



GROWING INTO YOUR SHOES!

Interview with: Markus & Mariia Hirvoren

When you are a child people get you things a little bit bigger, especially shoes, always knowing of course that you will grow into them. Markus & Mariia Hirvoren, brother and sister from Finland both started dancing at a very young age and as we saw them grow, we all knew that they would definitely fill their shoes, dance shoes I mean.

I first saw them dance at the United States Championship in Miami in 2003. They were juniors then and they easily won the competition and the hearts of the American people. They then continued to dance and I saw

them many times, every time they changed a little more, but last year at the 2008 British Open in Blackpool England they won the Youth (under 21) Standard Title. Then this year, quite easily may I say, I saw them take the Open British Championship Rising Star Title. This was a great accomplishment for such a young couple, Markus is 20 and Mariie is 21.

I have been privileged to see many young people grow to become exceptional dancers but one thing that really impresses me with Markus and Mariie is that in some ways they have not changed one bit. They have become better dancers with great power considering they

are such a small couple, they have also matured even in their looks and they have outgrown their shoes, but one thing I have observed has stayed exactly the same and that is their good manners and demeanor towards people.

In 2003 I was so engrossed in what I was doing that I accidentally bumped into them. Instead of getting a look or a "watch where you're going," they looked at me and sincerely apologized even though it was not their fault. I felt totally foolish but I always remembered this. Since then I have seen them be courteous towards their competitors on or off the floor many times. During the Rising Star final in Blackpool, for example, a couple bumped right into them with full force. Markus stopped, gave a polite acknowledgement to the other couple, checked to make sure his sister was OK and then went back to competing while the other boy just took off in disarray.

This and their dancing is what makes this brother and sister team a special wonder. I ask them how it was to dance with your own blood for such a long time.

"I do not know," said Mariie, "it is really natural for us because we've been dancing for fourteen years together. Of course sometimes it's not so easy, we support each other, so it's really easy for us nowadays."

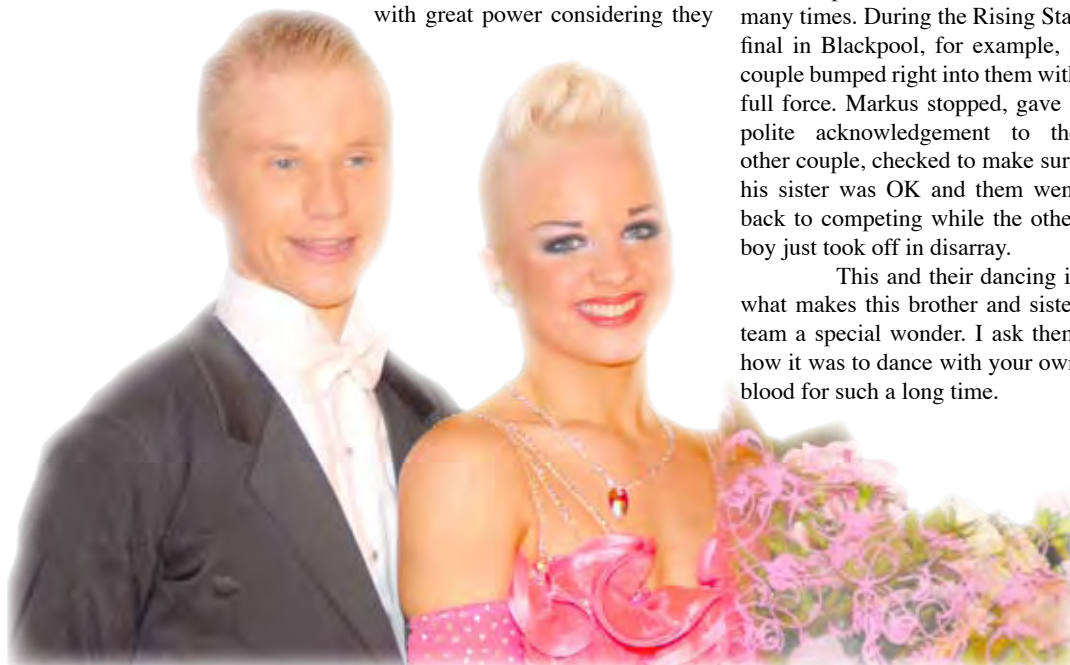
Markus agrees. "Yes, we have grown into it. And we live together and so it's very natural to us."

