

“A Ballroom Fairytale!” The DBDC 2022

Report by Anna Shahbazyan

Photos by Dance Production House (unless marked)

Year after year we are invited to an enchanting weekend of celebration at Boston's Park Plaza Hotel. The atmosphere magically envelopes us from the moment we land at Logan Airport, driving through the city of tunnels, walking through the park - perfectly located just across from the hotel and starting the day with a cup of refreshing coffee while enjoying a peaceful ride on a swan boat. The beauty and history of the city, paired with the traditional grace and elegance of the hotel, naturally set one up for an unforgettable weekend.



The DBDC is a very unique competition. Perhaps competition is the wrong word here and the organizers have chosen the more appropriate description, “Celebration.” This is a weekend-long party, where no one is a stranger, where everyone is treated as a friend and invited to play a major role in a “Ballroom Fairytale”: a magical story where history meets the present, where core values and friendships are put above all else, where cherished memories are shared as tools for educating new generations, and a place where



Dancing meets Joy again (the number one reason why everyone has continued doing it for so long), all embedded in an indescribable architectural and historic glamour and an exquisite delivery.

The competition schedule seemed quite deceptively typical. The amazing team of organizers, Didio Barrera, Chris Johnston, and Frank Miranda, had something special planned each day. Everything commenced on Thursday evening with the Nightclub events, with the theme of “West Side Story,” held not in the ballroom, but in the basement of the hotel or what we all like to call “Didio’s Hideaway.” As we took the steps down to the room, way before even getting to the entrance, we were greeted by an outpouring of



welcoming energy and of course one of the hosts, “Maria,” played so naturally by Mr. Barrera himself. The night was in full swing and the room was packed but everyone was in anticipation of what the show by Didio would look like this year. There were even comments that many people just attend to watch that show! This time the formation was led by Tibor Kerekes, and it was just as fun and special as always, depicting highlights from “West Side Story,” danced by members of several studios.



Tibor Kerekes & Didio Barrera

Friday was dedicated to the Rhythm and Latin Pro-Am competitions, both of which were very well attended with some very good semifinals. Although the day started at 7:00am, one quickly forgot about the hour upon entering the Ballroom. And yes, it was a true Ballroom—a ballroom that took us back in time, with grand chandeliers and balconies embroidered in gold.

As the celebration merged into the evening, the audience and judges were treated to four beautiful Pro-Am Theatrical solos dedicated to this year’s honoree, Mr. Rufus Dustin—each very different in mood and presentation and very suitable for this ballroom.



The Pro-Am Performers w/ Didio Barrera & Rufus Dustin

There were two Professional events run that evening, Latin



Eun Jin Cho w/ Kostiantyn Samarskyi - Open A Latin Scholarship Winner



Mila Pavlichenko w/ Dmytro Gurkov - Open B Scholarship Rhythm Winner



Martina di Pasquale w/ Roman Chagay



Linda Miller w/ Carlos Zapata



Jake Mazhar w/ Yulia Besarab



Judith Spivey w/ Mykhailo

all dances were Mikhailo Bilopukhov and Anastasiia Shchypillina. This couple also had a wonderful night, and although on other occasions, I feel they can be too quiet, on this given night it was as if the magic of the ballroom had given

expertise in such a Ballroom, connecting not only to their immediate audience but also to those perched in the distance, in the balconies. Second in

them a special energy that was quite radiant. The rest of the final was just as great with third in every dance going to Valentin Voronov and Anna Pelypenko from Canada, fourth in all - to Artur Tarnavskyy and Anastasiya Danilova, fifth - Pasha Stepanchuk and Gabrielle Sabler, and sixth - to Amanda and Andrei Besyedin.



Troels Bager & Ina Jeliaskova

The Professional Smooth was another great event with all couples showcasing their best dancing. The ultimate winners and the recipients of the Ken and Sheila Sloan Perpetual Trophy, were Tavis and Jamie Tuft. The Icon himself - Ken Sloan - presented this award. They commanded the floor from the semifinal with ease, leaving the rest of the finalists competing against each other. Second in all dances went to



Travis & Jaimee Tuft



Aleksander Vukosavljevic and Aleksandra Smirnova

Aleksander Vukosavljevic and Aleksandra Smirnova.

