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Dancing in Tinseltown!

Story begins pg. 6

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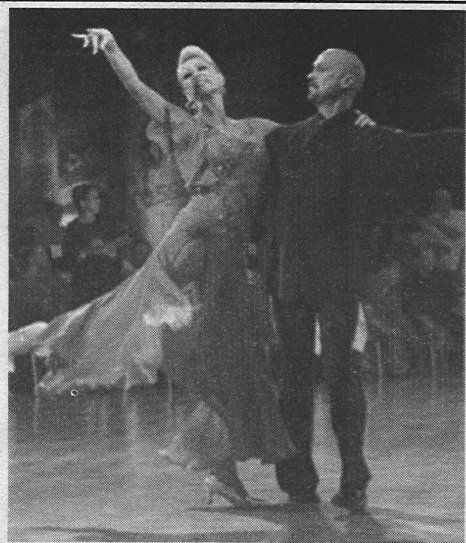
Amateur Haven

AN INTERVIEW WITH CHARLENE PROCTOR

Report & Photos By Keith E. Gardenhire

Charlene Proctor is a new dancer to the competitive ballroom dance arena. Charlene Proctor w/Blake Kish are attempting to win three DanceSport series as an amateur in the same year. This article includes an interview with Charlene Proctor that is a compilation of three interviews that were taken at the tournaments: The Atlanta Open Dancesport Spectacular, the San Diego Dancesport Championship, and the First Coast Classic held in St. Augustine, FL.

Charlene Proctor has burst upon the dance



Charlene Proctor with Blake Kish

Photo by Keith E. Gardenhire

scene with solid dance routines that brighten the ballroom floor. Dancing in all four disciplines, Latin, Standard, American Smooth and American Rhythm she has compiled quite a record of accomplishments this year. Numerous times she has won Top Bronze Female competitor. Her dancing is exquisite with charm and gracefulness of a much more experienced ballroom dancer.

Let us discuss the three series.

The DanceSport Series Leaderboard is a series of tournaments that are separated into seven separate regions. This is the twelfth year of the DanceSport Series Leaderboard. Region 1 comprises thirteen tournaments mostly in North Eastern United States. Region 2, which predominately covers the Mid-Atlantic region, includes the Atlanta Open Dancesport Spectacular, Virginia State Championship, the Heritage Classic Dancesport Championship, Savannah Dance Classic, Maryland DanceSport Championship and several other tournaments. Region 3 includes 15 tournaments mostly in Florida with 2 competitions in Tennessee, one tournament in New Orleans and the Caribbean Dancesport Classic in San Juan, PR. Region 4 has tournaments in Minnesota, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin as well as the Cincinnati Ballroom Classic and the venerable Ohio Star Ball. Region 5 has a series of tournaments in Colorado, St. Louis, Kansas City, MO, Houston and two tournaments in Arizona. Region 6 mostly includes tournaments in California with the Las Vegas Open, the Nevada Star Ball and the Seattle Star Ball. Region 7 includes a series of tournaments in Canada. At the Ohio Star Ball awards for the series are presented. Points are accumulated through all the tournaments by the participants

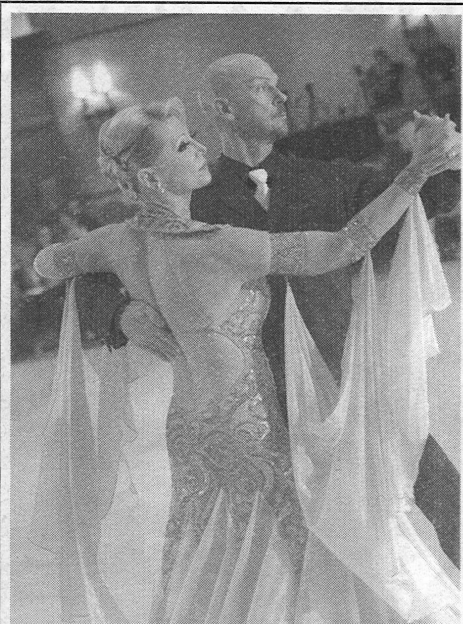
dancing in specific DanceSport series events held at each tournament. A certain number of points are awarded based upon the finish of the amateur competitor, the number of dances and bonus points are given for example if Pro/Am couple competes in all seven regions. At the time of this interview Charlene Proctor was the top female student with 49486 trailed by Judith Simon with 30,661 points. Charlene Proctor is currently the Top Female Bronze level amateur with 11,642 points and closely challenged by Judith Simon with 10954 points.

