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## United States DanceSport Champs

**Report by: Didio Barrera**

Last night, September sixth, was the best night so far of this prestigious US event. The dancing as well as the audience attendance and reaction to the couples dancing was great making it exciting for all of us present including the dancers who appreciated the support and encouragement.

The evening began with the US National Professional Latin a fantastic opening to this evening of dance. Riccardo Cocchi & Yulia Zagoruychenko won all dances with perfect scores only losing one first place mark to Eugene Katsevman & Maria Manusova in the jive.

The evening continued with phenomenal excitement but this time with the very unique American Style Smooth Competition. A rivalry has been forming since July when 2007 US Smooth Champions, Thomas Mielnicki & J.T. Thomas, were beaten for the first time at The Manhattan DanceSport by Jonathan Roberts with seasoned and former US runner up Valentina (Kos-tenko).

Thursday night, September 4th, we saw the crowning of the new US representatives to the world in the Professional Standard. This honor went to Katusha Demidova who was last year's champion but with new world



awarded to Eric Luna & Georgia Ambarian second went to Jesse Benedetti & Kimalee Piedad. There was a few couples entered from other parts of the world, but they all came in the lower end of the scale.

sensation, Arunas Bizokas, former World Amateur Champion. Katusha has now won this title 11 times. The runners up were world and Open British finalists, Victor Fung & Anna Mikhed.

The Open to the world Pro events run so far have also gone to the USA. The Open Professional Rising Star Latin was awarded to Roman Kutsky & Anna Kovalova. Vlad Borodinov & Irina Garus from Russia took second and Alexander Nishakov & Marina Goncharova from Macau placed third. In the Professional Open Rising Star Standard, Damien Koulouris & Karolina Szpiech from the USA took the cup and Anton Lebedev & Anna Borshch from Canada placed second. Third place was awarded to Russia's Lev Sidinikov & Marina Aleshina.

All top places went to the USA in the Open Cabaret/Exhibition Championship. First was

In the Amateur standard there was only five couples entered and first place went to Italy's Gaetano Lavarone & Emanuela Napolitano. Second to Andrzej Bator & Angelika Orent from the USA.

At the time of printing, the Championship is ongoing and tonight (September 6th) the Open US Championships in Pro Latin, Pro Standard and Amateur Latin will be held. The pro field is much stronger and although the majority of the couples are from the USA, there are significant overseas entries as well.

We will bring this in a full overall report beginning next week.



**Columnists coming in the next few weeks: Oliver Wessel-Therhorn, Diana McDonald, Lorraine Barricchi, Bill Sparks, Giampiero Giannico, Adele Hyland, Nadia Eftedal.....**  
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# <sup>4</sup> USA hosts World Class Dancers

# Embassy Ball 2008

*Report by: Didio Barrera*

This year, as every other year, the Embassy Ball continued to be the main window from the US to the outside world of DanceSport. This year it hosted IDSF Grand Slam events in Standard and Latin. Both competitions were fiercely contested by many nations but in the end both these Grand Slam Prizes went to Italy. In the professional field the Embassy ran two WDC World cup events one in the Standard and one in the Latin and it managed to keep both of these cup titles home in the USA.

This busy weekend of dance began with the Grand Slam Standard and close to seventy couples from as far as Russia and China participated. It was a very impressive competition but when it was over many of the judges, officials as well as some of the knowledgeable audience were not as impressed as expected. The body of the final comprised three countries. There were two Italians, two Germans and two Russians and for me all but one deserved to be in this final and I too agree with many those attending that this

final left lots to be desired. Most of the couples, with the exception of Benedetto Ferruggia & Claudia Koehler from Germany looked as if they were just going through the motions and could not wait to get it over with. Of course the dancing was great, but maybe we in the audience are a little spoiled and always expect the best from these couples.

The winners Paulo Bosco & Silvia Piton from Italy led the pack. Their performance for me was solid but very correct and clinical. Every time I see this young couple out on the floor I expect great musicality and interpretation (after all, this is what made them famous). Perhaps my expectation of all these world-class dancers is too high, but we must remember after all, that Paulo & Silvia are our current World Amateur Standard DanceSport Champions. I, in part, agree with the opinion of Mrs. Barbara Grover from England who was the only one of the 11 judges who awarded this couple a second place in every dance. Not sure I would have given Benedetto & Claudia all first places but perhaps a good number of them. On this night

they definitely touched me with their musicality and the subtlety throughout their bodies.

