

Ballroom Icons

I Journey through the Lives of Dancers, doers and devotees of the ballroom world

By Shirley Wall

We recently received a magnificent book entitled 'Ballroom Icons' written by Brigitt Mayer-Karakis to review in the ADR.

This beautifully bound book is a limited edition, there are only 2,500 in publication and covers the history of dancing through the early years featuring countless icons of the bygone era from around the world.

Starting with dancers from the early days, like *Vernon & Irene Castle* a couple that *Fred Astaire & Ginger Rogers* starred as in a movie in 1939. *Arthur & Kathryn Murray* (did you know in fact his name wasn't Arthur Murray – it was Murray Moses Teichman) he started the Arthur Murray chain of dance studios, this publication gives you all the history of the early pioneers of dancing.

Well known names such as *Victor Silvester OBE, Josephine Bradley MBE, Henry Jacques, Alex Moore, Elsa Wells, Sonny Binnick* to name just a few of the early greats featured. Each icon featured has a chapter supplying all their history, how they came into dancing, their titles and achievements.

The book moves on to cover some of the later historical greats, *Walter Laird, Bill & Bobbie Irvine MBE, Peter Eggleton, Anthony Hurley, Alan & Hazel Fletcher*, what great insight we see into the lives and dancing history of these great names. *Len Scrivener, Eric Hancox, Nina Hunt, Lorraine, Rudd Vermeij, Mick Stylianos and Lorna Lee*, the list goes on, all the greats from around the world.

It covers also those behind the scenes, people like *Gillian MacKenzie* who gives her insight into the history of Blackpool and the years she was involved with the event. *Ron Gunn* the tailor to the champions, how the first dance tailored tails evolved; *Supadance's Mick & Barry Free* – the creators of the first dance shoes.

One Australian is featured in a chapter, *John Kimmins* who was born in Toowoomba Queensland, most would know danced together with his then wife, *Carol Kimmins*. They were British Amateur Standard Champions in 1976 and placed 4th in the World Amateur Standard in 1973. John now resides in the USA where he has spent many years with the Arthur Murray chain of dance schools on which he is now on the board of directors.

This is a truly amazing book; the writer *Brigitt Mayer-Karakis* has obviously worked tirelessly, researching worldwide to gain insight into the icons of dance to produce this magnificent book. Each page is formatted beautifully and includes fabulous historical photographs and current photos where available of the greats of dance. While reading the book you can see the author has a great love and passion for dance.

In her foreword Brigitt explains why she undertook this enormous task of researching the historical information of the dance icons from all across the world. In part she says

"The pioneers have passed away and we are losing more and more of the ones who still remember its origins. As in any other field, the



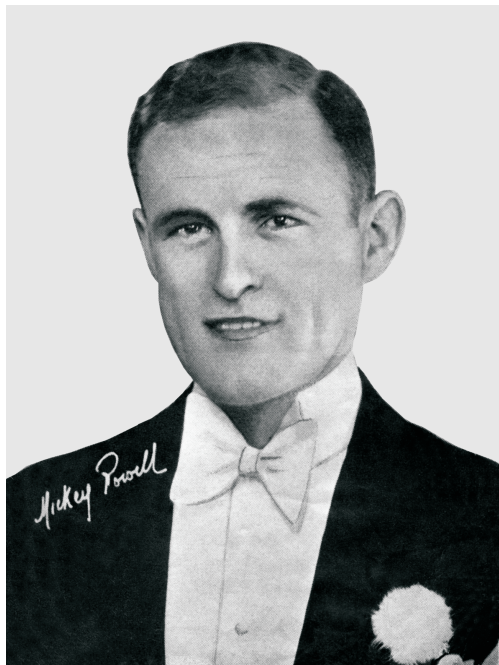
thinkers and artists should be acknowledged and have a platform from which to speak. We need to preserve the knowledge and the stories of the great masters of this field, give them the recognition they deserve and provide a forum for them to speak to the generations to come, so that this art form can stay genuine and authentic in order to develop into something bigger with even greater skills. Ballroom dancing will always change and develop like any other art due to changing socio-cultural circumstances and other currents. Therefore, it is even more important to strengthen its roots, and nurture the dialogue of generations."