This beautiful couple can really utilize any floor effortlessly and with ease, catching one's attention from the moment they step on the floor. As in the Latin, the rest of the final was very competitive, delivering great entertainment and energy. Third in all went to Volodymyr Barabash and Yulia Rudenco, fourth -



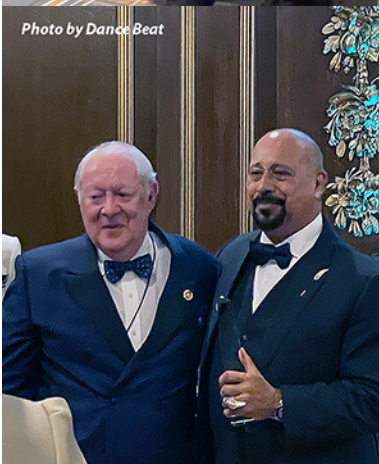
Mykhailo Bilopukhov & Anastasiia Shchypillina

and Smooth, each of which presented a special award to the winners. The winners of the Latin event and the recipients of the "Bob Medeiros Latin Medal" award, were Troels Bager and Ina Jeliaskova with an outstanding performance. This couple showed their dance

Dmytro Gurkov and Celeste Bailey from Canada, fifth - Vladislav and Brianna Nalyvaychuk, sixth - Pavel Lebedev and Ekaterina Romashkina.

I may be repeating myself in saying that, despite the huge progress in this style and its global attractiveness, we have abandoned something very essential - Fundamental Ballroom Technique (specifically footwork). Development and progress are wonderful, yet without foundation, there cannot be a lasting future. It reminds me a bit of the fashion industry - garments purchased in the beginning of the 1900s last to this day, yet new and very trendy items lose their quality after a single wash: high end or not, the quality of the past was made to last and today's priority is to satisfy an instant/momentary need which will easily fade even from memory.

The Saturday daytime schedule was dedicated to the pro-am Smooth divisions. With only one style danced this day, the timing was a little more relaxed allowing everyone to get ready for the night time activities.



As we continued indulging in this weekend's gifts, Saturday night ended up being rather emotional. The honoree of this year's Gala dinner and the recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award was Mr. Rufus Dustin, who entered the room accompanied by Ms. Diana McDonald to the ringing resonance of a standing ovation. It was a touching and emotional moment for Mr. Dustin himself as well as many attendees, who weren't too shy to shed some tears. This was an intimate affair dedicated to the contribution of this Icon to our industry. To celebrate, the organizers had prepared several surprises including special musical presentations by Justin Doucet, Daniel Tackett, and Brent Mills, as well as one of the charming co-organizers - Mr. Chris Johnston - conducting a mini Q and A.

As emotions were gradually subsiding, everyone was guided to the Ballroom. The night was full of some fantastic events, including the Finale of the Ballroom Spirit Under 21 Latin Tour, sponsored and presented by the lovely Vinie Miller (founder and president of the Ballroom Spirit Foundation) and Karlis Trejis (the coordinator). This event allowed the young couples, winners of the previous tour stops, to showcase their talents outside of their



1st Dave Firestein & Kennedy Eaton



2nd Vadym Pidhoretskyy & Ruby Castro

competitive events, by presenting a special showdance number which was ranked by the judges as well as audience vote. The winners of the \$5000 first place prize and recipients of the giant trophy were Dave Firestein and Kennedy Eaton. However, I must say that all the couples were well prepared with some great numbers presented.

The results were quite interesting and unpredictable. While the winners of all 5 dances in the Latin Freestyle segment were Vadym Pid-



3rd Sebastian Lennox & Veronica Baranova

horetskyy & Ruby Castro, Dave & Kennedy scored big in their solo from the judges and were also the audience winners. Vadym & Ruby were 3rd in the solo as placed by the judges, and were placed 3rd by the audience also. Sebastian Lennox & Veronica Baranova were second in the solo according to both the judges and the audience.

The Professional Ballroom, which was also the Peter Eggleton Ballroom Cup, was another great event, yet



Rudy Homm & Katia Kanevskaya

the one with the most predictable results. The easy winners and the recipients of the Cup for the second year in a row, were Rudy Homm and Katia Kanevskaya. Second went to Serhiy Averkov and Olena Barna from California with a very consistent performance, only placing third in Quickstep. Third were Dan Malov and Anna Bohachova; fourth - Nazar Batih and Mariko Cantley; fifth - Oreste Alitto and Zhenia Casanave; sixth - Mirko Spano and Pamela Romano.



Francesco Arieta & Jessa Mae Briones

The Professional Rhythm, on the contrary, produced astonishing results. The current US National and World Rhythm Champions, Andre and Natalie Paramanov, were defeated for the first time, by a rather new and very promising partnership, Francesco Arietta and Jesse Mae Briones.



