see showdance continue to grow. “I’d encourage people to take a chance on something new and put together a couple or team performance. There’s nothing to lose, and it’s a brilliant opportunity to show a side of yourself and your dancing that hasn’t been seen before.” ●