

Your First WCS Event <3

You've taken West Coast Swing lessons, attended socials, and now you're ready for an event! Maybe you're going with people you know from dancing, or maybe you're going alone. What can you expect at such an event? In this dance letter, we'll give you a heads-up.

1. What does a weekend event look like?

Most weekend events follow the same structure. During an event, there are socials, workshops, competitions, pro-shows or routines, and often intensives or focus workshops.

Schedule

Usually, an event lasts from Friday to Sunday, with a pre-party on Thursday evening. If there are intensives or focus workshops, they are sometimes scheduled for Thursday as well. Often, the first workshops start on Friday afternoon. On the website of the event you're attending, you'll see the exact schedule for the weekend. Usually, there are workshops during the day and competitions on Friday and Saturday evenings, followed by the social. Sometimes the social can last all night! (real-life story: Alex danced at an event so long that he had breakfast and then went to bed. Not an isolated incident hehe)

Workshops

Workshops are divided into certain levels. You can find a description of these on the event's website. Most start at level 2 (some dance experience) up to very experienced.

Focus workshops/intensives

During a focus workshop or intensive, you delve into a specific topic with the pro. This topic is announced beforehand, so you can see if you want to participate. These workshops are extra and require a separate fee.

Pro-shows/routines

Usually, a show is performed during an event. This can be a pro-show, where the dancers don't know beforehand which song they'll get (often with their own partner), or a routine.

These routines are pre-designed choreographies to specific music, with the dancers wearing costumes. There are also various categories and competitions within this. Since we don't have these in the Netherlands and they're less popular in Europe than in the US, we won't go into detail about them in this letter. If you want to know more about them, feel free to ask.

Socials

You'd almost forget what it's all about: the socials! This is where you learn the most because you dance with many different people. Everyone has their own style and way of leading/following. The socials take place in the largest available space. Sometimes there's a second room with different music, so you can choose what you prefer.

2. Competitions

This topic deserves its own section because many aspects of an event are connected to it. Think about the levels of the workshops, for example. At an event, you'll encounter all sorts of new terms. Jack & Jill, Open, Strictly, All-Star... What does it all mean?

WSDC: This stands for World Swing Dance Council. If an event is 'WSDC approved,' it means that you earn points for some competitions you dance in. These points are tracked on this website: worldsdc.com. Most Jack & Jills earn points if the event is approved by the WSDC, while Strictly's don't earn points. Sometimes there are other 'fun' competitions, for which you also don't earn points.

Jack & Jill: This means that partners in the competition are randomly paired. So, you don't know beforehand who you'll dance with. During the preliminaries, you dance three (sometimes four) songs, each with a different partner. In the final, you dance three songs with the same partner, who is also randomly chosen again.

Strictly: You choose your own partner beforehand and dance with this partner throughout the entire competition.

Levels

When you earn a certain number of points, you move up to a certain level. The levels are explained below.

Newcomer: You're a Newcomer if you have no experience with competitions and no WSDC points. Originally, the idea was that you participate in one or two competitions as a newcomer, but nowadays, you often see people staying in this level until they've won a final. Then you have 1 Newcomer point and must participate in Novice finals. If you want to participate in Novice competitions earlier, you can.

Novice: This is the first official level within the WSDC for which you earn points. You can participate directly at this level or first participate in Newcomer competitions. Once you've earned 1 Newcomer or 1 Novice point, you must participate in Novice competitions from that moment on; you can't go back to Newcomer. Once you have more than 16 Novice points, you can also participate

in Intermediate competitions. From 30 Novice points onwards, you must participate in the Intermediate level.

Intermediate: The count starts again from 0. From 30+ points, you can participate in Advanced level competitions, and from 45+ points, it's mandatory.

Advanced: People dancing at this level are often very dedicated and attend as many events as possible. The count starts again from 0. Now you must earn at least 60 points to participate in All-Star competitions. From 90 points onwards, this is mandatory.

All-Star: Many All-Stars are professional dancers. Besides the events where they sometimes teach, they give private lessons or teach dance in their own environment. The count starts again from 0. From 150 points onwards, All-Stars can also participate in Champion competitions. This is mandatory from 300 points if a Champion Jack & Jill is offered. This is not always the case.

Champion: For these people, dancing is their job. They teach at events, sometimes organize events themselves, give (private) lessons during events or in their own environment, and so on. Some also offer online training or lessons. This is the highest level within the WSDC. Sometimes this level is also called pro, although you often see All-Stars dancing in it as well.

