

STEPPING OUT

THE SAME-SEX DANCE SCENE



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Marianka Swain reports on August's ESSDA European Championships

The year's landmark same-sex dance event, part of Stockholm's EuroGames, crowned some exciting new champions. Swedes Jazz Munteanu and Karin Herman came out of retirement to compete on home turf, and won the women's A Latin in style.

Ever-elegant Germans Caroline Privou and Petra Zimmermann retained their women's A ballroom title – but this time narrowly, with dynamic fellow countrywomen Raphaela Edeler and Claudia Reger taking two of the five dances.

"Women's ballroom was the largest field, and it was spectacular," says Britain's Yvonne Settle, who won B with partner Tori – "our best results for some time, as

I've been beset with injury and illness. This feels like we're on our way back."

There were new champions in both men's A Latin and ballroom: Denmark's Esben Weiergang and Gilles Hoxer, and France's Stefan Lehner and Axel Zischka. Last year's Latin winners, Santiago Granizal and Antonio Castillo, were unable to compete, while ballroom champs Csaba Csetneki and Balázs Gáti have retired. However, Csaba joined Mette Bugge as MC, "and they made a gracious and comedic pair, really adding a light-hearted edge to the competition," reports UKSSDC chair Tim Regan, who, with David Jameson, took silver in Latin.

Numbers were up in women's events, but down in men's, with several top couples not

competing. ESSDA's Hadass Armon would love to see more participants "to justify more days of competition". Stockholm's three-day championships allowed time for adult and Senior tennant, and Senior ballroom and Latin. Tim and David won the adult men's tennant, while Yvonne and Tori snagged bronze in women's Senior ballroom.

Britain's Benedikt Kraus and Thorsten Dreyer were delighted to take fifth in the strong field of men's A ballroom. "It was our most successful competition since we started dancing together six years ago," says Ben. He notes the UK dancers were the second-biggest group, and had great support from a vocal British crowd.

Rachel Sparks and Marie Eisenhardt had a more dramatic Games. "We couldn't compete in Latin, as

Marie was unwell on Thursday, so once she was better, we decided to do ballroom instead," explains Rachel. "We worked out routines the day before, with help from the Pink Dancers' Ralf Schiller, rehearsed in the corridor of our hostel, and pulled together outfits from what we had in our cases.

"We weren't in any way prepared, but we didn't want to miss out on EuroGames after all the build-up." The pair fought through a large group to the C semi-final. "It's always disappointing not to compete for a place, but we went in with low expectations, so just to have the opportunity to dance felt great."

Germany's Swinging Sisters held off the Pink Dancers in team showdance, but Britain's Sorèn and Bradley Stauffer-Kruse took the



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Britain's Sorèn and Bradley Stauffer-Kruse won the showdance title for couples

title for couples. "We couldn't have been happier with the results," says Bradley. "We usually do well in artistic and entertainment value, but this time we also won the technical merit caption, which was a personal goal. We've had a great year of training with Hazel Newberry, Stefano Soldati and Lemington Ridley, so we really were at our best."

There was a slight hiccup during the awards ceremony, with the Federation representative struggling to fit their medals over the couple's bear head costumes, "so we

had to hold them in our claws!"

More seriously, the Games organisers "tried to deal with too much at the last minute," believes Hadass, leading to problems in several sports. The dancefloor arrived late and volunteers had to help lay it, meaning it wasn't in the best condition. Thankfully, ESSDA kept the competition itself running smoothly.

Ben notes there were Games flags on buses and buildings, but no central public village, so it was harder to meet people

from other sports or invite the public to participate. Tim thought Stockholm was welcoming, though "we've had higher visibility in the past".

UKSSDC's welcome tea attracted record numbers, but Games organisers refused an official closing ball, so Heather Gladding – on very short notice – organised a dance in a nearby hotel. "She was an absolute star," says Yvonne. "It's really important for us to have a social event, as we're a relatively small scene and we've made friends

from all over the world. It's also a great introduction for people at their first international comp."

Ben adds: "It's amazing to meet dancers from as far afield as the US and Australia, and share the floor with countries that aren't much represented in other competitions, like Russia, Sweden and Finland, where the next EuroGames will take place." Tim agrees: "It's a fantastic event where people of every nation come together, not just to compete, but to dance, entertain and enjoy one another's company." ●