

# Kickit Review of Worlds X in The Netherlands

When discussing a World Championship event, you expect to use superlatives: The **biggest**, the **most**, the **largest**, etc. This review of the UCWDC World Championships of Country Dance X is no exception.

## The View From The Top

From the viewpoint of UCWDC Event Directors, this must have been the **most** successful dance event ever. All of the dancing took place in 3 adjoining rooms, with attached space for a bar and a sort of food court. Not a lot of running around. Nice and compact and convenient. Everything was on schedule with minimal disruptions for the first couple days (though it got progressively worse, until the final fiasco of an awards ceremony).

But keep in mind that, for Event Directors, it's all about the money. Goal Number 1 is to make money. All else is incidental. And that's fine. If an Event Director makes money, they are motivated to have another event. If they lose money, less so. It's all about "Ka-ching".

Worlds IX, last year's lavish extravaganza in Edmonton (which we considered to be the best event we have ever attended) lost a LOT of money. The UCWDC event directors share in the gains and losses of the World Championships, so they had to share the huge losses of Edmonton. Their goal for Worlds X in the Netherlands was to recoup the losses from last year. And they managed to do so handsomely, collecting more money from customers than any event in history, while incurring minimal expense.

UCWDC Event Directors have discovered that they can treat line dancers like slabs of meat with wallets, harvesting tons of money from them at any time for any reason. That attitude, when applied to couples, helped make their source of couples dancers dry up a few years ago. Line dancers, especially European line dancers, have not yet caught on.

I am going to cite several different aspects of Worlds X. I apologize in advance for any of the complaints that might be construed as critiques of European culture. That is not intended at all. I can only compare Worlds X to other events I have attended in North America.

[When I mention UCWDC Event Directors, I don't include James Gregory and Jean Garr. Their jg2 Line Dance Marathon is a sterling example of providing us line dancers value for our money without insulting us. It's a wonderful event run by wonderful people. If they would get rid of their UCWDC affiliation, it would be perfect.]

## The Teaching Staff

The teaching staff in Edmonton was among the finest we have ever seen. This year, the Event Directors decided to go with no paid instructors. (At the last minute, they invited Max Perry to take the trip. Flights were difficult at that late date and Max did not arrive until late on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the event, and was forced to stay in The Netherlands for 3 days after it ended.) The list of people left out is huge; Jo Thompson (whose exclusion is absolutely a **sin**, since she and Max single-handedly (double-handedly?) introduced line dancing to Europe), Kathy Hunyadi, Scott Blevins, Peter Metelnick, Joanne Brady, Jamie Davis, Pedro Machado, John Robinson, Michele Perron, Judy McDonald, and on and on and on. I could name another 20 folks who you would expect to see invited to Worlds. None were. This was, by far, the **most** insulting part of this event.

## The Workshops

Workshops in Edmonton were also impressive, with some of the best teachers and best dances ever. I feel sorry for anyone who came to Worlds X looking for workshops, paying the extra \$40 workshop fee. The selection was the **worst** ever. I have been to 2-day events with a better set of workshops. Except for Wednesday's workshops (I lost that sheet), the complete list of line dance workshops is as follows. Notice that many of the dances were taught at Worlds last year.

### Line Dance Technique Workshops

Cuban Motion – Max Perry (PAID)

Funky Technique – Barry Durand

Style And Technique - Kelly Gellette (PAID)  
Technique For Line – Beth Emerson (PAID)  
Waltz In Line – Stella Wilden (PAID) (Scheduled twice)

