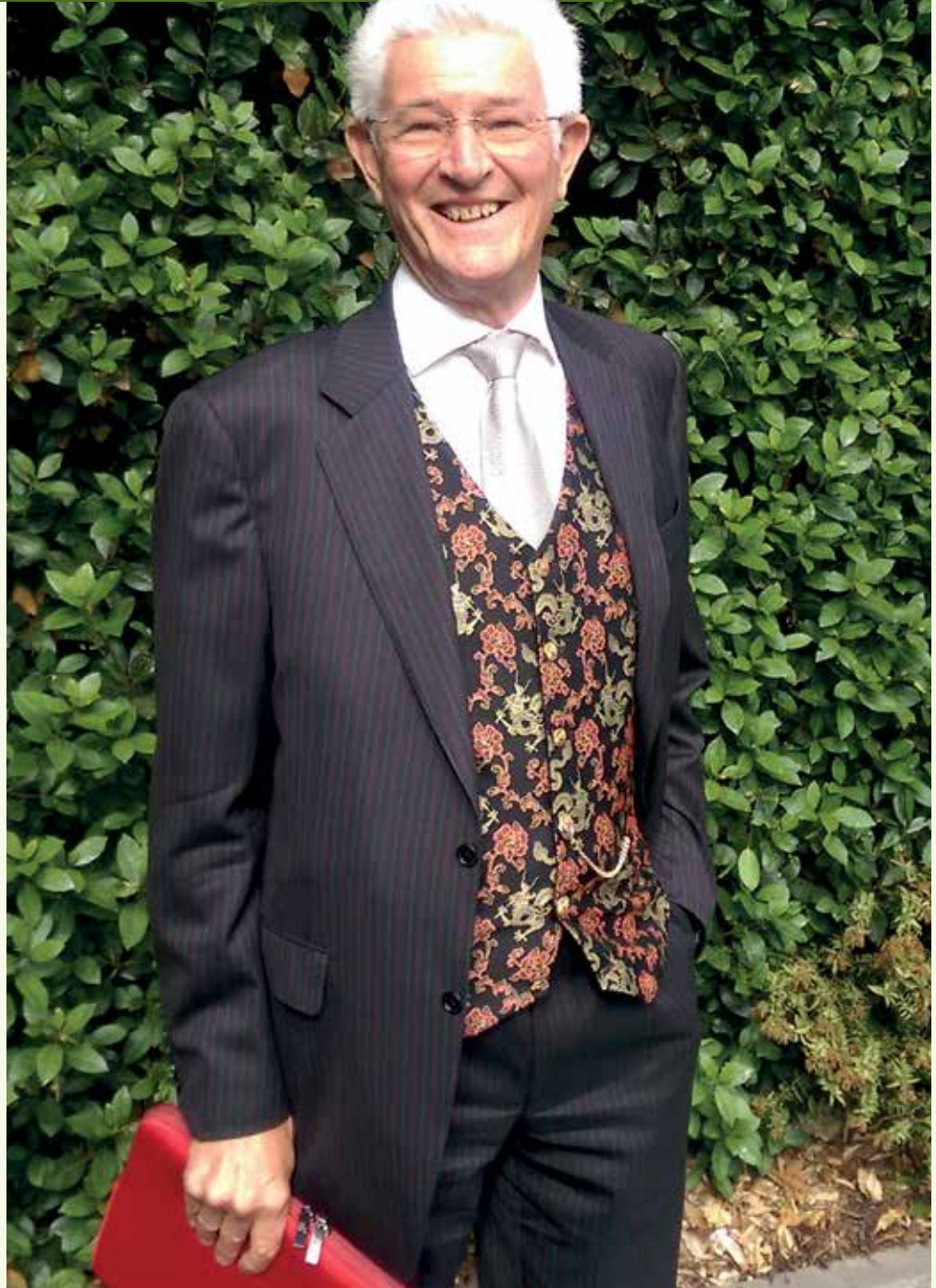


Brave New World

The English Amateur Dancesport Association has travelled a rocky road but is now on a new path. **Alison Gallagher-Hughes** reports.

Elvis Presley, Winston Churchill, Steve Redgrave have something in common – all had notable comebacks. Now, within the dance world, “the voice” of amateur dancers is again making itself heard. Like a phoenix from the flames, EADA – the English Amateur Dancesport Association – is again emerging to represent the interests of those actively involved in competitive dance, enabling it to prosper through their participation... but who, for some time, have not been seen and definitely not heard.

EADA was once a major force in dancesport. It had a membership of around 3,000 people, operated domestic league tables which qualified couples to dance abroad, managed payments to amateur dancers – taking a cut of cabaret and demonstration fees – and was an active corporate member of the British Dance Council (BDC) – the rule-makers of competition dancing in the UK, helping police its regulations.



Then it all got a bit messy. Around 2010 the dance world split in two. What was the International Dancesport Federation (IDSF) and the World Dance Council (WDC) tussled for power to be recognised as the leading body of ballroom dancing. Organisations ultimately had to align themselves to one or other.

