

Stompin' Swing for the Crown

Winners of "the Crown" Sophie Wijesuriya and Jonny Fisher



Photograph © Geny Caloisi

Dancers set the floor on fire at the Stompin' Swing for the Crown 2013 competition at the 100 Club this spring, culminating with the final on April 8. Organised by the London Swing Dance Society (LSDS), the event attracts many different couples every year.

LSDS founder, Simon Selmon, explains: "The competition has a dual purpose. On the one hand it is for the better dancers to show off what they have learned in a friendly and supportive environment. It also gives them a purpose to rehearse for. On the other, it is a way of improving the quality of the London [swing] dance scene as it represents the best of what we

have to offer, and encourages people to raise their game."

The event has been running for over a decade. Starting in January, once a month there is a heat, where up to ten couples show what they are made of. With the clapping public as judges, three or four couples are chosen from each heat to go through to the final.

Simon took his inspiration for the name of the competition from an event he saw in the US. "When I very first started to dance I was keen to compete and I entered the 1988 Rock 'n' Roll Championships, which were televised on BBC1," he recalls. "They had various heats in clubs around the

country and the finalists went through to the televised championships – and I was lucky enough to be placed first.

"We started running dances at Stompin' in 1988, but I think in its present guise, the title Stompin' Swing for the Crown came after I was teaching in Texas where they had a similar style competition. What I did differently to theirs, though, was to have heats, which you have to win first."

There are two unspoken rules for the competition: keep the beat and don't interfere with another couple. The winners take home £150. "The reason for the cash prize," explains Simon, "is I want to attract the better dancers. With no prize the standard is not so good."

Sophie Wijesuriya and Jonny Fisher took the crown at this year's competition, which was the first time they had taken part. The couple practised twice a week for a month for this competition and they made sure they had as many social dances as possible under their belts.

Sophie says that the competition was strong. "Everyone else looked brilliant; we were very chuffed to win." As for the prize money: half of it went on a vintage dress and a couple of nights of dancing; the other half to "dancing and booze". You decide who bought what.

Next stop for competitive lindy hoppers: the Maytime Mess Around Festival, with the Fast and Furious competition in Titchfield. As Simon points out, "Competing is like a muscle, the more you do the better you get at it." ●

GENY CALOISI