### **Line Dance Workshops**

A.T. Kinson – If You Should Go (Scheduled twice), TBA  
Barry Durand - TBA  
Brian Barakauskas – Shake Your Tail Feather (Scheduled twice), TBA (PAID)  
Caterina Torrella – I Will But  
Chris Godden – Connect  
Cyndee Neel – B.O.H.I.C.A., Chill Factor, Shake It Out  
Damian Brady – Crazy For Your Love, Little Bitty, TGIF, Mack The Knife  
Desi Bouwmans – Country Roads  
Gerda Klein – Down To The Bottom  
Jenny Stephenson – Open Arms  
Kelly Gelette – Mambo Here, Mambo There  
Kelly Haugen – TBA  
Matt Jenkins – TBA (PAID), War (Scheduled twice), Freaky Deeky  
Matt Oakley – Man Eater (Scheduled twice)  
Max Perry – Chill Factor, MJ Moves, maJiK Touch, No Ceilings No Walls (Scheduled twice), Sunset Bolero, TBA (PAID)  
Neil Smith – I Love You (Scheduled twice), Mabel's Waltz  
Rachael McEnaney – Fame, Karma Chamelion, TBA  
Richard Tymko – Princess Bridge  
Rob "I" – Check Er Out, Powerade (Scheduled twice), TBA  
Roy Hadisubroto – TBA (PAID)  
Roy Verdonk – TBA (PAID)  
Simone Anderson – TBA (PAID)  
Stella Wilden – Herman's Waltz (PAID)

Many of these workshops didn't happen at all since the schedulers didn't check whether the teacher was actually free at the time they were scheduled to teach. When there was a conflict, the workshop room was simply left empty for an hour.

### **The Judging Staff**

Along with their decision to not pay instructors, the Event Directors decided to not pay judges. They believed they have seen enough competitions that they could do their own judging. The UCWDC rulebook contains powerful restrictions on the qualifications of the judges used at Worlds. These were ignored. Many of the judges at this event had no certification whatsoever. Most line dance competitors, being new to this process, were unaware that they were being judged by some less-qualified people. When the more experienced dancers (couples) started showing up later in the week, the question of judge qualifications was raised more and more. When it came up one evening in the competitors meeting, the meeting was hastily adjourned and everyone was hustled out of the room lest a riot ensue.

### **The Location**

Remember the fabulous facility at Worlds IX? The venue for Worlds X was an old hotel with extremely tiny rooms (ours barely fit two people plus luggage.) It was a vast sprawling campus that was quaint and pretty. But it is in a part of the country that is quite depressed since its major employer (Philips) vacated to Amsterdam. And of course it was the nadir of the low tourist season. So the UCWDC probably got the place for dirt cheap or less. Many of the other problems of this event are somehow related to the choice of venue.

### **The Excuse**

If any complaints came up (e.g., in the nightly competitor meeting), the answer would often be prefaced with "Well, you know this whole event was planned in 6 months and it usually takes 8 years to plan Worlds, and that problem you just brought up is a result of that." When I move from one home to another, there is generally some stuff I bring with me. I don't just dump all my belongings and buy new stuff. But

that appears to be what was done in this case. All planning that was done before June of 2001 was totally abandoned and re-planned afterward. At least, that's what they kept telling us.

### **The Water Shortage**

Competitors were not given water during competitions until the third day of the event. However, we were given the opportunity to purchase water between heats. And it only cost \$1.50 for 8 ounces. Two of us spent over \$30 on water in the first two days of competition. Ka-ching.

### **The Plastic Coins**

The UCWDC had plastic coins with the UCWDC logo that they sold for about \$1.50 each. Food and beverages within the complex could only be purchased with these "UC-Euros". As stated above, 8 ounces of water or pop was 1 coin. A lunchmeat sandwich was 2 coins. There was no half-coin available, but a candy bar was priced at ½ a coin. Since they couldn't make change, it would either cost you 1 coin, or you would have to buy something else. Also, the food and the drink were at two different areas, so if you wanted food totaling 3½ coins and drink totaling 1½, you spent 4 coins at one place and 2 at the other. You could not combine them into a single 5-coin purchase. Obviously, everyone ended the week with unused "coins" that could not be turned in for a refund. Ka-CHING!