Serhiy Averkov & Olena Barna



Andre & Natalie Paramonov

This was surely an upset for the Paromanovs. However, I'd like to commend them on their professionalism during the award presentation and their applause for the new winners. Professionalism, etiquette, and simply good manners are the basic requirements for anyone and even more so for such high ranking couples and finalists; however, there have been occasions (even at very recent competitions), where the couples demonstrated their dismay to the presenting adjudicators and observers: a behavior that is not appropriate for a professional athlete/dancer. Therefore, seeing the Paromanovs applauding for the new winners, made me feel that not everything is lost and that, despite feelings of disappointment, values and sportsmanship still exist in our professional field. After all - competition is the name of the game and anyone should have an equal opportunity for winning based on performance.

Francesco and Jesse Mae were on fire and won the Cha-Cha, Bolero, and Mambo. I was quite impressed with their improvement in such a short period of time. On the last occasion when I saw them compete, only a month ago, Mambo was the weakest of their dances. But this evening, as they took the floor for the final, the short Mambo presentation, the feeling that they could have a chance of challenging the champions on the given night occurred to me. I was glad I wasn't on the judging panel of the given category and could watch and enjoy the performance of both couples to the maximum. These top two couples had riveted the attention of everyone. It was like the final at Wimbledon, eyes jumping from one end of the floor to the other, comparing and following both couples. The rest of the final was also good and worth noting: third overall went to the Canadians - Dmytro Gurkov and Celeste Bailey; fourth - Ivan Kudoshev and Ksenia Sokolova; fifth - Jake Davies and Alyona Kalinina and sixth - Michael Ulbrich and Lindsey Melville.

The first event of Saturday evening was actually the Amateur Ballroom. The winners, from Canada, were Nikita Druzhynin & Virginie Primeau from Canada. They finished 1st in all dances. Samuel Hacke & Katerina Hermanova were second in all dances. Another Canadian team, Vladyslav Komelkov & Alexandra Sevastianova were third in all dances. Fourth - Nathan Zaytsev & Alina Bankova 4,4,4,4,4; fifth Johnathan Liu & Oleksandra Basko 5,5,5,5,6; sixth Eric Newbury & Evgeniya Gorobets 6,6,6,6,5; seventh Gokturk & Asli Yurtyapan 7,7,7,7,7; eighth Christian Larsen & Lara Beecher 8,8,8,8,8.



Nikita Druzhynin & Virginie Primeau



Alexander Chernositov & Arina Grishanina

The evening was also enhanced by the Amateur Open Latin Competition where Alexander Chernositov & Arina Grishanina gave a stellar performance to win all dances. Vadym Pidhoretskyy & Ruby Castro were second overall in the Open Amateur Latin, a busy and successful night for them. They took second in four dances and third in the samba. Max Firestein & Nicole Mtchedlidze took third overall by placing third in four dances and second in the samba. Fourth place in all dances of this amateur open Latin went to Oskar Krimus & Shayna McDonald, fifth place was awarded to Emil Martirosyan & Sophie Shvartsman, sixth went to Sean Lama & Anastasiya Datsenko, and seventh in all dances were Haley Edgar Yegorov & Anastasiia Lemishko.

The night concluded and everyone was guided to the afterparty as the

celebration continued in the Presidential suite, with all the champagne. It was as if midnight had struck at a fairy tale event, where the glamour of the night had evaporated with the last chime of 12 o'clock, transforming everyone to their everyday looks in slacks and T-shirts. Yet the mood for continued celebration was still present and didn't want to let go. Just like a good book - that you don't want to put down, or a good story - that you wish didn't come to an end.

Sunday is Ballroom day for the pro-ams in the incredible Grand Ballroom of the Park Plaza Hotel. This Grand Ballroom was made for this style. Once again we saw a very high standard of dancing.

From my humble point of view, this is an event that keeps giving, an event that's so welcoming and where success comes not only from running a good 'Business' but from cherishing and building on core values and history. In our society today, as well as our dance industry, there are times these components are not compatible due to certain choices. Yet when everything is done for the right reason, the true value of success is amplified and becomes inclusive of everything, creating an environment which to some extent has died out due to our obsession with 'Success,' to be the biggest and the best and always competing with others, instead of coming together and building a healthy and supportive community.

With this said, I'd like to send my sincere congratulations to the wonderful team of organizers of the DBDC - Didio Barrera, Chris Johnston, and Frank Miranda, as well as Keith Todd, Andy Fishel, and Audrey Heyun Paek, for creating yet another year of a successful and truly special event. Well done! And I am already looking forward to next year's story in the making

