

# DRESSAGE PEOPLE

## World-Class Celebration

Amid the World Cup competition, this U.S. Olympic athlete gives the movers and shakers of the dressage community a chance to let their hair down.

*By Charlotte Bredahl-Baker*

**W**hen I realized that my 50th birthday was going to happen during the World Cup in Las Vegas, I decided it was my turn to throw a big party. What made it so perfect was that just about everybody I know in the dressage world would be there. The Madame Tussaud wax museum at the Venetian hotel was a perfect setting, thanks to my husband, Joel, who gave me the party as a birthday gift.

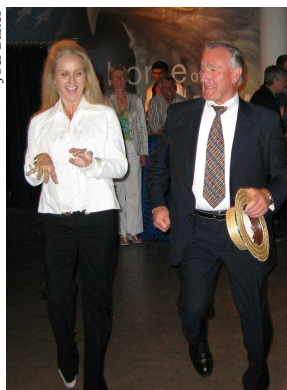
The party's theme was "American Idol." Guenter Seidel was "Simon Cowell." I had trouble imagining Guenter as a mean Simon. Boy, was I wrong. He had way too much fun telling the "contestants" they were pathetic or painful. Debbie McDonald and Anne Gribbons were insightful "Paula Abduls." They did a good job making up for Simon's

Joel Baker



**The "Rockettes" (from left): a Robin Williams look-alike, Jane Weatherwax, Betsy Rebar Sell, Jane Thomas, Patty Aiken, Charlotte Bredahl-Baker, Debbie Tomlinson.**

Joel Baker



**Jane Thomas and Klaus Balkenhol pas de deux.**

Lynndee Kemmet



**U.S. Olympians Guenter Seidel and Steffen Peters try on wigs and act as "American Idol" judges.**

meanness. Steffen Peters happily became “Randy Jackson,” complete with his accent and hand gestures. Announcer Nicho Meredith was “Ryan Seacrest.”

Ahead of time, many people had agreed to be contestants. Jan and Amy Ebeling were hard to recognize in their costumes and wigs as they sang Sonny and Cher’s “I Got You Babe.” Guenter gave them a 10 for bravery. Michael Barisone sang Frank Sinatra’s “Strangers in the Night” and got the only standing ovation of the evening! Mette Rosencrantz danced up a storm, even though she was lip sinking. Stephen Clarke and I sang, “You Don’t Bring me Flowers.” Normally, no amount of money could get me to



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**New “O” judge Anne Gribbons with Olympian Charlotte Bredahl-Baker.**



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**Cara Whitham and Dr. Mike Tomlinson**

sing in front of a large group, but there was such a warm feeling in the room that we all felt comfortable making total fools of ourselves. Guenter said Stephen and I were like a *pas de deux* where the riders are at the opposite ends of the arena and only come together for the final halt.

That night, the hottest female judge's group in Vegas was "The Supremes"—Cara Whitham (World Cup judge), Jane Weatherwax and Jeannie McDonald. They came well prepared with their choreographed routine to "Stop in the Name of Love." Even Guenter was impressed. Later, Cara and fellow "O" judge Jean Michael Roudier sang the sentimental "I Remember it Well." "I am emotionally touched," deadpanned Guenter. Later, Guenter and Steffen looked much less distinguished when they tried on the Sonny and Cher wigs. One singing duo asked me not to mention their names. "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas," they reminded me.

Later, Mariette Withages (chair of the FEI Dressage Committee) decided it was her turn to run the show. Only the most powerful woman in dressage today would have the nerve to ask Klaus Balkenhol to piaffe and passage to music on foot. She instructed several men to choose partners and do a *pas de deux* that must include piaffe, passage and pirouettes. They could add extended walk, if anyone began running out of breath. Klaus and Jane Thomas did pretty well, but Anne wanted more lift in their passage.

Dr. Mike Tomlinson and Cara wowed the crowd with their trot half passes. Axel Steiner (FEI "O" judge) and I did flying changes every second stride and every stride, even on curved lines and in synch (kind of). Guenter didn't think we took instruction very well and that we should be eliminated. Anne gave us a 12, Steffen a perfect 10, but Debbie commented that there is no such thing as a 10 in dressage!

Everyone was such a good sport. I think we take life and dressage a bit too seriously sometimes. This was a great way to see a different side of so many people who work hard to make the sport great. 🇺🇸