### **The Smoke**

This was the **smokiest** "non-smoking" event in history. There were numerous designated smoking areas, separated from the non-smoking areas by nothing whatsoever. So the entire complex contained a cloud of tobacco smoke. The competition floor nearest the food court had such limited visibility on the first day that it was unlikely that a judge on one end of the floor could see a dancer at the other end. Pre-teens sat in groups and smoked cigarettes. Competitors waiting in line to go onto the floor for their dance heat were lighting up. Lit cigarettes were seen in the hands and lips of spectators in the stands during competition and dancers on the floor during open dancing. Perhaps this is a European thing, but if the Event Directors are going to claim this is a non-smoking event, then they should take some steps to make it so.

### **The Dressing Room**

There wasn't one. There was a set of cubicle walls loosely set up as a rectangle. Since it was a unisex area, many competitors were reluctant to change their clothes there. Men and women were standing around in various states of undress within those walls. As it happens, they were walking around outside of the cubicle room that way as well. Again, maybe it's a European thing. But in North America, dance competitions have separate dressing rooms for men and women, and dressing rooms often include places to hang costumes and chairs to sit on for boot changes.

### **The Slippery Floors**

The rental floors were excessively slippery. I suppose there is not much that can be done about it, but it was certainly one of the first complaints you heard from every dancer.

### **Rental Numbers**

After spending \$149 to get into the event, plus \$15 per dance (someone dancing all 4 dances -- A, B, C, and D – spent \$209) you might expect that you would be provided with competition numbers. Not quite. All contestants were required to wear their numbers in little plastic holders, and were required to pay a deposit on each plastic holder. This was charged at registration as a "number fee". Though we could only wear one number at a time, we were entered in 3 different categories and had to pay for 3 plastic holders. It was through word-of-mouth that we eventually found we could return the holders for a partial refund (paid \$1.50, refunded 1 Euro) after competition. I wonder how many competitors never bothered to get their refund? Ka-ching.

### **Registration**

We have been involved in putting together registration packets for several large dance events. Given a spreadsheet that lists each registrant and what they paid for, two of us were able to put together 300 packets in about 2 hours. The cost of the 8x12 envelopes and a name sticker for each packet came to about \$60. If an event had, say, 3000 registrants, then putting together packets would have cost about 40 man-hours and \$600. Instead the Worlds X Event Directors saved money and time by not having envelopes and stickers at all, and putting the "packets" together at the registration desk. Every registrant stood in line for 2-3 hours while a half dozen people behind the table passed around the spreadsheet and

grabbed items from various boxes and bags in the area, collected the "number fee", and handed a loose pile of papers and plastic over the table. So instead of spending 40 man-hours to make it run smoothly, they stole thousands and thousands of man-hours from registrants. Again, the excuse given was the old "only 6 months to plan" mantra, but clearly the goal was to save \$600, registrants' time be damned.

### **The \$50 New Years Eve Gala**

Each registrant who wanted to participate in the "New Years Eve Gala" was charged \$50. What they got for their money was a 6-foot buffet with over 5 choices of food, followed by a dance show and then an hour of fireworks outside in the snow. The dance show was pretty good overall, ranging from the sublime (a championship Latin dance couple ages 7 and 9 who were phenomenal), to the nice (a 50-minute hip-hop dance show by Roy Verdonk and his troupe, and another hip-hop demo by an award winning brother-sister act), to the weak (Roy's amateur magician friend who adequately performed a few simple stage illusions and a singer friend who was always about 30 cents below the correct pitch). We were promised champagne at midnight, but I somehow managed to miss that. I think someone needs to visit an American casino and find out how to put on a buffet.

### **Additional Expenses**

Little niggling fees were everywhere. We always seemed to be digging out Guilders or Euros to cover some little expense the Event Directors had failed to mention up front. The most egregious one we encountered was the \$25 Membership Fee for teams. We are a Duo team, both of whom already paid their UCWDC membership fee. It turns out, our team also has to have a separate membership. So we had to give them another \$25 before being allowed to compete, even though we had no chance of winning an award, and ended up being disqualified anyway. We had never been approached with this in any of the qualifying events we attended during the year. In fact, it's not in the rulebook at all, except in an oblique reference to some sort of "tracking" system. So while a competition couple can be tracked just fine with only two memberships, a competition duo requires three. Stick it to the line dancers. Ka-CHING!