I said nothing, but had I danced with my brother or sister, I would probably have banged his head a number of times. Nevertheless, I'm not convinced by their answer so I continue my questioning.

What is the worst part of being a brother and sister team? Markus was a bit technical here.

"Well I think you can say things really straight to one another." He then changes his mind. "But actually this tends to be a really good thing as well, so?" Mariie was not as positive about everything. "The other thing is, because we spend so much time together, so sometimes this makes more trouble. Because we live together and we dance together. But, I think otherwise it's a very good thing." Never mind! I gave up! They won! They totally enjoy dancing with one another.

I now wanted to know how hard is it for them at this young age. I was quite positive that they went to school but I was not one hundred percent sure, so I ask did you go to school? Markus answers the question. "Mariia actually at the moment is applying for the university. I am also as well but of course it's hard to dance and do studies at the same time. So at the moment we are only dancing."



Mariie then adds, "I will actually have an exam in one week so it's a little bit difficult when you are a long time away and you try. So it is difficult to get into this university with our schedule."

I ask them if they ever did Latin and totally feel like a fool when they told me "Yes we do. Actually we competed today." Truthfully, I could not remember them dancing but I'm sure they have, I just never noticed and from their results, I'm sure their Latin does not come near their Standard and yes they agree to that. They told me that they do not put as much time in their Latin, they only practice about one third of the time the other two thirds are spent on the standard.

I then ask why is that? Markus' answer is simple. "I think we just grew more to it." Mariia explained a little more. "It's hard to say because when we were younger we were better in Latin and actually we liked more Latin. We also still enjoy doing Latin so it's very difficult to stop doing it. I think it also really supports the Ballroom and vice versa, Ballroom is supporting Latin so it's nice to do both."

I then wanted to know whether there was any animosity between their Latin coaches that get only a third of their time and the Standard who get two thirds. "No, No! We have such fabulous teachers and they work together and talk to one another and they just want us to do better."

I then ask how they felt with their win here in Blackpool this week. "Winning was of course fantastic especially because it was really a tough competition, because there were really good couples. We were very happy of course."

What is their next step? Markus: "Of course making our dancing more mature and trying to challenge the top couples in amateur, that would be the next goal."

Is there anything in particular that they are going to work on? "I think it's shapes," Mariie answers, "we tend to be good with the technical area. Yes, developing more our shapes for sure and more dynamics into our dancing."

I then ask what they thought the hardest thing was to conquer as a Ballroom dancer and



Mariie did not hesitate. "I think for us sometimes the mental things are more difficult areas. Sometimes your body can do more but your mind can stop your body doing it."

These two are so young and the pressures that they must go through especially at this age must be tremendous. So I ask how they manage to keep sane and in good spirits. "We try to calm ourselves down. When the comp is over we face the facts in a way, what we did

wrong, what do we have to develop and just start making it better. We then talk a lot together with our coaches and they help us and we ask questions, that's all."

To end my interview with this lovely couple I ask them if either of them was dating. With a smile Mariie tells me she has a boyfriend and laughing, Markus said, "I'm at the moment single." I know that they did not expect this question but I went on. "So, does having a

boyfriend or a girlfriend get in the way of your work? Markus did not think so. "I think this comes natural on the side. After practice you might go for a date."

I was glad to have the opportunity to interview this magnificent brother and sister team. In the next edition I will bring you an interview with their coaches, both Latin and Standard, so you can find out what they have to say. 'Til then, keep wearing your shades.