

An exclusive interview with Michael Malitowski and Joanna Leunis was published in the February 2014 issue of Dance Fan, a Japanese magazine. This was a joint interview between DSI-London and Dance Fan. The actual interview was made at DSI-London using the questions I prepared and they prepared its transcription for me.

As the original English data is still kept in my PC, I thought this should be shared with all the dancers in the world instead of keeping it in my PC forever and wasting it. So, I made this English article. I hope you will enjoy this interview with the Great Latin-American Champions.

(2021.12.26 Makoto Kammoto)



(1) THE RIVALS:

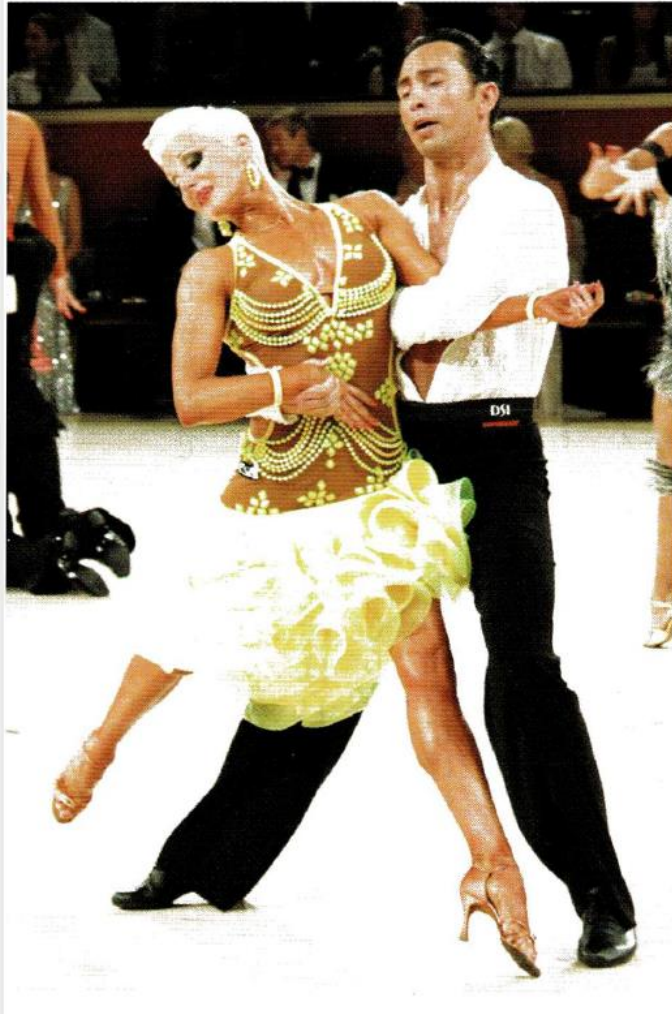
The winners of the 2012 International Championships went to Ricard & Yulia, but you (Michael and Joanna) perfectly took the crowns back this year. Would you tell, in the first place, how you felt when you lost last year and how you are feeling now? Would you tell what are Ricard & Yulia to you two, or who else you consider your best rivals, and the reasons why? Do you have any interesting stories with them (including when and where information).

Joanna:

Losing 2012 Internationals was of course harsh. Because you don't really like that aspect - of losing the competition. But also we felt that we actually took great learning from that experience. It helped us to even get additional motivation before UK Championships. We are competitors so we always really want to get it back, but the most importantly - we want to always stay focused on the dancing, and through the whole year we've been feeling that we're making improvements and clear decisions on improving at each competition, for its own sake. And then when it got to Internationals, which was a different challenge because we came as challengers and not the winners, it was wonderful to manage to deal with the stress and take control of this situation and get the title back was the bonus, the icing on the cake.

Michael:

In terms of results - I don't focus on them so much at the minute. What I enjoyed this year was coming back as a challenger at the International Championship, with a new energy. It was quite nice and I do like the proper comeback. Not only in terms of results but also to be able to come and show everybody that nothing really happened. That it's still all about the dancing. That it's still about our passion for dancing. It doesn't matter if we are first or second - we actually all the time believe in what we are doing, in the message about the artistry and about the new style that we've been promoting already for so many years. So that is not changing with all the results, and nobody holds the power over our attitude. We have our own attitude towards that. Doesn't matter if we're first or second. This message we wanna bring every time we step on the floor: that it is at the end not really about the result. Actually you can watch a special edition of all 5 dances from the International Championships with cameras following our every move, on DSI TV website. So you can judge for yourself and hopefully you can observe and notice what we're talking about. It's interesting to be able to watch it from the time perspective. So these videos are definitely worth checking!



(Left) 2013 International Championships that they achieved a wonderful revenge.

(Above) Michael & Joanna interviewed after the match. Watching interviews as well as competition scenes is one of the pleasures of watching DSI-TV.

Photographed by Lara Butcher

(2) HOW YOUR STYLE IS ESTABLISHED:

We see your dancing style is very unique and different from other couples, and we are interested to know what kind of practice you are taking in your lessons. If any dances from other genre are included, such as ballet, contemporary, jazz, tap, please explain why you decided to take them in, together with their merits in your dancing. Maybe, you also read books or go to the theatre, etc. for your dancing. Name one or two that gave big influence to your mind and dancing, if any.