It was funny, but just the day before the IDSF had a congress for adjudicators and many of these couples attended the lectures. One of the speakers was Mr.

Oliver Wessel-Therhorn from

Germany. He lectured on the quickstep from its origin in 1912 and its transformation into what it is today. He told us that he admired many of the innovations that have been created but also warned us about going too far and losing the essence and the basic principles of the dance. I could not agree with him more and so apparently did many of the couples because the next day in the Grand Slam we witnessed some of the competitors adding a few of the touches that Mr. Therhorn mentioned and indeed it was a pleasing sight not to just see those endless chains of "quicks" without some of the slows to compliment and accentuate their interesting work.

A comment from Mr. Therhorn that filled the room with laughter and stayed in my mind was the one about the variation I will call it the "Samba Roll" action we keep seeing from the couples, sometimes in the corners. In this Grand Slam we saw the brother and sister team of Sergei & Olga Konovaltsev from Russia who placed fifth in this final display this playful step right in the middle of the floor and it definitely looked as Mr. Therhorn described it, a "bird getting caught in a charged electric wire." For more of Mr. Therhorn's views be sure to stay here in Dance Beat World as he wrote a report on this Grand Slam event.

Back to this world class final. Many of us were also very surprised that a few of the couples in the semifinal were not called back for this final, firstly, the very talented Yang Chao & Tan Li Ling from China. I realize this is not the most charismatic and expressive



**Paulo Bosco & Silvia Piton**

*Photo by Park West*

couple but the softness, cleanliness and quality of the work should count for something. The other couple that many, although not me were expecting to be included was Emanuel Valeri & Tania Kehlet from Denmark. I'm sure you are wondering who should have been left out to put one of these couples in. Well, I will tell you. In my opinion, Sergei & Olga. I have always admired this couple's individuality and creativity but they seem to be on a standstill. They have conformed to many of the rules required to be in the final and now they have lost some of the spark and musicality leaving us with just the shadow of what they used to do - like the "bird on the wire" step! The only place they showed some of this fire was in their solo tango.

In defense of these couples, we must all acknowledge



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## EMBASSY BALL CONTINUED



**Stefano DiFilippo & Anna Melnikova**

*Photo by Park West*

that many of these young athletes have now been on the road for a long time going from competition to competition non-stop. Just before the Embassy Ball almost all went to China then to the German Open. No mater how hard and fit these couples are, this touring must take its toll on their young bodies.

You must also be wondering if there were any couples from the host country in this competition being that we have two world "professional" standard finalists? Well, the answer is yes but they were left behind in the

quarter final or hanging out in the "Repercharge." Mr. Oliver Wessel-Therhorn, former World Amateur Champion and world adjudicator, will bring this report real soon here in Dance Beat World.

The reverse of all this happened in the IDSF Grand Slam Latin where six very energized couples made it all too "marvelous" for us. The winners Stefano Di Filippo & Anna Melnikova were amazing and receive the Dance Beat World MVP Award for the Embassy Ball! I had not recovered from the loss to the field of this year's British

Champions Kratjer/Golczak who for me were the new horizon of Latin dancing and I feared that it all was lost when they retired immediately following the British Open. Watching that final in May, I had very little hope that the void in my heart that their departure had caused would be replaced. I came into the ballroom during the quarter-final and from that moment on I could not take my eyes of Stefano & Anna



**Zoran Plohl & Tatsiana Lahvinovitch**



**Valentine Chmerkovskiy & Valeria Kozharinova**

*Photo by Park West*

and almost everyone I spoke to agreed that they were magnificent. His style, although quite rough and unconventional at times, is complimented by the softness and seductiveness of Anna's movements. There is a reality to this team that makes you want to join them on the floor.

Second place went to Andrey Zaytsev & Anna Kuzminskaya from Russia. I was very impressed with this young man on his own, but as a partnership for me this night they were lacking communication this was disputed by many who thought they were absolutely brilliant, I disagreed, but perhaps I might have just been keeping most of my attention on Stefano & Anna.

I was totally pleased to notice that Zoran Plohl & Tatsiana Lahvinovitch from Croatia who placed third overall have done some major work and are now beginning to relish and dance to one another. In the past when I have seen this couple dance it was all about speed and it was too hard for me. Had I been judging, I think I might have given this couple a few second places if not all seconds.

