



Stepping Out

The same-sex ballroom and Latin dance scene



Marianka Swain reports on the Pink Jukebox Trophy

“It was one of our most successful competitions,” says organiser Jacky Logan of the 20th anniversary Pink Jukebox Trophy (PJT), which took place at London’s Rivoli Ballroom on February 18. “We had five couples from Finland, covering all different levels, and loads of new pairings coming through – many via the UK Fun Competition. It feels like a real investment in the future.” Adjudicator Julie Tomkins, who last judged PJT in 2002, agrees the future is looking bright, noting impressive progress in the standard of same-sex dance.

Germany dominated ballroom, with Gordon Knittel and Stefan Huch winning men’s A and an all-German final in the women’s. Caroline Privou and Petra Zimmerman held off Tania and Ines Dimitrova, “who were thrilled to come second – it basically felt like winning, because no one can catch Caroline and Petra!” reports Jacky. The champs were thrilled to clinch their

Petra Zimmerman and Caroline Privou, winners of the women’s A Ballroom.

15th PJT title. “Competing in England is special because of its great dedication to ballroom,” explains Caroline. “There’s no place else where we have a full house during the morning sessions (and we really mean morning!) – which creates a great atmosphere for the competitors who can then dance to their full potential. We felt like we were flying over the floor with no effort and total enjoyment. Maybe that’s why we always come back!”

Petra praised Jacky and compère Ralf Schiller’s organisation, adding: “Every year there are improvements, like introducing DSI as a sponsor or splitting the morning and afternoon sessions’ award ceremonies – all done without changing what’s made this event so special in the past.” The winning pair returned to England in March to join Jacky and Nicole Cutler at the Royal Festival Hall for Women Take the Lead, a workshop held as part of WOW

festival. “Caroline and Petra are an incredible example of strong, beautiful women’s ballroom, and I really hope they inspire more women to try leading, rather than sitting around waiting for a bloke,” says Jacky.

In Latin, dynamic Kelly Monshouwer and Liejette Spindler from the Netherlands triumphed in women’s A, while in the men’s, compatriots Mario Houtsma-Grech and Jan De Haas Amsterdam finished second to the impressive Swiss pair of Marcus Mnerinski and Renato Minnig Baden. Home team victories included Martin Arthur and Nigel Bradshaw in men’s B Latin, which also contained newcomers John Sterling and Diego Avila. “They did the Fun Competition last October and decided to carry on,” explains Jacky. “Making B Latin after such a short time together is a massive achievement. And there were some incredible stories, like Jill Shackleton having an injection in her shoulder the day before, but still competing even though she

could only use one arm. That’s commitment!”

Jacky also loved the huge standing ovation for Rivoli regulars Carole Padmore and Marion Rivenall in C Latin. “They rocked the floor, absolutely winning the hearts of the audience with their sheer joy of dance.” Carole adds: “The support was amazing and unexpected. The whole day was fantastic.” Jacky’s partner Mary says it’s that welcome which makes this such a beloved event. “The new Finnish girls were just glowing – they’ll definitely be back. Years ago, competitors wouldn’t partner anyone else during the social dance; now, everyone dances with everyone. It gives me such a thrill to see people from all these different places, at all different levels, coming together.”

Everyone expressed their appreciation for Jacky and Ralf’s 20-year dedication, as competition organisers and members of ESSDA and the UK Same-Sex Dance Council. “It’s a long time,” says Jacky. “Other countries have had a same-sex dance scene for maybe eight or nine years. We’ve got such a strong sense of identity and community – everyone here is proud to be part of something greater.” ■

We are the champions

Gordon Knittel competed with women for nearly 20 years before pairing up with long-term same-sex dancer Stefan Huch in 2014 – initially just for practice, until Gordon found a new female partner. “Dancing together felt good and was a lot of fun, so we took some lessons and our trainer recommended competing,” recalls Stefan. “Our debut event was the Nordic Open in December, where we placed third in A class, and we did our first PJT last year.”

The Rivoli is a special venue for Stefan, “as it’s where I began dancing in 1998.” Stefan then joined Ralf Schiller’s classes, “and I still meet dancers from that time at the PJT. Winning the trophy here is a great feeling – I’m very thankful. It’s overwhelming to reach the top in this wonderful atmosphere.”