The Global DanceSport Series was started in 2000 to assist the Professional and Amateur dancers. The Global Circuit consists of the tournaments: Ohio Star Ball, Maryland DanceSport Championships, Vegas Open, Michigan Dance Challenge, Emerald Star Ball, Tulip Classic, Atlanta Open Dancesport Spectacular, Colorado Star Ball, Manhattan DanceSport, Volunteer State Dance Challenge, Cleveland DanceSport Challenge, Orange County DanceSport Challenge, North American Imperial Star. Charlene Proctor leads the Top Female competition with 17292 points with Julie Stadler trailing in second place with 8542 points.

The Dancers Cup Tour consists of the tournaments: Ohio Star Ball, Holiday Dance Classic, Nashville Starz, California Open, St. Louis Star Ball, Wisconsin State Championship, People's Choice, Twin Cities Open, Heart of America, First Coast Classic. Charlene Proctor

currently has having 9617.

At this time Charlene Proctor leads all three tournaments. I have seen Charlene Proctor dance three times, at the Atlanta Open Dancesport Spectacular, San Diego Dancesport Championship, and the First Coast Classic in Jacksonville, FL. She has danced with two different professionals Blake Kish and Sean Brunell. Most of her tournaments she has danced with Blake Kish. Charlene and Blake make a striking couple as they have great height and are easy to find on the dance floor. Blake has trained her in the classic ballroom dance style. It is precise and holds great technique. Her form in each dance is always correct. Through the ups and down of the year of constant competing and traveling, Charlene and Blake Kish have



Charlene Proctor with Blake Kish

Photo by Keith E. Gardenhire

forged a lead for all three series.

Would you please give me the three DanceSport series you are competing?

-DanceSport Series Leaderboard

- Global DanceSport Series

- The Dancers Cup Tour

We are attempting to win all three in one season, which has never been done by any student before, or any Pro-Am team either, in a single competitive season. If we Grand Slam and win all three leaderboards, we will make ballroom history. We figured we should go for it, as long as we are happy, healthy, and able to travel.

When you started dancing did you have any previous dance training, such as ballet?

- I had years of ballet when I was younger and was a tap dancer as an adult. Not so sure ballet helped me with heel leads in the waltz and the there was a lot to undo with the tap, especially in the East Coast Swing. Knees together! And get down in the knees in the tango! I love the ballroom styles so much more.

What got you to started dancing?

- I am a self-help writer by profession, after having spent many years previously in academic research. I taught and traveled for ages, and was a working parent. One day, I decided to spend less time in front of my computer and in my head, and more time enjoying music and movement. I revisited the ideas that made me joyful as a kid. So, on my birthday, I walked into a Fred Astaire studio and signed up for lessons.

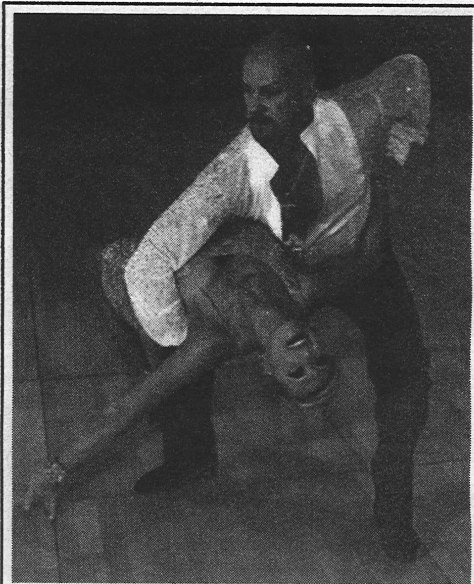
When you started dancing what was your first lesson like?