So were there

any US couples sin this final? Yes!

Valentine Chmerkovskiy & Valeria Kozharinova made this outstanding final and placed fifth, just where I figured they might place. Diana McDonald, former World 10 Dance Champion and US Latin American Champion, will have a full report on this IDSF Grand Slam.

The WDC World Cup Professional Latin & Standard were also well attended and we saw beautiful dancing in both styles. For me the Latin was possibly the better of the two although there were more world-class couples in the Standard. The Latin was won by Riccardo Cocchi & Yulia Zagoruychenko from the USA. They received perfect scores from all the judges in all the dances there was not a single second awarded to this couple.

As we mentioned in our blog at [www.dancebeatworld.com](http://www.dancebeatworld.com) all but one of the couples that made this final were from the USA but the panel of adjudicators was mixed. 17 judges were used for this event and 8 were from other countries. There was 32 couples entered and about half were from other parts of the world. The big fight here on this international stage was for second and third place. Dmitry & Violetta Kurakin also from the USA who dazzled the Brits at this year's British Open in Blackpool, England to win the title of Open British Rising Star Latin Champions, competed trying to break through



**Riccardo Cocchi & Yulia Zagoruychenko**

**Dmitry & Violetta Kurakin (left)  
Pavlo Barsuk & Anna Trebunskaya (right)**

and get ahead their competition with this varied international panel. Ever since Dmitry & Violetta have come back from England they have been beaten by Pavlo Barsuk & Anna Trebunskaya from the USA, who also competed in this year's British Rising Star Latin and made the final but did not even come close to beating Dmitry & Violetta. Unfortunately for them, Dmitry & Violetta's luck continued

to be against them and even with an international panel they are not able to make a dent in Pavlo & Anna's wall. Pavlo & Anna placed comfortably second in every dance.

The only non-US couple to break through this US barrier was Canada's Latin Champions, Andre & Natalie Paramanov. While speaking of foreigners, there was plenty of excitement on and off



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## EMBASSY BALL CONTINUED

the floor when Italy's Mauricio Ghigiarelli & Manuela Andrechio did not make the semifinal. They came up to the stage demanding to see the marks from the Chairman. Presumably the couple expected to make it further and they must have thought there had been a mistake. No, there was no mistake, the Chairman said, they did not get enough marks to make it into the next round and in fact there were two couples ahead of them. I felt bad and embarrassed for the couple, but I must add that the USA's quality of dance in the professional divisions has improved 500 % in the past few years and in the US there are many couples of great talent that do not travel abroad for many different reasons and perhaps this might be the first time this couple have come to the USA and encountered a different professional climate to that of Europe where there usually are not as many professional competitors. There will also be a write-up on this event by Bill Sparks former US Latin Champion and World Latin Finalist.

The WDC World Cup Professional Standard was the largest professional event of this weekend of Dance with over 37 couples entered. It had only 11 couples from other countries and the rest from the USA and the quality of the dancers was fierce. Before I give an overall description of this world-class event I must say that I felt many of the couples did not dance to my expectation, the same as in the Amateur Standard but this is comparing them against their past performances and not against the others in the final.

I was surprised that Isaia Berardi & Cinzia Birarelli from Italy were included in the final. I'm not quite sure what the judges saw in this couple, but I totally missed it and every time I looked at them they were always involved in a collision of some sort. Perhaps this might have been the reason why my opinion was negative. There were at least three or four couples that I liked more in the semifinal.

The winners of this World Cup in all dances were Arunaz Bizokas & Katusha Demidova from the USA. Compared to the rest of the final, I totally agree with the judges. Arunas' natural posture

and relaxed movement was so far better than from anyone else and Katusha's natural response to his leads made them my overall winners too. But I must add that I have seen them dance with a lot more passion in recent performances.

Second place went to Jonathan Wilkins & Hazel Newberry From England taking second in all dances. I have to say that this was perhaps the best I have seen this couple dance. Jonathan & Hazel were not trying to win, they looked as if they were just having fun. I have to mention that although Arunas and Katusha got the majority of firsts, there were a few judges that gave them seconds and even thirds. Their worst judge for Arunas & Katusha was Tetsuro Shimaimura from Japan who awarded them a fourth in the tango.

Jonathan & Hazel took a few firsts in almost all dances from Arunas and Katusha and I think, like me, some of the judges might have been judging Arunas & Katusha against themselves from past performances and not against the other couples. Who knows what goes through a judge's mind in the critical moments of such high quality competition.

