

Map of Tokyo



Dancing Profile:

Micky and Momo Kezuka

by

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The picture above is reproduced from a brochure brought back from Japan by Graham Perkins after he visited the country a couple of years ago. It shows the modern as distinct from the romantic, cherry blossom image of the country

BALLROOM DANCING was introduced into Japan before the Second World War but it is only in the last few years that the Japanese have emerged as serious contenders for international honours. There are several reasons for this.

To begin with, dancing was initially confined to "High Society" and was, therefore, very slow to gain in popularity.

Secondly, the Japanese have always been greatly influenced by tradition and contact dancing was frowned upon. Even now it is not considered to be the done thing for the young and eighteen is the minimum age for ballroom dancers in Japan. As a result, the Juvenile and Junior competitive scenes are conspicuous by their absence.

Finally, the Japanese have always been very insular and this hindered their progress in dancing. At first they learnt solely from the text-book which meant that their footwork was beyond criticism but that they lacked any body movement.

All this changed in 1955 when Len Scrivener and Nellie Duggan were invited to visit Japan by the country's major dancing organization, the N.A.T.D. The man who persuaded the Committee to arrange that visit was Micky Kezuka's father, then the reigning Japanese champion.

In one sense, it was the worst thing Mr. Kezuka could have done for Len Scrivener, the sole judge for that year's championships, marked him down from first to eighth place.

Even more amazing than this marking, however, was Len and Nellie's demonstration. Because of their emphasis on footwork, the Japanese danced in a rather stiff fashion and were actually marked down if the lady's skirt rose above her knee. Imagine their surprise at the dynamic dancing they saw from the British couple, with Nellie's dress bobbing up and down as they sped across the floor!

After that a top English couple was invited over every year to judge, demonstrate, lecture and coach. Thus Japan began to adjust to the British style of dancing. This adjustment came too late for Mr. Kezuka senior but it has certainly helped his twin sons, Michio and Tetsue.

Michio, better known in England as Micky, did not initially intend to make dancing his career. He wanted a job which would give him opportunities for overseas travel and dancing did not, at that time, seem likely to provide this. Nevertheless, parental pressures prevailed and he started training to become a dancing teacher as soon as his schooling was completed.

Teaching occupied his next five years. This did not exactly please Micky since his brother was by that time a successful competitor. In Japan both Amateurs and Professionals are classified into five grades—Novice, D, C, B and A. Tetsue was already a grade A Professional.

Then along came Motoko—Momo for short. She began taking lessons with Micky who at first believed her to be too short to become his partner. Once they did begin to compete, he soon realised how wrong he had been. They came third in their first competition, back in 1964, and, by the following year had shot up into the A class in Latin.

Modern presented greater problems. They stayed in the D class for some time because, although they did a good Waltz and Tango, they could not get their Foxtrot and Quickstep up to the required standard.

Another problem was Momo's parents. Her father, the president of an electrical company, and her mother did not approve either of their daughter becoming a competition dancer or of her getting romantically involved with Micky.

After a visit to the Japanese Championships they changed their minds on the first point but remained firm on the second. Dancing was acceptable,

