



# Stepping Out

The same-sex ballroom and Latin dance scene

**Marianka Swain**  
reports on the 12th  
Vienna Dance Contest

**I**t was a smaller Vienna Dance Contest this year, with so many dancers attending the Paris Gay Games just beforehand, but exciting nonetheless, says Roswitha Wetschka, who was a key part of the organising team, but enjoyed just competing on the day. She and Stephanie Goj came fourth in the A women's ballroom, behind a fierce battle between Germany's Sabine Engelmann and Manuela Schulze, and Switzerland's Helene Grob and Judith Wildi – who finished second and third respectively.

The clear winners were Hungary's majestic Reka Fuleki and Maria Glotz, who then entered into something of a champion-of-champions contest with the equally emphatic men's A ballroom winners, Austria's Thomas Marter and Stefan Lehner, in the Viennese waltz round. The men eventually prevailed, but it was a "wonderful spectacle," recalls Roswitha.

Thomas and Stefan also took part in the Viennese waltz contest at the mainstream Austrian Open last year, since the Austrian Dancesport Federation took the landmark decision to open it up to same-sex couples; the rest of the competition remains under World DanceSport Federation rules. "The Vienna Dance Contest played an important part in that, showing same-sex dance at its best to people who might not know about it," explains Roswitha.



Hungary's Maria Glotz and Reka Fuleki.

Those newcomers included two Austrian judges this year, both very impressed. One had made other plans in the evening, but was so taken by the atmosphere that "she asked if she could reconsider and bring her husband along to the social night instead," reveals Roswitha. Another new addition was DJ Michael Kongso, from Copenhagen, who "mixed old and new music brilliantly – it really carried everyone through the day. He's already booked in for the next competition!" That will be in 2020, with the organising team taking a year's break.

Roswitha also competed in A Latin with Del Plasse, coming second to Finnish pair Santra Rinne and Piia Korpi. "We really felt we danced well, and we're very happy and proud with that result," says Roswitha. Meanwhile, the men's A Latin saw Germany's Simone Biagini and Thomas-Emanuel Bensch triumph.

Finally, the Pink Dance Night allowed competitors to socialise and enjoy performances from Les Schuh Schuh, dancing to a medley on the theme of love, and the Sugar Dandies – who officially retired in Paris, but, since

they'd danced at the very first Vienna Dance Contest, wanted to return for a special farewell. Capturing events was a film crew from local station Okto TV, and, during those interviews, Roswitha was surprised how often the topics of dancewear and lead-swapping came up

– with many reflecting on how those choices expressed their identity.

"I'm very pleased it's still going," says Roswitha of the competition. "Throughout the whole day, you feel how community-based it is, and how it celebrates LGBTQ+ visibility. Some organisers were feeling overwhelmed earlier, but after the actual event, they were all talking about the incredible spirit, the joy of diversity, and saying it must happen again! It has deep meaning for us, and for society."

Roswitha's personal favourite moments included UK dancer Abigail Reynolds teaming up with Austrian Ulrike Wernhart on the day to compete, and everyone mixing together in the Cha Cha Fun. "Alongside the wonderful high standard, I love that element of inclusion – it's what makes this event feel special." ■

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## Mainstream success

Two years ago, same-sex ballroom champs Caroline Privou and Petra Zimmermann began exploring mainstream competitions (though unfortunately so far not in their native Germany). "We have a great team giving us the confidence to persevere in this new world," notes Caroline. "From the beginning, we wanted to show that same-sex dancing is competitive and attractive, and that we can keep up, but you're never sure how people will react. There are still some judges who reject us, but the majority now just mark the quality of dancing being performed. We also got a lot of positive feedback from ballroom icons, which makes us more determined to keep working and strive for even better results."

"We're delighted that we made our first international final at the SEN I European Championships in Blackpool, coming sixth. We also had an exciting day at the Internationals, and were thrilled to finish tenth in a strong semi-final; both results are improvements on last year. We look forward to dancing again on the mainstream circuit, hopefully tearing down some walls so that one day, same-sex dancers will be welcomed in any competition around the world."