

# Berlin's

# Dancing Duo

By Brandon Stiles

**T**hey teach, they party, they compete in both line dance and couples. Gert Wollschläger and Susanne (Susi) Schalewa are making their mark on the dance scene in Germany. They started line dance in 1995 when they attended a dance class at the Western Saloon in Berlin. Their very first dance was the "TushPush". After few weeks they went to different classes in Berlin but it seemed that they were at the end of learning line dance. "Because we have learned all 10 or 12 line dances people were dancing in Berlin We tried to meet other instructors in Germany and during our vacation in the US." Explains Gert. "At this time we collected lots of American videos and books about Line Dance and attended every class we could get."

After they returned from the US they taught these new taught dances to their instructor at the night club who taught these dances a week later in his class. "Then our instructor started with TwoStep" says Susi "...a full catastrophe! How can we turn as a couple? Problem, problems and more problems and irritations..."

At the Saloon they had live music every weekend, which kept the people dancing all night long. On one of these nights Gert and Susi were approached by about 20 people and asked why they don't teach a class. A little talk to the manager and on February 13th 1996 they started their very own dance class. "It was amazing because we had around 150 people in this class!" says Gert. "We had to split the class and started with two Beginner Line Dance classes" Susi remembers.

Teaching was no problem because both are teachers in an elementary school. Gert had played in a band, and had a little (very little) experience in ballroom. He is also a trainer and coach of the schools basketball team (they call him a teacher for sport in school) and was dancing square dance in his own school. The caller and teacher happened to be Susi's arithmetic teacher!. Susi had a dance background having started ballet at the age of five, later she did jazz dance but an accident in a Judo class put her dance career on hold for

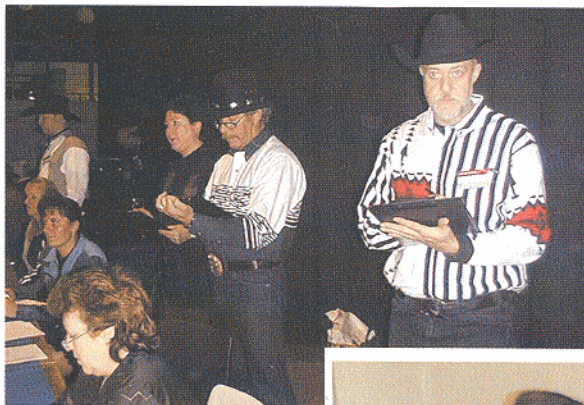
a while. That didn't stop her from pursuing line and couples dance when the time came around. Susi even has a line dance class for kids at the school where she teaches. These cute little boys and girls do easy dances that Susi has learned or even makes up. You might see the "chicken dance" or other hands in the air and wiggle dances that the kids have fun with.

So they decided to pursue teaching their class and started wanting to create a "name" for the class. "The dictionary was our best friend at this time." Says Susi. "Because on Berlins dance floors two people were dancing TushPush, three danced Slapping Leather and five were dancing Electric Slide (YES! at the same time on the same dance floor!!!)" And these are really small dance floors.

Gert remembers how they came up with their dance club name. "We came to the name In Cahoots. A big surprise was when we discovered the first time in San Diego, CA a Dance hall with the same name. Other were following (Oklahoma, Tulsa...)that was a great and funny experience." They have carried the name In Cahoots ever since and this club is one of the strongest in Germany.

Later they met the GCWDA (German Country Western Dance Association) and joined them. The problem for them was and is that the

activities of the GCWDA are in the southern parts of Germany and very little in the North where they live. So they started hosting their own workshops and started bringing top US instructors to Northern Germany. They brought in the likes of Dorsey Napier, Barry Durand, Sam & Denise Miller, Robert Royston & Laureen Baldovi, A.T. Kinson, Pedro Machado, Brian Barakauskas, Judy McDonald just to name a few. "Some of them like Barry were



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in Berlin several times." Explains Susi. "So we took private lessons in Line and Couples too." Gert joined NTA and started together with Susi Judges Training for the UCWDC.

They even started a dance team and their first event was European Dance Championships in 1997 where they scouted out the other teams to try to capture the flavor of team dancing. They came back and founded In Cahoots dance team with 12 members. Their First competition was the German Championships in 97 and they placed 2nd in Teams Long Performance. Since then In Cahoots has racked up wins in the 1998 Europeans, 98 German Championships, 2000 Europeans and Germans, the Benelux championships, and are proud of this years wins in Short Program Line at the 2001 German Championships and Long Program Line at the 2001 Dutch Championships. In Cahoots is hoping for a world championship title at the upcoming UCWDC world championships in The Netherlands in January.

Susi and Gert are coaching the team and both love to choreograph the team routines in Line and Solo. Their main focus is line dance. "To work with the team in couples, we started to compete in couples "Just 4 Fun", says Susi, "but we have not the real time to practice as much as we do in line and with the team. " Right now Gert and Susi have 4 dance classes a week and a lot of workshops at the weekends in Germany. They also keep busy judging as they have judged at many of the different championships in Europe. They have a passion for couples dance too and have worked their way up to recent wins in their division. This year they took a First in both West Coast Swing and Two Step in the Crystal Novice division at the Northeast Dance Festival in Connecticut and first in Two-Step at the Dutch Championships. "But ..... since we have been at Swing Fling this year (a huge swing event in Washington DC) all we wanna do is SWING, SWING, SWING!!!! We hope, we will have more time for couples after worlds." Says Gert.

They have also been coaching other dancer for 3 years in line. They were very successful (German Champions, European Champions ...) "For 6 months we have a really talented student: Enrico Adler. He is dancing since 1 year and competed this year at Benelux, Germans, Europeans & Dutch in Newcomer Male Crystal."

Explains Susi. "He won every dance in every competition. Now he is going for worlds! Be careful, he is coming!"

There is not a lot time for other hobbies but before they started CW Dance Gert was playing the guitar and loves sport (Basketball). Susi was studying art and her big hobby was painting. They also like to collect and restore cars. "For many years we had an Old-timer" says Gert " a 1956 Chrysler New Yorker with a HEMI - engine but we sold him 'cause we had no time." Gert's non-dancing daughters are his "hobby" too. And they love our non dancing cat LUCKY. "His friend was named STRIKE...LUCKY STRIKE...you know..." says Susi.

One hobby that they really enjoy is to go in the summer every year for 6 weeks vacationing in the states to meet friends and...to dance. This year they went to the Northeast Dance Festival and Swing Fling but also they spent one week with the Miller family (world champions Sam & Denise, plus son Chris and the "non dancing dog" George) at the Outer Banks, NC.

They are looking forwards to Worlds this year. Susi explains, "Because of our job we can't go to World's often, except 1999 in San Antonio, TX and of course in 2002 in the Netherlands." Gert and Susi have had a huge impact on dancing in Germany and all of Europe with Susi

winning the European Country Spirit Award in 1998 and both are the first in Northern Germany to translate step descriptions of the popular line dances into German as well as just writing line dance steps for their classes. They even wrote a book about Line Dance that has been published and distributed in Germany and the US.

Gert and Susi are excited about worlds coming to Europe so they can see all their friends and "say thanks for all the help (and fun) they have had over the years.

**See you at worlds! ~ To contact Gert and Susi they can be reached by email at [info@incahoots.de](mailto:info@incahoots.de)**

