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Dancers waltz into town

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news

Snowball Classic part of international competition

## Dancers do their thing this weekend at Hyatt

By Sandra Thomas  
Staff writer

MORE THAN 600 COMPETITORS from 30 countries, accompanied by family members, trainers and various entourage, converge on the city this weekend as part of an international Latin and standard dance competition at the Hyatt Regency downtown.

Brian Dudley, who chairs the Snowball Classic that is sponsored by the Canadian Amateur DanceSport Association, said while the annual local event is celebrating its 15th year, it's the first time the International DanceSport Federation (IDSF) World 10 Dance Championship is being held here as part of the competition.

"It's very exciting. It's the best of the best," he said. "You have to be in very good shape to compete in this competition—it's grueling."

Dudley said the World 10 Dance Championship is not the only first this competition brings to the city. Dance enthusiasts can also watch top U.S. wheelchair dancer Ray Leight and his able-bodied partner Diane Gingeritch perform Latin and standard dances.

"This is brand new in Canada," he said. "I don't think anyone here has ever seen this before."

Both the defending ISDF world champions Franco Formica and Okasana Nikiforova of Germany and first runners-up Klaus

Kongsdal and Viktoria Franova of Denmark will compete in the international open Latin competition Feb. 21. Representing Canada in the standard competition, which includes dances such as the waltz, fox trot and quick step, is Richmond resident Joel Marisigan, who, along with partner and Vancouver resident Clara Shih, share the title of B.C.'s top standard couple and are ranked fourth in Canada. Marisigan said they plan to use the event to put B.C. on the dance map.

"We don't know exactly who is coming, but we plan to be the highest ranking," Marisigan said. "Over the years, Quebec and Ontario have dominated the Canadian dance world, but we're going to break that mold. We're very passionate about that."

The pair met at UBC's dance club about six years ago and started dating. For the first couple of years they had different dance partners, but as the competition increased they found they were spending less time together.

"We saw our dance partners more than we saw each other," he said. "We decided that if we were going to put in all this time and effort, we'd do it together."

The couple spends about \$25,000 annually on airfare and costumes in order to compete on an international level, which means they are always looking for private sponsors. His custom-made tuxedos with tails costs more than \$3,000 each and that

doesn't include the fact they are made in London, England, where he goes to have them fitted.

"I try to arrange it around competitions and training there," he said. "Because we dance with our arms up, these tuxedos are specially made to create a straight line across the shoulder, not like a regular tux."

Marisigan considers himself lucky, though. While a classic tux can last him two or three years, Shih has to look original in each competition. She requires three or four new dresses a year at a cost of more than \$4,000 each. Because the pair are considered "amateurs" in Canada, they are not allowed to earn any money by teaching or through winnings.

"Canada is really in the dark ages when it comes to amateur dance," he said. "Amateur skaters and skiers are allowed to have corporate and TV sponsors, but we're not. We are constantly fundraising."

Despite the fact the pair aren't making big bucks, they are determined to carry on—at least until the 2008 Olympics in Beijing when SportsDance is scheduled to become a competition for medals. While it's currently considered an Olympic demonstration sport, no medals are given out.

"It might seem like a long way off, but I would love, love, love to represent Canada in 2008," Marisigan said. "That's why we have to become Canadian champions."



Joel Marisigan and partner Clara Shih are ranked fourth in Canada in standard dance.