

**IDTA**

**DANCE  
INTERNATIONAL  
MAGAZINE**

Issue 2 - June 2020



# New Patrons

**Jukka Haapalainen  
and Sirpa Suutari-Jääskö**

## **The IDTA is thrilled that Jukka Haapalainen and Sirpa Suutari have become Patrons of the Association.**

Jukka Haapalainen is a Finnish professional ballroom dancer who started dancing at the age of 5 in his hometown Lapua. In 1989 he teamed up with Sirpa Suutari-Jääskö and turned Professional specialising in Latin American dancing. They retired from competitive dance in 2002 and have become Latin cabaret dance artists. They have won a large number of 1st and 2nd places in various international championships and awards.

Sirpa Suutari-Jääskö started dancing ballet at the age of 5 in her native town of Oulu in Finland. At 10, she switched to Dancesport. In 1989, Sirpa teamed up with Jukka Haapalainen.

Jukka and Sirpa achieved many titles. Their accomplishments include becoming four times Professional Latin British Open to the World Champions, twice European Latin Champions, UK Open Professional Open to the World Champions, and International Professional Open to the World Champions.

For their performances in Professional Latin dancesport competitions, the couple have earned a number of (non-championship) awards, including the world Dance and Dancesport Council's Isadora Duncan Award (2002), Carl Alan Award twice, Classique de Dance Award, twice prince Mikasa of Japan Award, Universal Hall of Fame.

Sirpa and Jukka have been guest performers as well as adjudicators on Finland's "Dancing With the Stars" The couple has also performed various times in "The World Super Stars Dance Festival". They have gone on tour throughout Europe, the Americas, Japan, China, the Philippines, and Australia. Since retiring they have continued to perform throughout the world on our own tours throughout Europe, The Americas, Japan, China, The Philippines, Australia, among others.

They have also performed and choreographed extensively for stage and founded their own DOUBLE Dance Company.



### *Stage credits include:*

- Tango of the Black Rose Musical, Seinajoki City Theatre 1999
- New Merry Theatre (UIT) Musical Revue, Peacock Theatre Helsinki 2003
- Blood Wedding (Lorca), Turku City Theatre 2004
- Disposable Object Cabaret, Alexander Theatre Helsinki 2006
- Latin Quarter, Savoy Theatre Helsinki 2006
- The Lost Moon, choreography Jorma Uotinen, Kuopio International Dance Festival 2008
- 3Some Contemporary collaboration, Alexander Theatre Helsinki 2009
- Wolf Bride (Kallas) TTT Theatre Tampere 2011
- Double, Dance performance in the acts. Kuopio Dance Festival 2013, Aleksander Theatre Helsinki 2013, 2014. They have also made several live performances on television, including the Opening number of Eurovision Song Contest 2007 in Helsinki, several charity live tv performances for Unicef and Cancer research.
- Sirpa along with Jukka are the owners of their own Haapalainen Suutari-Jääskö Dance Studios. They also travel much between England, Finland, and Japan.

### *How important is training for dancers?*

Dance certainly is for everybody and the beautiful thing is that you can dance the way you like and dancing has been always a big part of any culture worldwide.

But to learn a specific form of dancing, especially aiming to be performed, needs proper fundamental training. Those wishing to pursue a career as performers and teachers,

need to understand the form and basic techniques in order to portray or relay the knowledge to audiences and students. Talent can take you somewhere but training makes you a master.

### **What aspects of training?**

A teacher must have all the knowledge available in their active vocabulary in order to be able to give the right kind of guidance according to the level of each student.

Correct understanding of syllabus and the skill of taking it further when the students progress. The aspects are different in different levels of training, but the solid understanding of syllabus will always have importance.

### **Please tell us about your dance school.**

Our dance studios in Finland have been open for 4.5 years and cater for all ages and levels. During our career as performers we never had the time to take on a studio but as we were offered this amazing space in a cultural hub of Kaapelitehdas in downtown Helsinki, we took the opportunity. The building is commissioned by the state and City of Helsinki as the official House of Dance, so it is great to be in the heart of things. A new theatre dedicated only for dancing is being built at the moment and will open in 2022.

We will be part of the team producing repertoire for the stage there and that is a very exciting prospect. In our studio we have activities for beginner level for all age groups, both Ballroom and Latin as well as group solo classes. We have several hobby groups who compete in Latino Show group categories and quite a large number of students entering Pro-Am competitions with their teachers.

We recently opened a new space that also houses treatment rooms for our masseur, osteopath and physiotherapist and a spacious reception with a dress making studio to add to our three ballrooms of various sizes.

We see some of our international top couples in the Helsinki Studios for private lessons and training gatherings, so the normal day there is a happy mix of beginners and top couples. While in London we teach at The Dance Art in Paddington, near our home.

### **How important is training to be a teacher rather than performer?**

Being a performer or a teacher are completely different avenues however, for both walks the same basic skills are needed. Not every, even great, performer is suited to become a teacher, but having been a performer will help some people become a great teacher especially when it comes to training someone in a top performance level.

### **What tips do you have for teachers who are building up their dance school?**

Get your training and qualifications. Dance as much as you can, and show always really well, to the best of your ability. Students copy everything, also the bad example. Base the teaching in knowledge rather than your opinion. Teaching is always about the student and the subject, never about you. As a teacher remain agreeable, in good humour and do not get angry. Make sure the front of the house has a welcoming personality, students want to feel safe and comfortable. Create an ambiance of warmth, belonging and acceptance.

### **What are your next professional commitments?**

Once the virus lockdown finishes, we will have several teaching trips planned to replace the ones we lost during this time, if we are free to travel in the autumn, we will have to fit many bookings in a short space of time.

Our next stage project is the choreography for Evita musical for the theatre in Finland, in fact the first theatre where we worked back in 1999. September sees the beginning of the 13th season of Dancing with the Stars on Finnish TV, where Jukka has been a judge since the beginning.

We are in the process of planning our next personal DOUBLE Dance Company evening for stage, with an idea of celebrating our career together of 30 years.

And certainly the studios will continue to be one of our main focuses.

### **What does being a patron of the IDTA mean to you?**

To be invited to become Patrons of the IDTA is a huge honour and privilege, seeing that we are not that many and what a great group of people it is. We have been very surprised by this nomination and intend to carry the responsibility that it comes with always with sense of gratitude and pride.

### **Thank you very much!**

