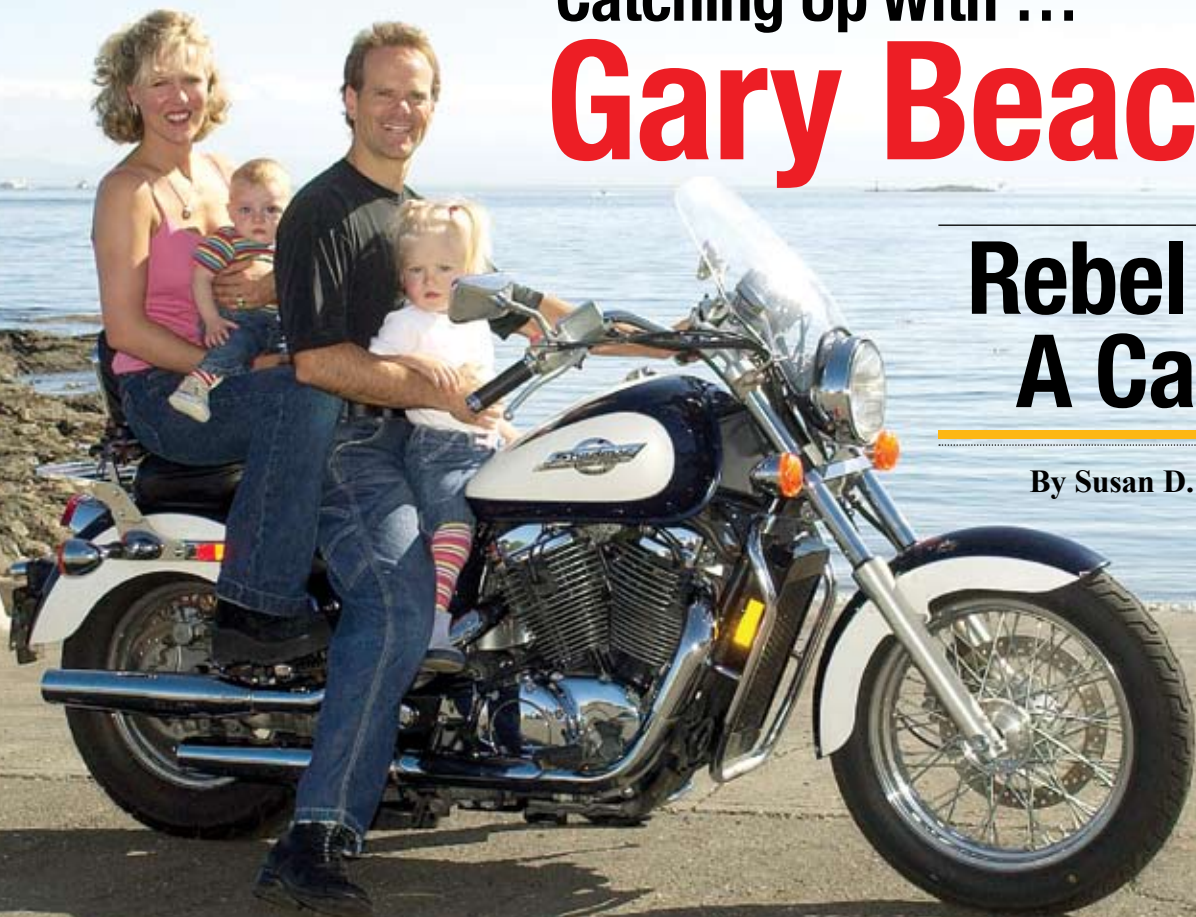


Catching Up With ... Gary Beacom

Rebel With A Cause

By Susan D. Russell

Gary Beacom now lives in Victoria, British Columbia with his wife, Deena, and their two young children, Stella, 4, and Garrison, 2.



COURTESY GARY BEACOM

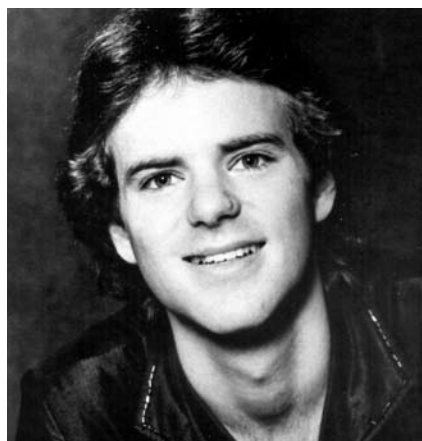
Gary Beacom, Canada's legendary skating rebel, set the skating world on its ear when he hit the international scene. Armed with a repertoire that combined skating with modern dance, his programs were comprised of innovative footwork and imaginative choreography that were often brilliant in their creativity and originality.

His revolutionary style brought him both acclaim and criticism. A master of improvisation and endowed with a flexibility that often made him look like he was made of rubber, Beacom brought to the sport a uniqueness that, to this day, remains unparalleled. His entire career has been an exploration of inventing new ways of moving on ice, contrary to any established style of skating. As an amateur skater he excelled at school figures but was never able to master the difficult triple jumps that were necessary to be competitive.

"People have called my style weird and offbeat," Beacom said. "It was not

intended to be that way. I just came up with something that was a little bit different."

Beacom stated skating around age 6, winning his first competition three years later. His lengthy amateur career, however, garnered him little success.



Although he never won the title, Gary Beacom won three medals at the Canadian Championships. His biggest success, however, came in the professional ranks.