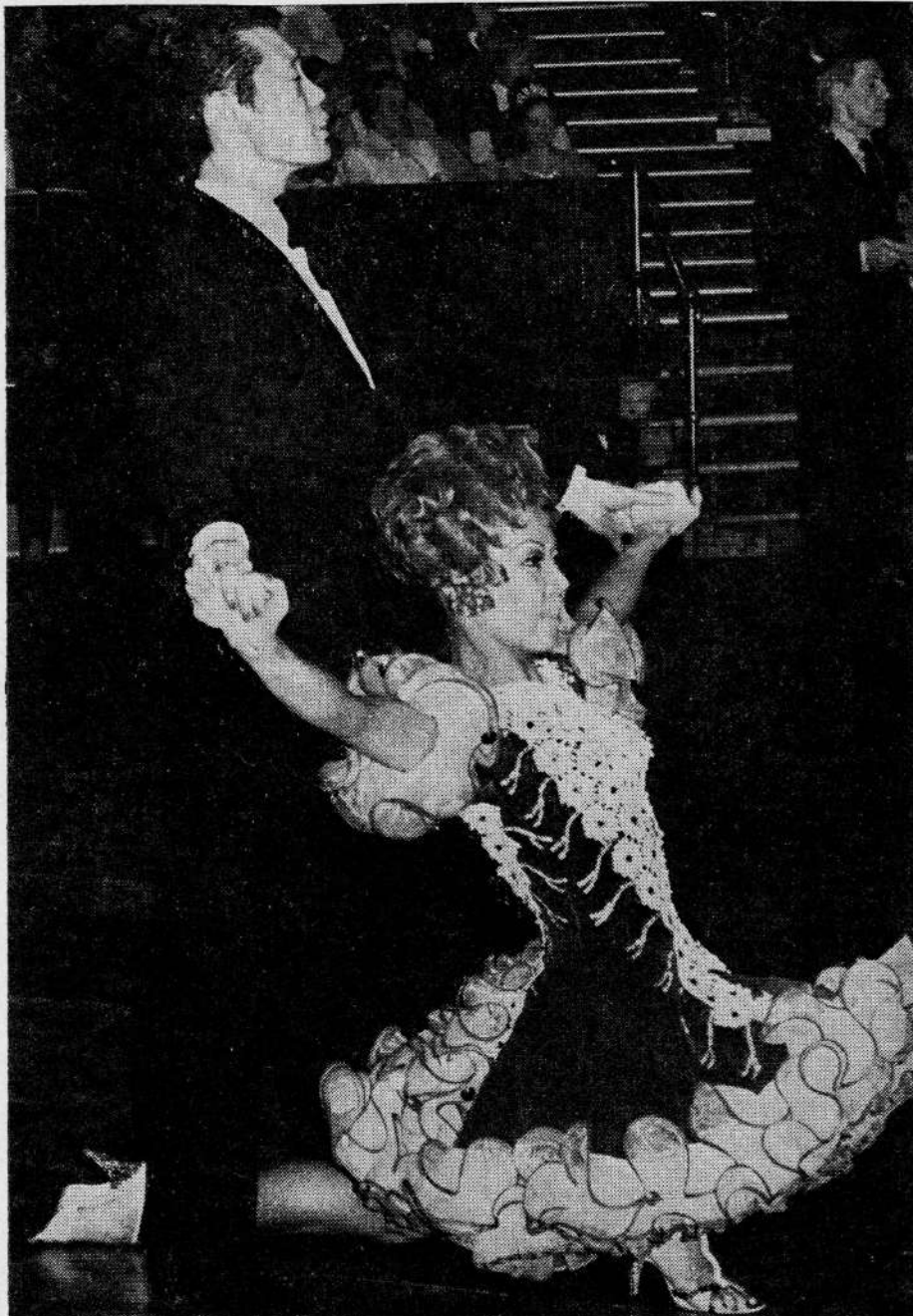
marriage to Micky was not. However, as Micky and Momo's success increased, parental opposition progressively diminished and the wedding took place in 1967.

They were both born and brought up in Tokyo and they continue to live there now. The frequent travelling involved in the Kezukas' competitive career makes it impossible for them to run their own school so they work for Micky's father, teaching at his studio in Tokyo.

Dancing schools in Japan differ from English schools in one fundamental way: there are no group lessons. Any-

one who wants to learn to dance must have private tuition. This means that Japanese schools employ many more teachers than their English counterparts—at least ten teachers per school. It is also harder to qualify as a teacher since students must pass both the examinations of the Imperial Society and the Japanese exams.

Competitions are very popular in Japan. A hundred or more couples will often enter—both at Amateur and Professional level. Dancing is a popular spectator sport too with the National Championships attracting an audience of 16,000 people.



*The Kezukas
in action
during the
Latin contest
at the
International
Championships
in London.
In the
background,
Len Scrivener.*



The Kezuka style in modern ballroom; in the background David Douglass and Janice Barb. Both photographs by Ron Self

Japanese audiences, again following tradition, are very restrained. At a dem, for example, there will only be mild applause after each dance, the real appreciation being reserved for the end of the complete demonstration.

For the competitive dancer in Japan, coaching is the main problem. The

N.A.T.D. reserves the sole right to invite British couples to visit Japan—individuals are not allowed to issue such invitations. The result is that, in order to get enough lessons, Japanese competitors have to come to England for tuition and this is an expensive business. Not only do they

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