

Dancing Profile

Peter Maxwell and Lynn Harman

by

GRAHAM PERKINS

On the right, dancing to win the World Cup in Munster; the title also brought them an electric cooker. Below, receiving their Carl Alan Award from Princess Margaret after winning the U.K. 9-Dance event. Foot of the page, after winning the British Youth Competition at Blackpool during their first year as amateurs. Only the month before Maxwell-Harman had competed at Blackpool in the Junior Festival and had been victorious there as well.

PETER MAXWELL'S STORY BEGINS BEFORE HE was even born. His parents, with whom he still lives, have a large house in Tooting. The top floor of this house was let off as a flat which became vacant a few years before



Peter's birth. The man who took it was a professional dancer from Holland. He had partnered up with an English girl called Sylvia Sylve and had therefore decided to come and live in England. His name was Benny Tolmeyer.

After Benny became established in this country, he hired a hall and opened his own school. Peter used to go along there from the age of about four although he did not really start learning to dance until he was seven.

Lynn Harman lived in nearby Mitcham. She had always felt a natural urge to move in time to music whenever it was playing and at the age of four began to learn ballet, continuing for several years until her ballet teacher had a baby and stopped giving lessons. The girl who lived next door to Lynn used to attend Benny Tolmeyer's Saturday morning children's classes, so Lynn, who was then nine, went along too. She soon partnered up with Peter and they have been dancing together ever since.

Their progress was hampered for a while when Peter, who suffered with asthma, had to attend an open-air boarding school some distance from his home. During this period their practice sessions were confined to a couple of hours in the school hall once a fortnight when Lynn went to visit him.

Once their competition career got under

way, however, success soon followed. The second competition they entered was the 1964 International and they were placed fourth in the Juvenile section.

The period that followed was hectic, to put it mildly. Wherever there was a competition, Peter and Lynn would be there, often competing once on a Sunday afternoon and then rushing off to enter another event in the evening. Luckily, Mr. Harman had a large car with bench seats into which Lynn, Peter and both sets of parents could be crammed.

Mrs. Harman played her part by filling the role of dress-maker. Lynn is something of a perfectionist when it comes to dresses and, in particular, will never have one with a halter neck. The reason for this goes back to a competition in Birmingham where she wore halter necks in both the Modern and Latin events and the straps on both dresses broke during the course of the evening. In the Modern competition Peter was able to use body contact to save Lynn from embarrassment but there was nothing at all he could do in the Latin.

The tremendous support their parents gave them proved to be worthwhile for in April 1965 they came second in the Juvenile Latin Championship at Blackpool. Unfortunately, a quirk in the rules prevented them from competing in the ballroom section.

The Latin competition was held on a Wednesday and the ballroom event on the Friday. The day in between happened to be Lynn's twelfth birthday. This meant that not only were they ineligible for the Juvenile event, but, because Peter was not twelve until August, they could not compete as Juniors either.

With no such problems the following year, they entered as Juniors in both sections, reaching the semi-finals in ballroom and coming sixth in Latin. Then, in each of the three years that followed, they took first place in both events—a record which will be difficult to equal.

In 1969 Lynn's birthday worked to their advantage, for the Junior Championships at Blackpool were held a couple of weeks before the adult events. Lynn's birthday fell between the two, enabling them to compete in both sections. As adults they entered the Youth and Amateur events. They won both the Youth Championships but just failed to get into the semi-finals and finals respectively of the amateur ballroom and Latin events.

In the major competitions that followed they regularly made the finals, but they have had to fight to reach the very top placings. This is hardly surprising bearing in mind the opposition, particularly in ballroom, where they had to battle with Gleave, Charlton and Barr.

Outside of dancing, Peter and Lynn have developed rather differently. Lynn left school at the earliest possible moment, largely because of her teachers' unsympathetic attitudes towards her occasional need for time off in connection with dancing. She worked initially as an accounts clerk at the Gas Board, moving a few months later to her present employers, a company manufacturing chocolate, where she has a job in the computer centre.

