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Gay Games off at a Gallop

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[...]

On Friday, among the hundred or so travellers lining up in the basement of the busy Town Hall in the heart of downtown Sydney, Dunja Jansen and Claudia Reger chatted with their friends as they waited to register. The two partners from Cologne, Germany have practiced their Ballroom Dance routines since winning in 1998's Amsterdam Games.

"We got second place in the highest class in Ballroom, and in Latin, the fifth place," said Jansen.

The inclusion and growth of same-sex ballroom dancing stems from the Gay Games. But while gender pairings have been expanded, costume requirements are strict. Jansen described hers as "a sort of frock. You have to see a lot of the figure. It's light to show the body's shapes."

Judging is somewhat subjective. "Everything is noticed," said Jansen, "the character, the rhythm." She also mentioned that specific tempos are required, as well as musical styles.

Since 1998, Jansen and Reger have competed in specialized tournaments throughout Europe, particularly in Germany and the Netherlands. Not all are gay events, but they said that the Games have furthered the diversity in this artistic sport event.

"I think it's paved the way for women," said Jansen. "There are different opportunities, in very small places and corners, but it has opened up to other dancers. We have special competitions in several towns, once a year, in other cities."

They hope to win in both Ballroom and Latin categories, where artistic flair, comportment, articulation of the dance vocabulary and a sense of style will be judged at a lavish performance in the same building where thousands of registrations have been processed. The ornate Town Hall, with sweeping staircases and sparkling chandeliers, will become a dance festival from Sunday through Wednesday Nov. 6, when over 400 dancers will perform a variety of styles.

With so many years of practice, do they feel ready?

"We hope so," said Jansen. "We just landed, and we've got a bit of jet lag."

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