### **The Video Pass**

Information distributed prior to Worlds X made it abundantly clear that it would not be possible to video tape anything at Worlds X; that there would be a professional videographer to do that. Imagine my surprise when I arrived there, thousands of miles from my JVC camcorder, and was told that a video pass was available for 55 Guilders. There was no video crew at all. If you wanted to get a video tape of your performance, you had to hope to meet a spectator with a camcorder. Numerous people could be found in the stands during competition with camcorders, but no video pass. So I guess it was not really necessary at all, though they probably sold a few. (Ka-ching) When the subject of a videographer came up in a competitors meeting, the answer given was that video taping is not a part of the European dance culture. This upset the Europeans in the room. A very funny argument ensued, which I don't want to go into here. I love it when competitors meetings turn dramatic.

### **The Lighting**

Videos and photos taken during the event suffered badly from poor lighting. Weird colored gels over the spotlights made it worse, and the overall wattage was barely adequate to light the room. There were certain locations on the floor where a contestant was virtually invisible, and I pity anyone whose costume was black and silver, because that combination just did not stand out at all. I have seen haunted house movies with better lighting.

### **The Photographer**

Again, there was none. On the 3rd or 4th day of competition, a guy with a camera and tripod showed up to take pictures of competitors in their competition costumes standing by a potted plant in a lobby. To some, that is a keepsake of Worlds X. To me it's an indication that, at some time, you stood next to a potted plant. We thought about photographing a Worlds X backdrop, and digitally pasting a picture of ourselves in our competition clothes over it, but it turns out that the phrase "Worlds X" did not appear in the decorations in any room at the event. (It was on the DJ booth in Workshop Room 2, but that didn't make a very good backdrop.) I guess they didn't have time to put together something like that in 6 months, and all the Worlds X decor they designed and executed in the previous 7.5 years of planning were somehow mysteriously vaporized.

## **The Dancing**

OK. I have to praise the dancing. It was incredible. Just magnificent. Congratulations to all of the people who work so hard to turn themselves into such great dancers. It was a joy to watch. However, there is one thing that just bugs the heck out of me. It is the hand motion that goes like this:

- 1) Touch your hair
- 2) Touch your boobs
- 3) Touch your ass

For some reason, someone has decided that this is the preferred hand motion for all competition dances in all styles. I don't know what it means in Europe, but in the USA, this particular sequence of moves is interpreted as

- 1) You can have a
- 2) piece of this for
- 3) only fifty dollars

To see those motions on a competition dance floor is repulsive, like a certain middle finger gesture. And we saw it in all age groups, from Jr. Primary to Gold, and even in men's divisions. PLEASE STOP!

## **The Open Dancing Play List**

Knowing how difficult it is for a dance DJ to please a bunch of dancers from opposite sides of the same city, I can only imagine how tough it is to do that for a bunch of dancers from opposite sides of the same planet. All of the DJs did a great job. Most of the dances called at open dancing were either competition dances from the last 3 years, or else Chill Factor. No complaints here. Lots of great music and when we weren't dancing, we were enjoying watching the quality of everyone else's dancing.

## **The Seating**

Venue related, but, oh well. The seating capacity of this Worlds was about one-third of Edmonton's. The seats were bleachers brought in from the outdoors, probably from around a soccer field somewhere. They were not very clean and more than one pair of jeans was demolished by tree sap seeping from knots in the wooden seats. Also, the angle of the rise from one row to the next was about 10 degrees, so that if anyone was sitting in front of you, you couldn't see the floor at all. You could only see dancers from the neck up. Kinda hard to appreciate a dance competition that way.

## **The Treatment**

Most surprising of all was the way we were treated, especially by fellow dancers. There seemed to be 2 categories of rudeness. First were people who either realized we were Americans or did not categorize us at all, but were rude in any case. There were far too many people stepping into line ahead of us, refusing to return a greeting (even a simple smile), and just being rude. My experience at all past dance events has been that everyone with which you attempt the slightest rapport turns out to be a friendly person. It was exactly the opposite here. I know tensions run high for competitors at an event like this, but you can't even return a smile when passing in the hallway? By Tuesday, when BJ Brown tried to joke about rudeness to Americans, we were already overly sensitive to it and it came off as very insulting.