In the centre of the book is a 'open out' section with a collage of photographs of the dancing greats, Australia's own **Alf & Julie Davies OAM** are featured in this section as they are truly one of the greats and undoubtedly Australia's No 1 icon of dance, while they do not have a chapter in the book they are featured in the list of **British Professional Champions** as being the *only Australian couple* ever to win a **British Professional Standard** title to this day. Alf and Julie took out their title in 1956 in the days you had to take a 6 week boat trip if you wanted to compete at the British!! A little different to today.

The outside side of this fold-out features section numerous autographs from some of the greats included in the book.

Also incorporated are commentaries from some of the stars of today giving their insight and feelings on the icons they looked up to, trained with and who gave them inspiration in their formative years.

In the chapter devoted to **Richard Gleave** he speaks about how important strong leadership is in the dancing fraternity. He goes on to say



“Look at the history of dancing and you find that strong countries in the past, had strong people at the helm. Alex Moore for example, helped to develop ballroom dancing to a great degree, travelling all over the world spreading the word about it after the second World War. And then there was George Fujimura in Japan, or Mickey Powell in Australia”

“Mickey Powell led the Australian Dancing Society and helped the first Australian team come to England by sea in 1948. Alf Davies and Julie Reaby were members of that team. Mickey received the Carl Alan Award from Dame Margot Fonteyn for his contribution to ballroom dancing and he was the first one outside of England to receive it. And then later, in 1956, Alf Davies & Julie Reaby were also awarded.”

The book is full of wonderful, inspirational quotes, one I particularly liked was: *“Dance is the only art of which we ourselves are the stuff of which it is made”* by Ted Shawn

If there is one book you should add to your collection on dance this is it.

For more information you can contact the author, Brigitt Mayer on www.Ballroom-Icons.com

Steps Through Time - the Australian Story

As is the case with most sports, there is a history. The stories on the trail blazers who have set the scene for today, is important. **Margaret Lonsdale** has commenced work on this project with **Neil Montagnana-Wallace** from **Bounce Books** with all profits going into setting up an “all of dance” fund to support aspiring young dancers.

Neil has developed a raft of books for many individuals, corporate and organizational histories as well as junior fiction. The 'A List' was an outstanding publication. **Steps Through Time – An Australian Story** – recording “must read” stories from some of the legendary names, like **Alf Davies and Julie Reaby, Charles Leeing and Mascotte Powell**.

The **Australian Dance Review**, are delighted to add their name to the “**Lovers of Dance**” who will make this project possible.

We will have a full report and interview on how this project got started in the next edition, and why the dancing industry need to embrace the opportunity to record the historical background of dancing in Australia for future generations. The plan is to trace the history from the 30's to the present day – a big job. But then the development of the Australian Championship was a big job, so the impossible will and must be achieved.

Barry and Shirley Wall

Happy 90 years Young to Madge Hitchins

By John Murphy

Like Charles Leeing (May ADR), Perth's Madge Hitchins is 90 years young when they strike up dance music.

Nirvana Social Club, where Madge has been a rarely-miss-a-night member for the past 31 of the club's 43 years, turned on a special night for her 90th birthday.

Family and friends went along to Leederville Town Hall see the club adorn Madge with a royal robe, crown and sparkly staff for the night.

Not one to like being made a fuss of, Madge told the Joondalup Weekender newspaper, which circulates in the district where she lives, that she'd rather the club had waited till she turned 100 and made it a real big party.

Proud to be part of the birthday festivity was another dancing nonagenarian, club veteran Charles Morrissey (92). He took Madge to the floor for a dance of honour.

Madge is best known at the club for the outfits she puts together for its fancy dress nights.

Of her skills in that regard, she said; “I'm just one of those silly people. I don't h i r e something. I just find stuff from around the house. and think that it'd come in handy for a fancy dress.”

