

Brian & Christine (Kristi) McDonald

They fell in love with the land of the free and the home of the brave, bridging the old and the new world. Brian McDonald was born in the heart of Scotland in Dundee, and practically grew up in his parents' dance school. He started ballroom dancing at age four and never left that environment. He started to compete at age 11 as a juvenile/junior, a category that was huge at the time in Great

Britain. He was also an ice skater and enjoyed soccer.

Dancing became more important than all the other activities by the time he was 15; and until he finished high school, he danced as an amateur for Scotland with his first partner Sheila Downton.

Christine, or Kristi as she is known by most, grew up in Glasgow and was introduced to ballroom dancing by her parents. They sent her to dance school where her first teacher was Jim Graham. She enjoyed it so much she decided to try competing. Her first partner in the amateur field was Jim Oliver, and by 1965 they came 7th in the *British Amateur Latin Championship*. Kristi was 18 at the time. They stopped dancing in 1966, and Kristi found herself looking for a new partner.

In 1968 she met Brian at the *British Open* in Blackpool, and they decided to tryout. It felt promising, so Brian left Sheila to dance with Kristi, sensing that she would be the one for him, and not only for dancing! Within six weeks they were in the top six in the *Scottish Amateur Championship* and became Scottish champions in 1969, 1970 and '71. During all of this, both their parents had supported them and their dancing

aspirations, but now it was time to make this their profession. They turned pro in 1971.

Brian's first and only teacher until he turned professional was Mary Buchannon, who had also taught his parents. She was a former Scottish champion and examiner for the *Scottish Dance Teachers Alliance*. When Brian and Kristi made the final in the *British Open Professional Championship* in 1976 they felt it was time to get more teachers and more exposure. They started to commute to London, a seven-hour drive, to work with Benny Tolmeijer and Bill and Bobbie Irvine as their core coaches. They also had some lessons with Anthony Hurley and Peter Eggleton.

As Scottish representatives, they made the final of the *European Standard Championship* three times, and in 1977 when Richard and Janet Gleave took a one-year hiatus, Brian and Kristi came second. Richard and Janet had won the European six times (*See also Richard Gleave*).

The 1977 finalists in the order of placement were:

- Michael and Vicky Barr, Great Britain
- Brian and Kristi, Scotland
- Wolfgang and Monika Tönnies, Germany
- Frank and Bruni Gierok, Germany
- Richard Wienecke and Ulla Jensen, Denmark
- Espen and Kirsten Salberg, Norway

That same year Brian and Kristi went to the U.S. and "fell in love."

"At that *European Championship* in Germany, Byron Charleton, fellow competitor, and second in the *British Championship* with his wife Dorothy asked what we were doing the next couple of weeks," Brian remembered. "He wanted us to fill in for him in a show at the *Telemark Ball* in Washington, D.C. So we gave our pre-arranged lecture for the *Scottish Dance Teachers Alliance*, and then flew to Washington. We loved the whole experience and on our flight back, we decided to come back on a tour. We had been invited by John Morton, a Los Angeles promoter to do some shows."

Before they went back to the U.S. though, Brian and Kristi joined the ranks of their peers as finalists in the World Professional Championship in Tokyo in 1977, and in 1978 in London.

Vita

Brian

Birthdate

April 14, 1946

Birthplace

Dundee, Scotland

Father

Charles McDonald, dance teacher

Mother

Joanne Stevenson, dance teacher

Christine (Kristi)

Birthdate

July 18, 1947

Birthplace

Glasgow, Scotland

Father

James Murphy, carpet weaver

Mother

Margaret Fairfull, store manager

1969-71

Scottish Amateur champions

1976

finalists of the *British Open Professional Standard Championship*

1977

second in the *European Standard Championship*

1977-78

sixth in the *World Professional Standard Championship*

1979-82

U.S. National Professional Standard champions

1993-96

first dance sport chairman of the *World Dance & Dance Sport Council (WD&DSC)*

1996-2003

vice president of the *WD&DSC*

1996 – to present

President of the *National Dance Council of America (NDCA)*





In 1978 the finalists in order of placement were:
 Richard and Janet Gleave, Great Britain
 Michael and Vicky Barr, Great Britain
 Tetzuo Kezuka and Chieko Yamamoto, Japan
 Greg Smith and Marion Alleyne, Australia
 Chu and Susie Tanaka, Japan
 Brian and Kristi, Scotland

In 1978 they went back to the U.S. on a tour of shows they had organized. This took them from coast to coast, and they knew for sure that **this** was where they wanted to live.