Michael:

All all these years we have taken a lot of inspirations from different teachers and different dance styles, like jazz of course, the contemporary, contact improvisation to create nice choreography, to study deeper the Latin American dance, the roots of it. So this is very broad. But we have one coach really: Prof. Dr. Ruud Vermeij. So we are truthful to one line really. And he monitors us every month. Whatever we do we

share with him. So we have actually one person with us who makes the decision about the final look. We're not sidetracked also into too many things. We all the time believe what we really are all about. Our strengths. So with Ruud we work on particular choreographies that fit us the best. And actually that combination, that team work that is our biggest strength. And what exactly it is we cannot say because it's a secret.....:)

Joanna:

In terms of Latin - our special thing.. We went to Cuba 2 years ago. We're going again there in February. So we really find there nice inspirations at the roots. New feelings, atmosphere that we can introduce to our competitive style. So Cuba is a big thing. And we constantly go to jazz classes, ballet classes, contemporary classes to find inspiration there. Also we read various books, one of them is the book of Ruud Vermeij I was just re-reading it recently. It's a quite special book for me. Also Maximiliaan Winkelhuis' book and lots of others dance books that are in our scene. It's always nice to come back to even old ones. Another great book is the book of MASSIMO GORGIANNI - "Dancing beyond the physicality". So we are lucky to have a few nice inspiring books.

Michael:

I'm also very interested in contemporary arts. Anything really: from the books to the music and the movies. Everything that is new on the market inspires me. And I try to be updated with everything that happens now and put it into dancing so that our dancing is not something from the archives, old-fashioned, but it's seen as current. What I'd like to create is something that "regular" people, hip-hop dancers or actors can learn something from it as well and not to see it as something completely disconnected from the current reality. So I like to feel this connection very strongly. To be open to theatre production, to the music, to the musicals. From left to right. Everything. I'm taking it.

Joanna:

Even in terms of fashion. Because our scene can be a bit closed. Not very free, and open for the fashion thing. So even in that sense we try to look around and see what current designers are doing. Not to copy, but to try and find some ideas.

-How do you spend your spare time?

M&J:

We don't have spare time.



-What point are you careful about in your lessons / practice?

Joanna:

We make sure that we find the right balance. The right combination. Between the technique, skillful thing and artistic components to the dancing. And we always have clear ideas on what we want to work on with different teachers. So we don't go to the lesson without any concept, any idea on what are we going to work for. And different teachers offer different skills and aspects.

Michael:

And also to structure a practice is very important. Some people don't know how to practice and when we teach them they ask us how to practice. And it is for us essential thing to focus on something. On which exactly aspect are we working today. Is it just important to go through it. Go through choreography. Because it is important for our body, which is our medium, it needs to repeat all the moves. Like in ballet school. They need to go through all the technique stuff. Sometimes when we focus on choreography we need to focus on that. If you target particular muscles, for example legs, then you need to focus on that, and go through that. So there's

specific thing about the practice that we constantly involve brain and thinking process into to the practice. So then when we're performing we don't have to think about it, but then we actually can express it.

(3) COACHERS:

Would you tell about your main coaches today and what in details of the coaches attract you? How good they are and why they are good for you. How do you respect them? Any interesting episodes with them (including when and where information)? What kind of changes did they make to your dancing?

Michael:

We have to be the best teachers for ourselves. Because in the end we take the responsibility for our own dancing. So we don't give too much responsibility to our teachers. We're grateful for all information we receive and we are really good students we could say. We are loyal and we listen to our teachers and our coach. But the final decision on how we dance is ours. Many dancers give too much responsibility to teachers. We are great believers that we have to make the most of lessons and do our work. We are the best teachers for ourselves really.

(4) WHAT IS LATIN DANCING FOR YOU ?

Could you tell about the pleasure of the dance, difficulty of the dance and how deep you feel about the dancing? What is the essence of the Latin dancing to you and about the goal you are aiming at?

Michael & Joanna:

The main thing is the partnering bit. That's what fascinate us the most. What quality we can show being two individuals, to share that passion and to show other qualities. And another thing is that it involves many techniques. Legs are very close to ballet work - it has to be precise, and the legs have to be straight. And the rest of the body is more jazzy. So to combine these two techniques is very difficult. And also the variation of 5 dances, of different moods. It also suits my personality. Not to do just one style. In ballroom dancing the Latin style has variety because of samba, rumba, cha cha, paso doble and jive. It never gets boring.

Actually it was interesting experience when we were recently asked by DSI TV to reflect on each of the dances after the 2013 International. This is something that we

always do after major performances. So it should be really interesting because for the first time we gave such an open access “behind the scenes”. We were talking about our preparations and our feelings and approach to each dance during the competition. Because they are all different to the extent that you have to also mentally readjust before entering the dance floor. We can’t actually wait to watch it ourselves. Hope we didn’t reveal too much of our craft (hahah)!