- Well, it wasn't with Blake, so I didn't laugh so much and didn't learn as quickly. I danced with a number of other instructors at the studio until one day Blake decided to take over, like General Patton.

How does your family feel about your dancing? Are they supportive? Do they feel neglected?

- They are totally into it and say that if I don't get out on the road every other week next season, they will kick me out the door. When Momma is happy, everybody happy, as the old saying goes. A meteor could hit the planet next week, so we should enjoy every day doing what we love to do like there's no tomorrow.

When I saw you in San Diego you danced with a professional Sean Burrell. How did you meet Sean? Who introduced him to you?



Charlene Proctor with Blake Kish

Photo by Keith E. Gardenhire

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Charlene Proctor contd.

- Every successful creative partnership is built upon respect, appreciation, and loyalty. Blake and I lost our way for 5 weeks while I danced with Sean at 3 competitions. I met Sean at Emerald Ball. But Blake was miserable without me and I truly missed our energy and connection, so we decided to start over, and remember that dancing begins in the heart and that no matter what, we should always dance with joy, and forget everything else. It was a spiritual lesson in forgiveness and acceptance, so we both did grow personally from this. Besides, if we didn't get back together, Marianne Nicole threatened to lop our heads off and we were just plain scared about that.

What do you like about dancing?

- I like lighting up people's faces in the audience. When we dance well, and connect with people sitting at the tables, it's more fun than I ever imagined, even at my level. It motivates me to improve and dance better the next time. I also love all my ballroom friends. I laugh so much at competitions, I must have dance in my life. Especially when joking with Jeremy Gatlin about nose hairs.

What was your first ballroom dance tournament? Was it a major tournament or was it a local small tournament?

- Blake took me to Holiday Dance Classic in 2010 and after the first few heats, I was hooked. I'll still be at competitions when I'm a hundred years old. By that time, I'll finally do a proper cha-cha.

How many hours per week do you practice with Blake Kish? Do you practice with someone other than Blake when you are home in Bloomfield Hills, MI?

- We average about 15 hours per week when we are not on the road, sometimes a little more. I practice every day and on the weekends by myself, because good technique comes from both a passion for the sport and repetition and that is the only way to make a routine one that you own. I am just beginning to learn how to express something deeper in the dancing and not be so mechanical. It just takes time. I also love all my coaches, and feel this additional instruction is vitally important.

You currently dance in the C-Division. Is this the division you started? I am trying to gracefully determine your age when you started dancing.

- I had just turned 50 when I started to ballroom dance. I've been dancing for two years now, so that often puts me in the C division. But I danced two levels this season because we needed the points for the leaderboard. Next year may be a different story.

What was your tournament schedule through the year?

- At the end of this year, we will have attended 26 competitions, which was rigorous. Overall, I've attended 34 competitions. Blake and I are Dance Road Warriors, and spent a lot of birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays at airports. We calculated we've danced on the competitive ballroom floor 11,370 times. At the time of this writing, I have won either a Top Competitor award or Top Bronze 29 times. We also won a Triple Crown Championship in our division, as we also danced Larry Dean's Triple Crown series.

What are the tournaments you are going to dance through the end of these championship series?

- We will finish the big three. Dancers Cup ends at Holiday Dance Classic in December, and after that we will put our feet up and have a couple of martinis and share stories.

Do you do social dancing?

- If anyone would ask me out, I would certainly go. I would love to waltz and 2-step at a country western bar. Blake's been promising to take me

but we're so busy practicing and traveling he hasn't had time. Maybe he will as a Christmas present. Would you please remind him?

What hobbies do you do outside of dancing?