Peter stayed at school, taking GCE 'O' and 'A' levels. He is now studying for a B.Sc. in Social Science at Southbank Polytechnic. He finances his dancing by helping out in the family businesses run by his father and brother. These include building and decorating, the design of cardboard display stands for shops, silk-screen printing, and the latest addition, a shop for dancers.

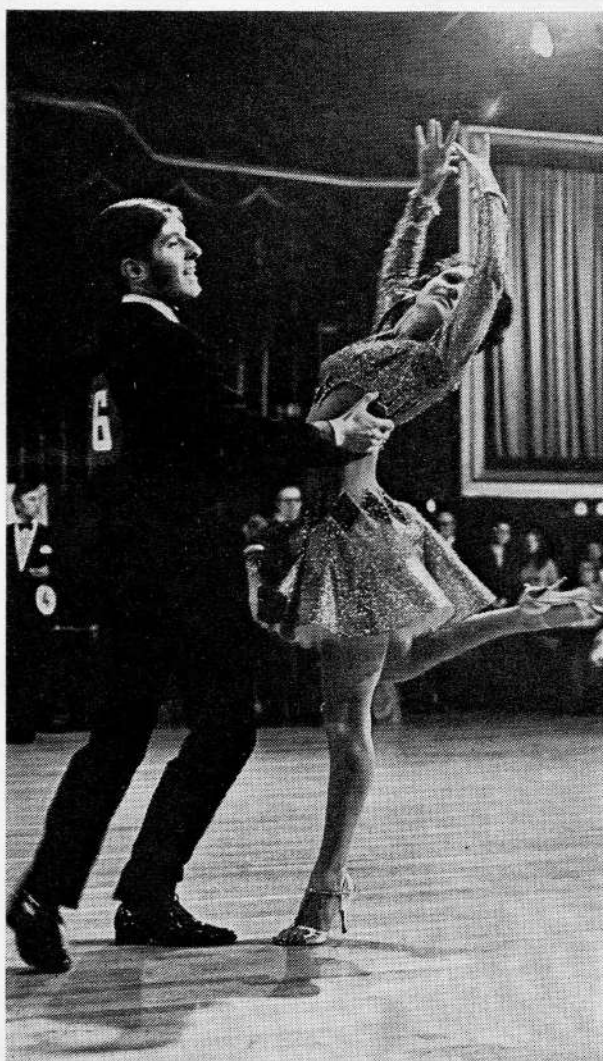
Like most top amateurs, Peter and Lynn are now seasoned travellers. The trip they enjoyed most was when they competed in the World's Championship in Australia. Since they were both advised, for medical reasons, not to have smallpox vaccinations, they had to travel by a route which avoided the need for a jab. This involved spending two weeks in a quarantine zone and the one they chose was Fiji—not exactly a hardship.

At the other extreme, they still remember a trip to Austria which had to be cut short because Lynn was unwell. Thanks to their driver arriving late, they missed their flight home and had to return via Munich and Paris, involving hours of tedious waiting and a route-march between planes at Orly. They finally arrived in London after midnight and Peter wearily hauled his case off the baggage conveyor only to see it burst open, scattering his belongings all over the floor. Then came the last straw when, having repacked his case, he was confronted with an over-enthusiastic customs officer who made Peter open the case and take everything out again.

In spite of these ups and downs, Peter and Lynn look forward to a long and successful career in dancing, their sights at the moment being set very much on Blackpool and the British Amateur Championships.



Above left, Peter and Lynn photographed with some of their trophies after winning their first British Junior Championships, Ballroom and Latin. Top right, with Josephine Bradley after winning the International Amateur Championship.



Above, a very young Lynn Harman presents a bouquet to Sylvia Silve while Benny Tolmeyer looks on. It is interesting to note that this couple took all their I.D.T.A. medal tests even when they were competing and gained their Empire Awards at the same time that they won the "British". Left, dancing in the Star-U.K. four years ago. "Did you win?" we asked. "No" was the sad reply, "we came fourth."