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'Evening with Champions' brings together old, new

Protopopovs once again grace Bright Center ice; Flatt debuts new short

Posted 10/8/13 by Sarah S. Brannen, special to icenetwork



In addition to hosting the show, Emily Hughes performed to "Hallelujah." -Sarah S. Brannen

At "An Evening with Champions," held Oct. 5 and 6 at Harvard University, venerable stars shared the ice with promising newcomers. The show, now in its 43rd year, has raised more than \$2.6 million for the Jimmy Fund, the fundraising arm of the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.

To the delight of the crowd, Ludmila and Oleg Protopopov, the 1964 and 1968 Olympic pairs champions, returned to the show. Now 77 and 81, they can no longer do the death spiral they invented, but they still skate with classic elegance. They have only missed two shows since 1989.

"We will continue as long as possible," Oleg said.

"If everyone likes it, it's good for us," Ludmila added. "All our lives [the fans] supported us, and we cannot

stop."

World champion Kimmie Meissner, skating to "Follow You, Follow Me," included double Axels and a triple toe. The Haydenettes performed their new short program, to Mercan Dede's "Ab-i Hayat." Reigning world junior champion Joshua Farris skated to "Feel Again" by One Republic; he landed a triple loop and a huge triple toe, as well as a huge triple Axel as his encore.

Rachael Flatt, now a junior at Stanford, performed a new short program to Barber's *Adagio For Strings*, which she choreographed herself. She toned down the difficulty a bit for the spotlights, but she performed a couple of good triple loops.

Flatt also choreographed her new free skate, to Rachmaninoff's *Piano Concerto No. 2*.

"With these [programs] being my first that I've done the choreography for, it's definitely a unique experience and I really love it," she said. "Honestly, the primary goal this year is just to stay healthy. That's been a huge struggle the last couple of years."

Flatt is looking forward to competing this season, but she doesn't have specific placement goals.

"I mean, I would love to make the Olympic team again, but at this point I'm just focusing on finishing this year out strong and having fun and coming back to enjoy it," she said.

Nathan Chen got a huge ovation for his program to "Home" by Phillip Phillips. The 14-year-old landed an easy double Axel, triple flip and triple Lutz in both shows.

"It's my first time in Boston," he said. "Harvard's great! I'd love to study here."

Chen said that the ankle injury which plagued him last year is completely healed and he is looking forward to competing at the Junior Grand Prix Final.

"Everything is on track," he said. "There's no set expectations; hopefully, I'll make top three."

Chen said his goal for the U.S. championships is to be named to the world junior team.

Dance

Three ice dance teams skated in the show. Isabella Cannuscio and Michael Bramante skated to "Ghost," and Isabella's sister, Anastasia, and Colin McManus skated to "Unusual Way." Lynn Kriengkrairut and Logan Giulietti-Schmitt performed their new Finnstep short dance, to "Jolie Coquine" by Caravan Palace

and "That Man" by Caro Emerald.

Isabella said her free dance with Bramante is a waltz medley of "Masquerade Waltz" and "La vie est belle."

"We modeled the free dance after the piece and created a story for it," she said. "He's in the military, and we meet at a ball. We fall in love, but I'm having an affair. In the third part, we're married, but he finds out about the affair and ends up killing me!"

Emily Samuelson, who went to the Olympics with former partner Evan Bates, is no longer competing in ice dance. She performed a solo number to "One Day I'll Fly Away," sung by Nicole Kidman.

Samuelson just graduated from the University of Michigan, where she is a part-time research assistant in the political science department, studying the energy sector in developing countries. She also coaches at the Ann Arbor Figure Skating Club.

Samuelson's program in the show touched on a lot of emotions.

"I miss skating so much," she said wistfully. "I would love to perform more."

Entertainers

The always-entertaining Braden Overett skated to "Sway," before heading to the boards and "flirting" with a life-sized doll he had planted in the stands. He brought "her" out for a tango, to the delight of the crowd.

Shawn Sawyer performed a fascinating, delightful mime program, complete with face makeup and a ponytail, to "We No Speak Americano." Show co-hosts Emily Hughes and Paul Wylie, both Harvard alums, tried to do an on-ice interview with him, but he refused: "Mimes don't speak," he whispered.

Sawyer is coaching and choreographing just about full time. He mentioned that he and Kurt Browning have talked about choreographing for each other, and he raved about one young U.S. skater in particular.

"Jason Brown's long program this year is brilliant -- I watch it over and over again," he said.

Sawyer will be choreographing the closing number for Skate Canada this year.

Hughes working for the IOC

Hughes took to the ice for a powerful number to "Hallelujah." She egged on Wylie to show off his skills, and he showed he's still got it, with his signature spread eagles, split jumps and blur spins.

Hughes moved to Lausanne, Switzerland, a month ago.

"I'm working in the sports department, on all the athlete-related programs," she said.

Asked (jokingly) about becoming the IOC president one day, she said, "You never know! I just found out that they are elected every 12 years. It was fun to be there while the election was going on. There's a cafeteria there, and the new president, Thomas Bach, has been eating there with us."

Hughes is in the early stages of learning French -- "I can say 'bonjour' and 'merci'" -- and she will attend the Olympics in February as part of her job.

Three members of the Next Ice Age, an on-ice dance company, skated a lovely program called "Triune" to Ravel's *Mother Goose Suite*. The skaters -- Allison Timlen, Robert Korycinski and Sarah Yassenka -- are all college students in the Boston area.

Yasmin Siraj skated to "Bring Him Home." Harvard freshman Harrison Choate skated to "Desperado" and later joined the ice theatre troupe Act I of Boston for a circus fantasy number.

Choate has retired from competition.

"I still skate with Act I of Boston, but in the sense of competing like I used to, I'm very much retired," he said.



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