- I love my dogs so I have plenty of conversations with them because they always see into my heart. I love to scuba dive, fish, and enjoy nature. I get a kick out of just rolling around in the leaves on the back lawn on a sunny fall day. For balance, I remember the simple things in life and try to be fully present with them. Like talking to a good friend or grilling a steak.

Do you have a career (besides being a fabulous dancer)?

- I write spiritual and self-help books and have done blessings and empowerment workshops for women for years. I just had a new book come out this year, *The Oneness Gospel*. We hit #1 on Kindle in the spiritual and self-help category on the day of its release, in April, and the book also won a silver Nautilus award, for the best in category, which a huge honor in my industry. It's been an amazing year for achievement this year. I think the planets have been aligned in my favor.

We may include your struggles as capturing the essence of a particular dance. What are your struggles?

- Standard is the most difficult for me, as it is so technical and the postures seem hard to hold. But I will never be an excellent smooth dancer without learning standard, as it informs everything and provides an important foundation. So, I just pay attention to the elements of the dances, do my best, and someday it will all come together. Dance is a journey, not

a destination, and even the most frustrating parts of the process have value.

I would like to include some information on Blake Kish as how you got started dancing together. In St. Augustine you said you started out with a different instructor and Blake came and took over. Did you enjoy dancing with previous instructor? How long did you dance with your previous instructor? Did you dance in any competitions with this previous instructor? What was the difference between the two instructors? What did you like about



Charlene Proctor with Blake Kish

Photo by Keith E. Gardenhire

Blake? Was it his height or teaching style you liked better?

- The first instructor I had was too skinny so we didn't last long. I like my dance guy to be tall, have a big chest, giant guns, and some decent ink. Blake definitely fits that criteria. Of course, Blake is an excellent teacher, having been in the industry for 29 years. He has the ability to break down a pattern and find a way to make it make sense, no matter your level. He also has the patience of a saint, even though he can often be a slave driver, and doesn't allow tears and fears. But I like to work hard and push myself, so it works for us. We also find a way to laugh a lot. If we didn't have that, we could not dance 430

heats at a comp and still be on speaking terms.

What was the first dance that you started?

- The Rumba. But after two years, I feel I am still starting it. Does it ever end?

Were there any particular struggles that you had through the year?

- With this kind of schedule, we had injuries. I danced on a pulled hamstring for 6 weeks, had a few cracked ribs, swollen feet, and all the usual dance stuff. But I also got very sick at Galaxy with a deadly methicillin resistant staph bacteria, the kind that kills you because it spreads so fast. It got into my lymph nodes and was entering my lungs and bloodstream, so I was in two hospitals and had to have surgery on my right arm. Packing those wounds were worse than childbirth so I am glad it's over. I have trouble lifting the arm, but it will heal. I am so grateful to be alive.

Did you have a particular dance or style that you struggled?

- I don't like anything where I feel restricted because I am a free spirit. Rhythm is a blast and smooth is just elegant, expressive, and full of grace. I dance standard because I have to learn the technique, it is a necessary foundation for smooth. And Latin is a work in progress. We do it for fun and giggles, and dance is supposed to be fun, right? I think I am too tall and unspeedy to be an exceptional Latin dancer, but I will stick with it because I love working with Kasia Kozak. I've learned a lot from her and there is plenty of cross-over value for rhythm. Besides, I like growling at Blake during the Paso and I can't really give that up.

Charlene Proctor has embarked on year long quest to win all three leaderboards. As of now the goal of winning appears to be within her grasp. Through the trials and tribulations of the year she has persevered. With beauty, grace, and fortitude she along with Blake Kish have traveled the dance circuits with great personal sacrifice. The dance community does not think she is too tall to be an exceptional Latin dancer. Her leg positions on the Rumba are exquisite and her foot positions are excellent in form.

Blake Kish is the founder of the Birmingham Ballroom in Birmingham, MI. For over 25 years Blake has been a professional dancer and instructor.

Now Blake, you must take Charlene out for quick spin around the dance floor in a social setting. OK, I am only asking because Blake, you are bigger than I am, so don't take offense. Charlene wanted me to ask you!



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