Victor Fung & Anna Mikhed from the USA placed third and I found their foxtrot breathtaking. After the competition I spoke to a few people and they were all in agreement that this foxtrot was terrific. I was a little disappointed with Domenico Soale &



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# THE INTERNATIONAL MEGA STARS DANCE FESTIVAL



*by Philip Nicholas  
Photos by Dallas Williams*

The International Mega Stars Dance Festival organised by Bob and Leigh Steele at Conrad Jupiters Casino on the Gold Coast Queensland Australia is one of the musts on the Australian Dance calendar. The Gold Coast being a perfect place in the month of August to come and enjoy a great International Dance Festival and spend a couple of days visiting the beautiful beaches of Australia's premiere tourist destination.

This year's event was bigger and better than ever with couples coming from overseas and an International panel of judges. The IDSF Standard championship was won by Michael Glikman and Milana Deitch from New South

Wales winning all 5 dances. I have been watching this couple improve over the last few years. I find them very musical and have a great use of the floor always being very aware of finding the spaces to dance into. I felt that Milana seemed to have problems with her body position and her back was very tight making their movement not as fluid as it could be.

Into second place from West Australia Antonio Michili and Bianca Tonizz. I was very impressed by this couple. Very fluid movement over the floor. A very good girl, she is always so neat in the footwork which is something we do not see so much today. The boy needs to use the floor better, he was often caught in corners.

Third from Queensland was Rhett Salmon and April McMahon. This couple I found very heavy. The girl needs to get her weight down into the floor. Her weight is so far up it seems like her feet and not touching the floor making movement impossible. She also needs a lighter look. Saying all this I understand why the man had trouble getting her moving.

Fourth again from West Australia Craig Denham and Tegan Short. These two were difficult to place, sometimes looking good and other times very bad. Their body positions seem completely wrong, as if they do not want any hip contact.

Into fifth spot from New Zealand Tim and Yulia Mullaayawau. I was a little surprised that this couple made the final. I found them all over the shop, not balanced and bad feet. At this level there should not be any bad footwork.



And into sixth position from Victoria Jacob Grech and Zalie Merrett. Again a heavy girl. I do not feel that the majority of girls today put in the work to make themselves good dancers. They have 50% of the work to do and are often not doing it.

Winning the IDSF latin championship from New Zealand were Arkady Bakenov and Rosa Filippello. They easily won all 5 dances. This boy has improved so much over the last year. He has such a natural masculine style of dance, nothing plastic about this boy. Rosa has always been good, but I do not really see any improvement over the last 2 years. I think she needs to really work hard now to go forward with him or she will be left behind.

Into second Craig Monnley and Sriani Argaet from Victoria. I always have trouble with this couple. They have improved so much over the last couple of years. Some parts of their dances are really good and 20 other parts so physical and rough. The girl really needs to calm and control the upper part of the body and her arms. She always wants to make the speed by using the arms and that is not the way. The boy has greatly improved.

Third place from New South Wales Michael Hemera and Lauren McFarlane. This girl is so good it makes everything so easy and for her it possibly is. But saying this she needs now to find that extra something that will make her brilliant. The boy is a good dancer but needs to get a better look and work on shapes. He dances a little square.

Fourth from China came Chen Gon Min and Lin Xuan. I have rarely seen a man who can dance without any facial expression. I found he was a good dancer, so precise and clean, but zero feeling. A great pity. The girl was a little weak especially in leg action. She was a little expressive but it was a little difficult for her as nothing came back from him.

Into fifth place from Victoria Shaun Kingston and Fiona Rizzo. This couple could be so good. Two years




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## Mega Stars continued

ago they were on the edge of a big break through, but they decided to go into the show *Burn The Floor*, what a pity, but we all make our own mistakes. They have lost a lot but they have come back and I am sure they will come back better than before.

And sixth place to Bradley Montagnese and Jessica Dorman from Victoria. A very nice young couple, I found them very good all around dancers, but need more maturity in their dancing. And need to find a look. At this moment in time everything is nice but nice does not always go a long way.



And seventh in the good final were Stuart Canning and Gabrielle Russo. I found this couple very rough. Before you can dance together you need to be able to dance on your own. So I feel you both need to do a lot of training on your own.

