

Ballroom's Back

Dancing with the Stars returns for another season on ABC

LAUREN WOOD
FOR THE WICHITAN

Seven seasons running and still a hit, "Dancing with the Stars" premiered September 22 with its largest cast assembled to date. With 13 celebrity contestants, this season has the oldest and youngest competitors ever and includes two Olympic Gold medalists, a Grammy-winning singer, a television legend, an Oscar winner and a Super Bowl champion.

Apart of the successful pop group *NSYNC, singer Lance Bass partners with Lacey Schwimmer, making her series debut. Lance has executive-produced and starred in many film and television projects as well as trained to be a cosmonaut at Russia's Star City.

Capturing her second gold medal at the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics, Misty May-Treanor will have to work her magic with her new partner, Maksim Chmerkovskiy, who is returning for his fifth season.

Rocco DiSpirito, the James Beard Award-winning celebrity chef and author, will step out of the kitchen and try his hand at dancing with Karina Smirnoff, who is a fifth season participant. In 2003 DiSpirito launched the reality series "The Restaurant" and will star in a new A&E series in October, "Rocco Gets Real."

Warren Sapp, retired defensive tackle and Superbowl champion, played for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and the Oakland Raiders during his 13-year career. He has played in seven consecutive Pro Bowls and will have to be light on his feet with partner Kym Johnson, also returning for her fifth season.

Comedian Jeffrey Ross, a.k.a. the "Roastmaster General," and has also been named "The Meanest Man in Comedy," teams up with Edyta Sliwinski, the only dancer to compete in all seven seasons.

Billboard chart-topping singer Toni Braxton partners with season one champion Alec Mazo, who is returning for his fourth season. Braxton is a winner of six Grammy Awards and



has the second-biggest single by a female artist in history, "Un-Break My Heart."

Trying to add another trophy to her collection, actress Cloris Leachman dances with World Latin Champion Corky Ballas, who is making his series debut. Leachman has been recognized with nine Emmy's, a Golden Globe and an Academy Award. She is

currently in the process of writing her memoir and touring the U.S. with her one-woman show, "CLORIS!"

Kim Kardashian, actress, model and reality television star from the hit E! reality series, "Keeping up with the Kardashians," pairs with the defending champ Mark Ballas, son of Corky Ballas.

Cody Linley, best known for his

role as Jake Ryan in "Hannah Montana," is the youngest contestant ever to compete on "Dancing with the Stars." Linley also has appeared in multiple films including "My Dog Skip," "HOOT," and "Cheaper By the Dozen." He teams up with two-time champ Julianne Hough, who is returning for her fourth season.

Actress, host and entrepreneur,

Brooke Burke, who is also ranked in men's magazines as one of the sexiest women in the world, shakes her stuff with Derek Hough, who is returning for his third season. She has hosted the travel series "Wild On!," is a mother of four and has launched her own baby store, BabooshBaby.com.

The "World's Fastest Man," Maurice Greene, paired with two-time champion Cheryl Burke, who is returning for her sixth season. Greene has won two gold medals in the 100m sprint and the 4x100m relay at the 2000 Sydney Summer Olympics and has also won silver and bronze medals at the 2004 Athens Summer Olympics.

Susan Lucci, one of the most famous faces in daytime television, teams up with Tony Danza, who returns for his sixth season. Lucci has won the Emmy Award for Best Actress on ABC's "All My Children," and will continue to work on that show while competing on "Dancing with the Stars."

Lastly, television legend Ted McGinley pairs with newcomer Inna Brayer, U.S. Amateur 10 Dance Champion. McGinley has starred in "Married...with Children," "Hope & Faith," "Happy Days" and has also had roles in films "Pearl Harbor," "Dick" and "Wayne's World 2."

Last week's first episode consisted of half the competitors dancing the Cha-Cha and the other half dancing the Foxtrot. At the end of the night, Brooke Burke and Derek received the highest score, while Jeffrey Ross and Edyta received the lowest. The next night six couples danced the Quickstep and the other six danced the Mambo. In the end, Jeffrey Ross and Edyta were eliminated.