(5) WHAT IS MISSING FROM JAPANESE DANCERS

Any advice or comment to Japanese dancers, please.

Michael:

The practice is the thing. There’s no impossible stuff. We are working with a lot of Japanese dancers but what we miss from them is the practice, the regularity.

Joanna:

But it’s actually impossible for them. Because they have to work. They have to earn a living. Most of them are employed by the dance studios so they have to teach and they don’t have possibility to practice on daytime. So the only time they have opportunity to practice is after they finish work and they are too tired then. The system is not supportive enough maybe!?

Michael:

Now there’s a new generation of Japanese dancers. There are two champions in Blackpool from Japan, under 14. We’re teaching them and they are mega talented and they are trained as professional dancers already at the young age. So there is a difference in education. In general Japanese dancers are talented but all it comes to is dedication and work. If somebody puts it together they’ll get the results.

(6) JOKES

We find Michael-san a fun person and we remember you are always making a joke during the winner’s interview. Are you always like that, even during your practice? When do you start to think about a new joke for the winner’s interview, a month before, a week before, or immediately after the competition?

Joanna:

During the practice he's not joking at all. He's rather fanatic and serious. But I think his jokes are just in his genes. He's a street boy. It comes naturally. He wakes up with a joke and go to bed with one which is nice...



(7) ADVICE TO HOBBY DANCERS

How to practice, how to enjoy dancing.

Joanna:

Make some clear plans in terms of where you are in your career. What do you want to say. What do you want to improve with your dancing. Whether it is changing choreography, or improving the technique or whatever is necessary. Make some plans. Don't just go along and do your routines.

Michael:

For me it's joy to just practice. Even enjoy feeling tired. Dancing can also bring mind to rest. People are drawn to it and find it satisfying and joyful. They can actually forget the conscious of things when they move their bodies.

It's not the fun like "hahaha" because I enjoy dancing paso doble very much for example, and I'm happy when I'm doing it although it's not a funny dance. It's a very aggressive dance. And it doesn't visualise happiness. But inside it makes me happy.

Joanna:

But there is no trick to finding happiness.....no one can make someone else happy only that person himself/herself.

What are you working on at the moment and what are your plans for the nearest future?

Michael:

Right now it's time to focus on the next competition. That's how it works in our dancing scene. The three major competition are spread in the calendar really nicely, so now it's time for us to focus already on the UK Championships. Our actual focus is to bring something new for the audience to see what have we've worked on. maybe some new choreographies, new aspects, new avenues in terms of our development. So we're busy searching outside of the box. Improving different stuff that we saw on the Internationals that could be better. So it's a really exciting time to work toward that competition, in terms of challenge how can I improve and what could I bring more to the people and not to think "I have to win this competition and the result is the most important thing". But again, through the artistic approach to it it's about how can we improve, how can we challenge ourselves, and actually how can we bring M&J thing to the next level.

So I really look forward to it and I'm extremely happy that DSI TV decided to do it live again and to close the Big Three competitions with live coverage. So that people around the world can actually watch these beautiful competitions. So it's great that dance fans in Japan will be able to watch the UK's live! We know very well how interested they are in not only results but the whole experience. This is a great opportunity for someone who really loves Latin dance. So yeah, definitely watch and feel excitement live, wherever you are!

Joanna:

Probably the most important and most difficult thing is the planning, the preparation. To make sure that we have enough time to really focus on that. We always make sure that we have at least 2,5 months to have a vision of the next comp. That's quite important and that allows us to really get deeper into it. Deeper into visual side of it. Deeper into details that we could see that maybe could be improved from the last competition. And also to go outside the box and get some new ideas, new perspective.

And I'm also excited that DSI TV is streaming the whole event on their website and make this experience available to the dance fans around the world. For people who will stay at home, who are not able to travel to attend the competition, like my dad, it will be so nice that he will be able to watch it and enjoy our dancing without being there.



(end of interview)

*Interviewed by Marcin Stobrawa

*Photographer Jacek Zielinski / The Polaks

*Corporation DSI-London

*Original interview questions and Japanese Translation by Makoto & Hisako Kammoto. To read Japanese article, access to (<https://watashinodancenote.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/2014DF02-MichaelJoanna-w-cover.pdf>)

レクサス エクササイズ
83分

〈付録DVD〉ボリューム増! 白石組「ガッツリワルツ」&家泉組「ダンスファン体操」

2
February 2014
980円
(本体930円)

豪華ドレスなどが
当たる
お年玉
プレゼント

特集
ワルツ
&
タンゴ
レッスン

ガッツリワルツ「4段階のコンセプト」白石組
ダンスファン体操第2〈タンゴ編〉家泉組
あなたの悩みに答える「ダンスQ&A」菅井組

〈インタビュー〉
マイケル・マリトスキー&
ジョアンナ・ルーニス
ブレない王者の理由
北條明・須田雅美
次世代のあなたたちへ

〈ファッション&ヘアアレンジ〉
最新・競技ヘア
〈ラテン編〉

表紙: 白石智樹・香織

<http://www.byakuya-shobu.co.jp/dance-fan/> 毎月27日発売