The second category is the most surprising to us; people who correctly pegged us as the people who run the Kickit website, and are really pissed off about it. Mostly these were teachers from the Netherlands and UK. Apparently, they like to sell step sheets to their students and the presence of Kickit makes it difficult.

Several of these people were Newcomer and Novice competitors, which made me wonder why the UCWDC doesn't enforce it's laws against dancers at those levels teaching classes and taking money from students. It turns out that they all claim to the UCWDC they don't get paid and are actually "assistants", not "teachers". Yet, they are pissed off at the fact that Kickit is cutting into their income (whereas it is okay for them to get free step sheets from Kickit!)

Max Perry was kind enough to introduce us to the class in a couple of his workshops, which each time resulted in a round of applause. Meanwhile, I was looking straight into the eyes of people who had already tried to rip me a new one simply because I run a website that gives away step sheets. Well, pardon me for giving stuff away for free. It won't happen again.

This is not to say that there were NO positive human interactions. The Line Dance Classic Diamond Intermediate ladies were very nice. A 30-second encounter with the angel, Rachael McEnaney, was the

highlight of one whole day. Any time we ran into Max Perry, we had a great time. Irene Kiener is always a delight (and now a World Champion! Congrats Irene!). And then there were "The Scots Who Almost Saved Kickit". After 4 days of being abused for our association with Kickit, and having already decided to shut down the on-line archive, we were invited to join the entourage for Leyonee Maree Forbes. It was like a breath of fresh air. We actually had an hour of lovely conversation with some wonderful people, and went back to our room that night feeling refreshed and welcome for the first time all week. Looking back on it the next day, we were still pleased with that encounter, but realized that at any other event, we would have been having something like that happen to us every minute of every day, not just one evening. When only 1% of your encounters are positive, and the other 99% are negative, the overall effect can be pretty depressing. So while we came close to keeping Kickit as it was, it turned out to be too little, too late. You Scots can be proud of Leyonee Maree and her family, dance friends, and well-wishers. Please buy them a drink for us. (Maybe we'll send you a plastic UCWDC coin to pay for it.) They were one of the few bright moments in an otherwise long, dismal event.

## **Conclusion**

What we learned from all of this is that there is a lot of money to be made off line dancers and the UCWDC is taking it to extremes. Therefore, the Kickit website is changing as well. We will no longer spend thousands of dollars and thousands of hours to provide free step sheets on demand to any line dancer with internet access. From now on, the Kickit archive is available only by purchasing the entire Kickit Archive CD-ROM at the Kickit Mall. Monthly updates by email are available at the Kickit Mall as well.

You can still submit dances and search for dances by title, choreographer, or music. You just can't see any step sheet unless you pay for it. If we find time, we will work on a method to return the Kickit website to full functionality for anyone paying an annual subscription fee. But that is months away from happening, if ever.

Also, we are personally going to boycott all UCWDC events, and encourage line dancers worldwide to do the same. The insulting way in which line dancers were treated at Worlds X makes it clear that the UCWDC is only interested in our money. Once we all stop going to UCWDC events, the UCWDC can go back to what they did best for several years; ripping off couples. Until then, line dancers are apparently willing to pay whatever it takes, so we will continue to charge for all the work we do at Kickit.

For you competitors who just can't bear to give up the competition, we are announcing a new contest.

You can enter in any or all of the following categories:

- Kickit Adult Male Line Dance World Champion
- Kickit Adult Female Line Dance World Champion
- Kickit Youth Male Line Dance World Champion
- Kickit Youth Female Line Dance World Champion

To enter, simply send money to Kickit at our Paypal account. The person sending the most money in the category of their choice by December 31, 2002, will win the title for this year. Ties will be broken by a coin toss. Winner to be announced sometime in 2003, with the exact physical prize to be determined at that time.

So now you can have your competition and spend your money as well. Good luck.