On both nights we had two wonderful shows from Roberto Villa and Morena Colagrecio in Standard and Serguy Surkov and Milia in Latin. Both shows were excellent, not just good dancing but good shows. The music they used was really beautiful and they really came across as simple nice people who are at the top of their profession and that is exactly who they are. And as always after the last night we had a very enjoyable party that finished rather late. And I am really looking forward to next year 14/15/16/08/09.



## EMBASSY BALL CONTINUED

Gioia Cerasoli from Italy. I too would have marked them fourth, but I definitely have seen better from this talented couple. It was a fantastic result for Linas Koreiva and new partner, Liene Apale from the USA who also danced beautifully in this final. I particularly love their waltz. They placed sixth behind Beradi/Birarelli. Former World Standard Champion, Loraine Barricchi will be bringing us a full report on this terrific event.

I believe that we saw the best Senior Standard competition of this level that has been presented on US territory. There were over 40 entries and most of them of a decent level. Keith Todd the editor of this magazine will have a report here soon but the winners of this great comp were Heinz-Josef & Aurelia Bickers from Germany. Second went to the USA's Xingmin Lu & Katerina Lu.

The youth divisions were also quite impressive but one entry from Italy put us on the edge of our seats, Galuppo/Pacini were so talented and so mature in their dancing especially when it came to listening to the music and interpreting it. Looking at the scores I was surprised to see some judges marking them as low as fourth. The winners of the Latin Youth are also worth a mention and they were, from Russia, Armen Tsaturyan & Kristina Bespechnova and they too were excellent.

The Pro/Am divisions in the Standard were totally world-class with many entries from outside the USA. The best for me were the A and the B categories. In the A, USA's Dara Campbell with teacher Igor Suvurov won, this time overshadowing her usual rival from Hong Kong, Katherine Chen partnered by Roberto Villa. The B winners were fantastic. RZ O is been perhaps the best Pro-Am Standard man we have seen in years and this was a well deserved win for him. He is partnered by Katya Kanevskaya. The C division went to Canada's Beverly Moore with Alain Doucet.

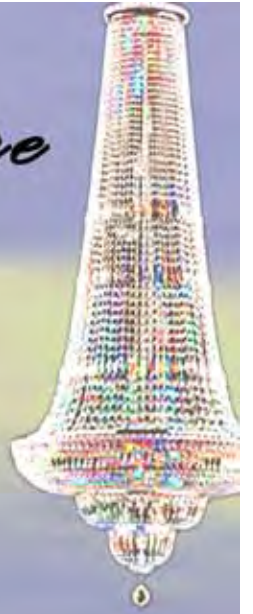
As we mentioned on the web the BDFI lectures were a total success. Inside the air-conditioned tent where they are usually held, it was standing room only especially when the "King of Standard," Peter

Eggelton, took to the floor to talk about elegance in the foxtrot. Peter's normal dulcet tones may have had everyone straining to hear, but it was worth the effort as he talked and demonstrated with Hazel Newberry the simple arts of positioning and moving with your partner, drawing from his experiences with past legends Josephine Bradley and Phyllis Haylor. Michael Stylianos fell back onto his "bum" when he was apparently being chased by the bull in his paso doble lecture. Prompting his wife, Lorna, to yell later on, "Oh please don't try it!" when he was explaining about the kids going into their knees and jumping back to their and appeared about to give it a try himself. Luca & Loraine Barricchi spoke about the art of touch, communication and lead and follow. Take it from Luca, don't start yelling at your partner - "Relax!" I think this lecture would have really benefited some of the US Smooth couples as Luca and Lorraine illustrated their connection to each other even when not in dance hold. Sam Sodano talked about the fundamentals of American Rhythm dancing and we were treated to a rare glimpse of the maestro shaking it himself partnered by a seemingly reluctant Ron Montez drawn from the audience.

So there you have it, the Embassy Ball was a magnificent weekend of dance for us all here in the United States. The organizers did their best to educate us about what is going on outside the USA and presented wonderful dancing. There were three parties in the evenings. One was a welcome party sponsored by Arthur Murray International. This was the first night. On Friday night the IDSF hosted a party for all the Amateurs who participated and came from so far away. Lastly there was the farewell party that sometime carries on into the McDonald's suite until we have to catch our flight. Once again I want to thank the organizers for their invitation and for setting up a program that was well planned and well run. Congratulations to Brian & Kristi McDonald, John Kimmins and Sam Sodano for a superb competition.

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