

STEPPING OUT

THE SAME-SEX DANCE SCENE



Marianka Swain reports on the Pink Jukebox Trophy's supreme champions and trailblazing newcomers

The belles of the ball assembled at the Pink Jukebox Trophy (PJT) on February 21, with arguably the world's best six women's ballroom couples gathering at London's Rivoli Ballroom for the very first time. "They don't come to every competition, so this was a real landmark event," explains organiser Jacky Logan.

Despite the influx, Caroline Privou and Petra Zimmerman clinched a staggering 14th A title with their supreme technique and presentation, but hot on their fleet-footed heels were fellow Germans Claudia Reger and Raphaella Edeler. "They were really chasing the champions, as were all the finalists, including the UK's Heather Devine and Chrisi Lyons,"

recalls Jacky. "It was incredibly exciting to watch." No change at the top, but plenty of new blood, with the first ever women from Italy debuting in C ballroom. Nicoletta Migliorati and Elga Galvan Castenedolo were "very pleased" with their second-place finish, says Jacky. "It's tremendous to see dancers from a new country taking part, and everyone cheered them on."

Following the retirement of

defending champions Csaba Csetneki and Balázs Gáti, men's A ballroom really opened up. "It was lovely to have Csaba there as a steward, and though we missed him and Balázs hugely on the floor, the final was a proper battle," notes Jacky. Emerging victorious were slick 2014 runners-up Axel Zischka and Stefan Lehner from France, with Brits John Church and Alex Levalle coming second.

The home team went one better in men's A Latin, as Nejc Jus and Lemington Ridley

retained the title for the UK. Their unusual, fluid lyricism made them the talk of the room, as did their head-to-toe silver costuming. "They were the most amazing outfits!" proclaims Jacky. "It almost looked like they were part of their bodies."

Making history in women's Latin, both A and B winners were completely new pairings. Daria Trayanovich joined forces with her partner just two months before the competition, and they had to commute between Belarus and Copenhagen for



Women's B Latin winners Rachel Sparks and Marie Eisenhardt



Latin dancers Ainhoa Moreno Perez and Janire Iglesias Marzal have risen rapidly from dancing in the C class last year to being placed runners-up in the A class this year

training. It paid off in their electrifying display, narrowly defeating Ainhoa Moreno Perez and Janire Iglesias Marzal. The Spanish couple, who made a memorable C debut last year with no same-sex competition experience, were once again accompanied by a voluble, colourful support team.

B winners Rachel Sparks and Marie Eisenhardt, representing the UK, only finalised their choreography in the last week. "Normally, experienced partnerships dominate," observes Jacky. "But they were so well-matched

and had such great chemistry, plus there was a freshness about their performance. It's wonderful to have real surprises on the night, and it's inspiring for newcomers – look at what you can achieve in a short space of time."

The starter category, new this year, helped bridge that gap. "It's difficult to encourage people to compete, because they feel outclassed, but competitors retire or change partners – it's so important to have new dancers coming up. The starters really were the stars of the show. We played S Club 7's 'Reach' for the

jive, and the whole audience stood up and 'reached'. It's boosted their confidence, and brilliant winners Patricia Macleod and Joanne Williams are going on to big things."

Jacky was also pleased by the geographical spread. Numerous nations were represented, with multiple foreign couples and judges hosted by Brits, plus dancers from across the country – two of the Sheffield-based starter couples came after cutting their teeth in the Fun Competition. This melting pot culminated in the festive Sunday party.

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The judging panel included three same-sex newcomers, "who said they'd never seen anything like it, and were hugely impressed with the audience participation and atmosphere,"

comments Jacky. Judge Yvonne Taylor Hill said it left her "on a total high", and *Dance Today* editor Nicola Rayner, on hand to present the prizes, added: "The atmosphere was fantastic and the support from the sidelines was almost as inspiring as the wonderful dancing on the floor."

This friendliest of competitions, expertly compered by Ralf Schiller, is the only same-sex contest taking place in the UK this year, making it all the more crucial for the ballroom community. "We're so grateful to everyone who's supported us, including the Rivoli's Bill and Jeannie Mannix," says Jacky. "This is our 18th PJT, and it just keeps getting better. Here's to next year!" ●