"One of our students in Great Britain came from Oklahoma City and suggested we come there and open a dance school. So we did, and it was a nightclub/dance school, much like today's Salsa clubs, that we called Kristi's. We would teach in the morning and have the club going at night. Occasionally we got people like Vernon Brock in to coach. We hired bands like "Buddy" Rich¹ and Woody Herman², and also had our own band." Running a club and teaching was very stressful for Brian and Kristi. They were up until 3:00 a.m. at the club, got up early the following day to clean and set up again, and then teach. It isn't surprising that they decided to give the club up.

"We took our two boys, Gary and Jason, and drove to California and that's where we stayed," Brian says. "We started teaching there, and in 1979 I became a delegate to the *National Council of Dance Teachers Organization (NCDTO)*, today's *National Dance Council of America (NDCA)*." Brian never missed a meeting despite the fact that he and Kristi were still competing. From 1979 to 1982 Brian and Kristi were U.S. National Professional Standard champions.

"Eighty per cent of the delegates were from different performing arts societies and I didn't know any of them. I knew a lot of people in ballroom dancing from around the world, but the only familiar face was John Kimmins.

"The ballroom Standard and Latin faculties were small back then, but this has changed. The *NDCA* has three large faculties in the council now, the performing arts, the ballroom societies, and the teachers/coaches and organizers."

Brian became U.S. delegate to the *World Dance & Dance Sport Council (WD&DSC)*, today's *World Dance Council, WDC* and their first dance sport chairman. Before it became the *WD & DSC*, this council was the *International Council of Ballroom Dancing, (ICBD)*. (See also *P.J. Richardson and Alex Moore*) By 1993 the name was changed to reflect the importance placed on the sportive aspect of ballroom, and the council was divided into the social and the sportive departments. The last presidents of the *ICBD* after Alex Moore were Bill Irvine and Leonard Morgan. The first president of the newly structured *WD&DSC* was Robin Short, followed by Karl Breuer. (See also *their articles*)

Brian was dance sport chairman for three years and then decided to resign. He had also taken on the responsibilities

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of president of the *NDCA* and felt that this was just too much. He decided to concentrate on his work in the U.S. Bill Irvine, who was vice-president of the *WDC*, wanted to resign and recommended Brian. He accepted Bill's proposal, was elected, and served from 1999 until 2003.

Brian now decided again to concentrate his efforts in the U.S. "The U.S. has over 88 competition events nationally now and generates more than 300,000 entries per year³. That's more than anywhere else in the world. We were and are very fortunate to have so many immigrants who settled here. In a big event like *Blackpool*, 25 per cent of the top 24 couples in every event are from the U.S.!"

In 1980, Brian and Kristi started to organize their own competition in California, the *Embassy Ball*, with John Kimmins and Sam Sodano as co-organizers since 2005. Over the years it has become one of the biggest international events in the U.S.

Gary McDonald, Brian and Kristi's son Gary, followed in the footsteps of his father and grandfather and became a competitor and studio owner. With his partner Diana McDonald, he became 10 times undefeated U.S. National 10 Dance champion, and in 1997, World 10 Dance champion.

Another family with three generations involved in ballroom dancing and in the McDonald's case, also bridging the old world with the new.



Top: Brian and Kristi presenting a medal in Miami at the USDSC 2004
 Middle: Brian speaking to the North American competitors in Blackpool 2003
 Below: Brian and Gary McDonald at the World Council meeting 2003