

Alan & Hazel Fletcher

One of the biggest concerns for the future of ballroom is that it may slip into a casual sportive style where the athletes and spectators enter the ballroom in either sweatsuits or ripped jeans and baseball caps. This uneasiness is not without merit.

Alan and Hazel Fletcher, disciples of the first group of enthusiastic ballroom developers, are two of the keepers of the English ballroom "creed." Hazel, who sits on the *Committee for Artistic Standards and Excellence* set up by the *World Dance Council*, helps preserve the best of the past

and connects it to the future of ballroom dancing. Alan heads a subcommittee of the *British Dancers Federation* responsible for organizing the congress during the *British Open* in Blackpool. There the best lecturers in the ballroom world share their knowledge with a broad audience worldwide.

Hazel, at the tender age of three, started her dancing career with ballet, as did many of her female counterparts in England and abroad. She was a natural and got little parts in ballet productions right from the start. She was first introduced to ballroom in high school as part of the curriculum. "It wasn't mandatory," she says. "You could just sign up if you wanted to do it. Then, when I was 14, I took classes in a small local dance school in Beaconsfield, run by Joan Milner."

Hazel became *Imperial Society* bronze medallist of the year, and from then on there was no stopping her. "One day I went with some friends to a dance class in Slough conducted by Bill and Rose Phillips and that's where I met Alan."

Alan was a natural at sports and played soccer and cricket on

the school team. "I was introduced to dancing when I was 10," Alan says. "One of my classmates told me about it, so I tagged along one Saturday and I really liked it. From then on there was this battle inside of me. Since both soccer and dancing occurred on Saturdays, I had to choose. Dancing won! My first teachers were Ken Bateman and Blanche Ingle who taught in the Slough community center. Both Ken and Blanche, specialists in Standard, and Bill and Rose, specialists in Latin, taught there. They had all been finalists together in the *International* and *U.K. Championships*."

Slough became synonymous with good dancers, owing to the accomplished dance instruction and leadership models of these two couples. There was no rivalry between them because each had their own dance speciality. A lot of champions came from their "stable," such as Richard Gleave, Patrick Johnson, Brian Puttock and later Jonathan Wilkins and Timothy Howson to name a few. Alan became British junior finalist and also a member of the Slough formation team. He danced in their junior team, and in 1965 travelled abroad for the first time to dance in a show at the *European Championship* in the *Deutschlandhalle* in Berlin.

"These four teachers, (Bateman/Ingle and the Phillips') were wonderful, and had a lot of foresight," Alan says. "When they thought they had taken any one of their 'kids' as far as they could, they would send them to London to Sonny Binnick or Sydney Francis, or anyone else they thought would further their protégés' careers. Jealously and paranoia didn't even enter their minds, unlike today where there's too much holding dancers back on the part of coaches for fear of losing them as clients. They can feel an enormous sense of pride that they 'paid it forward' by putting so many couples on the road to success. And the couples themselves had this sense of accomplishment and pride."

Hazel and Alan started dating and good old-fashioned courting. Alan's partner had stopped dancing, but he and Hazel didn't talk about dancing together. Hazel thought that perhaps dancing with a medalist wasn't what Alan wanted. But when Alan didn't find a new partner right away, Bill Phillips recommended they try it. So off they went on their bikes to the pub where Hazel's mum worked, and practised in the adjoining room. Alan taught Hazel all his routines and she proved to be a quick study. Not surprising because for 12 years she had trained with a teacher who showed her the steps only once and expected results. So she was fast to learn Alan's routines. After a couple of weeks they showed Bill what they had accomplished. After two more months of

Vita

Alan Fletcher

Birthdate

March 28, 1948

Birthplace

London, England

Father

Ernest Fletcher, general foreman, head baggage handler, St. John's Ambulance driver

Mother

Violet Turney seamstress

Hazel Fletcher

Birthdate

October 20, 1948

Birthplace

Middlesex, England

Father

Leslie Charles Simpson quality controller - Mars confectionary

Mother

Kathleen Hazell seamstress, hotel receptionist

1972-73

World Amateur Latin champions

1976-80

European Professional Latin champions

1977-81

World Professional Latin champions

1985

opened studio in Cobham, Surrey

1972, '77, '81 and 2004

Carl-Alan Award

1985-92

cabaret *Latin Fantasy I, II and III* with Espen and Kirsten Salberg

2004

BDF Committee Award for special services to Alan

2006

BDF Lifetime Achievement Award to Alan and Hazel Fletcher





“That was very typical of Dimitri and Nina’s relationship. He loaded the gun, and she took the shot!”

“We felt Nina was right for us,” says Alan. “She seemed genuinely interested in us personally; I think that was one of her biggest assets. She made you feel that she cared about every aspect of your life, and for us it was the perfect fit – or so we thought. ”

Hazel remembers: “When we told her we wanted to leave Wally, Doris and Sydney to work **exclusively** with her, she got really mad. ‘You can’t start taking lessons with those teachers or any teacher for that matter, and then stop going. It’s not right, and you can’t put all that responsibility on me to make you champions!’ We were shocked.

“Nina went to her husband, Dimitri Petrides, and grumbled about our decision, explaining that she felt it put too much pressure on her. But he convinced her to ‘take them on because they’ve got talent.’ That was very typical of their relationship. He loaded the gun, and she took the shot! After that little outburst she was totally committed. She wasted no time telling me that my dresses weren’t good enough and the hair was all wrong, and which competitions to go to etcetera, etcetera – We were ‘officially’ family now.

training, Bill sent them to Wally Laird, and in 1965 their success story began.

They added Sydney Francis, Doris Lavelle and later Nina Hunt to their team of teachers, and after dancing together for four years, they made the British team and represented the U.K. abroad. By then they worked solely with Nina, since they got confused trying to ‘serve many masters.’ They had also run out of money to pay them!

Hazel married Alan in 1968 and they spent their honeymoon in Mallorca, a trip she had won. On their return, they moved into what Alan described “as a dreadful little flat” to be closer to London’s dancing hub. He worked as a stock taker for a brewery and Hazel as a telephone receptionist; their salaries would cover dancing expenses. They never considered a career outside the dance business.

“I always made my own dresses, and one day Nina remarked, ‘You could make a business out of that, but you’ll have to get better at it.’ She started sending dancers to me for fittings, and eventually I made a living working from home. It was a relief, because now I could stop working as a receptionist and making that awful commute into downtown London.

“Nina would come to our home and ask Alan and me about our outfits for the next competition or what were we eating, or did we think we used enough fake tan? When she was interested in a couple it was total immersion. But if you spoke to her about anything else other than dancing, she would fall asleep - almost,” Hazel said with a grin.

“I remember a story Sonny Binnick told us. They were at dinner with a whole group including Nina, and he talked



Left: Alan & Hazel in a demonstration
 Middle: Alan & Hazel in Blackpool
 Right: Alan & Hazel receiving the Carl-Alan Award, 1972