Types of competition

Open level: This means that anyone from any level can participate in this competition. You could have an All-Star dancing with a Newcomer. Often these competitions are combined with a strictly, so partners who don't dance at the same level can still compete together.

All-European (or All-American if you're in the US): This is a 'fun' competition that anyone can participate in, from Newcomer to Champion. This is often combined with a Jack & Jill, so you have no idea beforehand who you'll be dancing with. Especially as a new dancer, this is a lot of fun because you could suddenly be on the dance floor with a very good dancer!

Age categories

In addition to a classification based on the number of points you have, there's also an age classification for the competitions. This is again seen as a 'fun' competition. The categories are:

Junior: 0-18 years

Sophisticated: 35 years and older

Master: 50 years and older

3. What do you need to arrange for an event?

Partner

Most events in Europe pay close attention to the leader-follower ratio. That's why it's always handy to register with someone of the opposite role. It varies per event whether the person you register with needs to be at the same level as

you. Pay attention to this before registering so you can find someone in time if needed.

Event pass

Some events sell out very quickly. Therefore, make sure to act fast if you really want to attend somewhere! Most events offer a full pass (for participating in workshops and, if you want, competitions) and a party pass (for participating only in the socials and sometimes the competitions). For the competitions, you pay a separate fee on-site.

Hotel/accommodation

An event almost always has an agreement with the hotel where the event takes place, or a hotel nearby. This is a requirement from the WSDC. To help the event organizer, it's best to book a room in the hotel: the organizer has to pay out of pocket if the rooms don't sell out. If the hotel is already sold out, the organizer often arranges a second hotel (ideally with a shuttle bus).

You can also look for accommodation in the area yourself. Keep in mind that you often leave in the middle of the night and whether you feel comfortable walking through an unfamiliar city at that time.

Transportation

Make sure to arrange your transportation in time to get to the event. See if you can carpool with someone else going there, or book a train or flight in time. Often people share a shuttle/taxi to or from the airport. Check the event's Facebook page for updates leading up to the event.

Food

Many events offer food at the venue. This can range from water and snacks to easy meals. Especially on competition days, many people choose to stay in the hotel and have an easy meal. Of course, you can also bring your own snacks. Recommended are refillable water bottles to ensure you get enough water, fruit, nuts, and protein bars. Often during the weekend, you have little time to do extensive grocery shopping, so it's handy to have a stock beforehand (of course, this becomes difficult if you're flying).

4. What happens when I arrive at the event?

Checking in at the hotel is separate from registering at the event. When you arrive at the event location, you'll be directed to the registration desk with signs or in person. Here, you'll let them know that you've arrived and receive a wristband. It varies per event whether you immediately receive one for a certain level. Later, there's a separate desk for registering for competitions; there you

also pay the fee for participating in the competitions. This is usually between €10-€20.

Fun fact: many dancers collect the silicone wristbands issued and put them around their water bottles. This is 1) to show where they've all been and 2) for recognition; when hundreds of people are walking around with bottles, it's nice if you can immediately recognize yours.

Most WCS dancers are incredibly nice, so don't hesitate to ask for help if you're unsure about something!

5. Do I need specific clothing?

Many dancers like to wear dance shoes, but this is certainly not mandatory. If you (especially as a follower) do a lot of spins, it's very nice to have shoes with little friction. Think of suede soles or stickers that you can stick under your soles. This way, you can keep using your knees for a long time ;).

Sneakers, flat shoes/sandals, or shoes with a low block heel are the most comfortable for WCS. Shoe brands that many dancers wear are: Swayd, Riviera's, Toms, Blochs, Taygra. This list is certainly not exhaustive.

Loose clothing that allows you to move easily is the most practical. How this looks for you varies from person to person. Make sure to bring enough clean/dry outfits, especially if you know you sweat quickly. This is also nice for your dance partner ;) Or bring a towel.

At many competitions, you'll see that participants put a bit more effort into their outfits; neat but still comfortable. Often, a bit more makeup is worn as well. Especially if you're interested, watch videos of competitions to get a better feel for this.

Colors

During competitions, many people wear black because it would draw less attention to mistakes. It also makes it difficult for the judges to see who is who ;) Red attracts attention, so wear it especially if you want the jury to focus on a particular aspect (e.g., your upper body or your feet).

Have fun!

The letter has become quite extensive. Don't let this deter you; we're extremely excited that you're going to an event and want to convey that enthusiasm. Most importantly of all: enjoy your first event!

If you have any questions, we'd love to hear them,
Colinda - Woman of letters, West Coast Swing Den Haag