At the time, many amateur

championships in mainland Europe were run under IDSF rules, whilst WDC affiliated events included major championships and professional titles including historic events such as the Blackpool Dance Festival. The tipping point occurred when the IDSF issued a worldwide ban on all competitions not held under its rules. This affected both

EADA President Tony Clipstone.

competitors and adjudicators and subsequently all competitions granted by and run under the rules of the BDC. It was effectively a declaration of war.

The WDC created an amateur league and the IDSF – which later became the World Dancesport Federation (WDSF) – started

a professional league. There were suddenly two opposing camps.

EADA had a foot in both. Many of its members competed in Europe and demanded support to fly the flag at events that were fast-aligning themselves to the IDSF. EADA was also an IDSF member and backed its aim to get dancesport recognised as an Olympic sport. It was also a corporate member of the BDC, but when the IDSF stated that all competitions involving member organisations must be under its regulations, it resulted in an impasse.

EADA resigned from the BDC, attempted to separate its international and domestic competitive representation – creating Dancesport England to represent the former – but then failed to be re-instated as a corporate member of BDC. Dancesport Scotland and Dancesport Wales kept their seat at the table but for years English amateur competitors had no representation. With its purpose diminished, EADA's membership dwindled. English amateur competitors had to raise concerns with promoters or the BDC direct.

However, in January 2017, the BDC agreed for EADA to return to the fold. Now, with new President Tony Clipstone at the helm, it sees itself operating with a modified rationale, as an unbiased voice to represent the interests of amateur competitors whilst working with recognised bodies.

The Dance Promoters Association (DPA) now operates a national league and EADA has no plans to establish an alternative. Nor does it plan to administer the collection of registration for BDC membership (all amateur dancers are required to obtain a licence to participate

in open competitions from the BDC). EADA's membership used to include this but it is now a task undertaken by competitors directly with the BDC.

EADA's new role will be supportive and nurturing, says Clipstone. "Our job is to represent amateurs, not take on any of the activities currently being undertaken by the professional organisations. We want to focus entirely on the things that matter to our members, provide them with a voice that can be heard by the BDC and support, encourage and guide individuals in their competitive pursuits."

It has a number of initiatives, which include "encouraging the BDC to allocate monies from amateur registration to directly benefit the development of amateur competitors". In other words, to see a comparative investment equal to the total of their registration fees.

"It's an issue close to our hearts," admits Clipstone. "We want to see an investment in the future of dancing in this country and assistance for amateur dancer to develop their skills and compete on an international stage. Currently, competitors must register annually at a cost of £18 per person, with no tangible benefits

other than the right to compete in this country."

And although EADA sees a role for itself in upholding BDC regulations it does not intend to "police" them as has previously been perceived. "If we are made aware of breaches in BDC regulations pertaining to amateur competitors, it is our duty as corporate members of the BDC to advise accordingly but EADA has no powers to stop people from dancing and we not see this as our primary purpose," says Clipstone.

He is keen to work with the BDC's 40 corporate members – teaching organisations, professional dance bodies and public companies, which include Blackpool Entertainment Company Limited – to represent and improve conditions and opportunities for amateur dancers. In reality, this means building bridges and garnering support for proactive projects.

"One of the things we are keen to reinstate is the EADA coaching scheme to help establish a definitive pathway for amateurs to transition to professional dancers should they wish and to create a clear method of certification for their involvement in teaching under supervision," he reveals.

What is clear is that EADA is playing the long game. It

does not expect wholesale change or have any desire to power grab the roles it once undertook, but to re-establish itself and once again give English amateur dancers the chance for their voices to be heard.

Bryan Allen, the President of the BDC since 2009, says he is "delighted" that EADA is again playing an active role within the council. "I was very sad to see EADA leave the BDC in 2010. I wrote to its President at the time to implore the association to reconsider but what's done is done," he recalls. "This is a new chapter and I welcome EADA's involvement within our organisation and its desire to represent the needs of amateur dancers, as the Scottish and Welsh associations have continued to do so.

"The BDC is only equal to the sum of its parts and as we prepare to celebrate our 90th anniversary in 2019, I am delighted that EADA is part of what we are."

EADA hopes to provide "added value" to its membership, using its new website to offer products and services to members – such as downloadable advice guides and discounts for dance-related products and services. And although membership may not have yet reached past levels, EADA's visibility and presence is again gaining support through its social media channels. Clipstone adds: "We understand that many people may have lost confidence in the EADA of old. It's fair to say that it lost its ability to influence and orchestrate change but that has changed. We are keen to carve out a new role for ourselves and ultimately be there to support amateur dancers and nurture the next generation." ■

"We want to focus entirely on the things that matter to our members, provide them with a voice that can be heard by the BDC and support, encourage and guide individuals in their competitive pursuits"

EADA President Tony Clipstone