The following night Ross and his partner came back to perform the Quickstep, The Jonas Brothers and Jesse McCartney performed, and at the end of the show Ted McGinley and Inna were eliminated.

The remaining pairs tried their luck at either the paso doble or the rumba Monday. The results came in Tuesday. Kim and Mark were eliminated.

Housewives still hot to trot down Wisteria Lane

NEAL JUSTIN
MCT

The Wisteria Lane neighborhood has spent the past four years battling cancer, tornadoes, blindness, infidelity and attempted murder. Now the residents face the most daunting challenge of their suburban lives: aging.

"Desperate Housewives" opens its new season tonight by fast-forwarding the action five years, as bold and risky a move as adding Keith Olbermann as an "American Idol" judge or turning "Law & Order" into a campy musical.

After a preview of the first two episodes, it appears the gamble has paid off.

Creator Marc Cherry has used the leap into the future to turn back the clock and recapture the tone of the prime-time soap opera's Emmy-nominated inaugural season, where sniping and sarcasm were more powerful and destructive than any windstorm.

"It was a chance for us to reset," said Cherry, whose show has largely been overlooked at awards ceremonies since that heralded rookie year. "Soaps tend to build up, and I wanted to get back to where we were that first season when it was just the small and relatable problems of

some ordinary women."

Cherry said he was partly inspired by the time-travel twist employed by another ABC series, "Lost."

"I was initially going to do an eight-year jump, but then when someone explained to me how the actresses would react to the idea that they were eight

shopping for window-washing.

"Teri and I were saying that we've kind of switched roles because she's glamorous now and I'm frumpy," said Parker, whose use of stomach and buttock pads on set have triggered rumors that she's either pregnant or addicted to creme-filled doughnuts. "I love it, because I come into hair

and now, for reasons that will be revealed this season, she's more closed off to love and not so needy of it. It's empowering and exciting to play different levels and different parts of your personality and have legitimate reasons why each character is in a new place."

What hasn't changed are the witty zingers, which were always the series' strength, but too often buried under heavy-handed story lines and dramatic twists that had more in common with "The Twilight Zone" than a frothy comedy.

The season kicks off with one perfect punch line after another, whether it's an icy saleswoman suggesting that Gabby's overweight daughter might want to shop in the costume department where they sell a Mrs. Shrek outfit, or the response to Edie's news that she now has a husband.

"Really?" Susan quips. "Whose?"

There's also a series of delightful vignettes, including Lynette's accidental "e-mail affair" with one of her sons (don't worry, it's more touching than icky); Bree being forced to produce a tricky dessert that she boasted of creating, and Gabby's attempt to sneak into a high-end party out

"We're going to get out while people still like us"

years older, I thought, 'Maybe five. Maybe I can get away with five.'"

The results are fresh and funny: Lynette's (Felicity Huffman) rambunctious kids are now borderline delinquents. Bree (Marcia Cross) has become a wildly successful, wildly insecure TV personality. Edie (Nicollette Sheridan) has married a motivational speaker. Susan (Teri Hatcher) has been transformed into a love-'em-and-leave-'em free spirit. Gabby (Eva Longoria Parker) now has two children, forcing her to trade in window-

and makeup now and it's like 10 minutes instead of two hours."

In serving up new story lines, Cherry also has given his cast new challenges — something rarely provided to actors on network TV, which is always wary of messing with a successful formula.

"It's given all of us an opportunity to be something we haven't been," said Hatcher, whose character was dangerously close to running out of ways to whine. "For Susan, it's been years of 'Please love me, please love me, please love me,'



of fear that her social life is integrating into a future of "flip-flops and keggers."

"What I love about my gals is that, for all the glamour, they're all actresses first," Cherry said. "I have friends who work on other TV shows who constantly marvel at what my gals allow me to do and how ridiculously silly I make them and how wickedly driven I can make the characters. They really go with me."

The ride can't go on forever.

Cherry openly admits that he plans to end the series at the conclusion of the seventh season — and don't expect him to hand the reins to anyone else.

"I love working with these gals, but the idea of letting anyone else take the show from me makes me sick to my stomach," he said. "I would rather just end it as my thing. We're going to get out while people still like us."