COURTESY SKATE CANADA ARCHIVES

Competing at Canadian junior and senior nationals from 1973 to 1984, Beacom won the bronze in 1980 and placed second to Brian Orser in 1983 and 1984. He was a member of Canadian international teams from 1976 to 1984, winning two bronze

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medals internationally in 1978 but it was not until 1983 that he went to his first senior World Championships where he placed 13th.

'Mad Genius'

Describing Beacom as a "mad genius," Toller Cranston has said Beacom's skating was choreographically "so far ahead of its time that it left the judges without any knowledge as to what to do."

In 1984 Beacom represented Canada at the Olympic Games in Sarajevo and though he placed 11th, it was a major turning point in his career. Immediately following the 1984 World Championships, where he placed 10th, Beacom quit competitive skating and joined the *Torvill and Dean World Tour* as a principal skater. He performed on that tour for two years. "I did not really have a good rapport with the 'establishment,'" Beacom said. "Jayne and Chris offered me a part in their show, which was quite an unprecedented undertaking at that time, and I decided that would be a better chance for me to skate and perform." That same year Beacom earned his bachelor of science with a double degree in physics and philosophy from the University of Toronto.

Throughout 1987 and 1988, Beacom produced his one-man show "Hard Edge" in Canada and New York City, earning rave reviews from the *New York Times*. He performed in the Sun Valley Ice Shows for 10 years and from 1989 to 1993, directed and starred in the Sun Valley summer programs. Beacom was widely popular in those days, according to 1984 Olympic champion Scott Hamilton. "There's a guy. I would go to Sun Valley and no one would even know I was there when he was in the show," Hamilton said. "They loved him. He had developed a cult following."

One of Beacom's innovative ideas developed during those years was using skates on both his hands and feet. "I was doing a sort of spinning move one day, kind of like a Charles Tickner death spiral move. I thought, 'Boy this would be kind of interesting if I had a skate on this hand rather than just putting my palm on the ice.' So I tried it and I was able to do some interesting things. From those humble beginnings I eventually developed many other maneuvers with



SUSAN D. RUSSELL

Gary Beacom's classic comedic routine "I'm Your Man" remains a crowd favorite.

my former partner Gia Guddat. We put together some very clever moves, which people really enjoyed." Their two signature pieces were "I Think I'm Losing My Marbles" and "Bull Frog."

"I adore Gary," Hamilton said. "He was a competitor in my very first international competition. Gary brought in the non-skating fanatic fan who could really embrace what he did because it was different, it was entertaining, and there were not a lot of peacock feathers. It was all about being himself, being unique to the rest of the world and doing something that was designed to really touch an audience. That is what is missing today."

Professional Success

In 1988 Beacom won the U.S. Open and World Professional titles, rare

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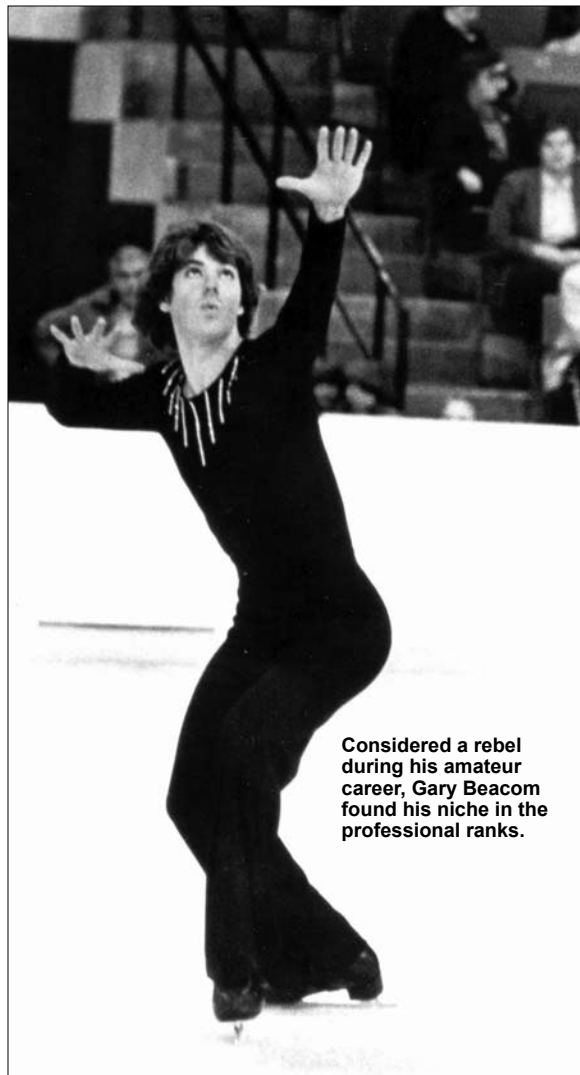
accomplishments for a skater who had never won a World or Olympic medal. He performed on the Boitano/Witt skating tours from 1989 to 1991, whereupon he joined the cast of the *Tour of World Figure Skating Champions* (now *Champions on Ice*) in which he performed for six years.

Now living in Victoria, British Columbia with his wife, Deena, whom he married in 2001, and their two children, Stella, 4, and Garrison, 2, Beacom is very content with his life. "I am on the coaching staff at the Racquet Club of Victoria Figure Skating Club where Deena is the director and I have three full-time students. I am not heavily immersed in coaching but I enjoy working with children," he said. "It keeps my ideas fresh and forces me to really analyze the technical aspect of skating as well."

Beacom choreographed a piece for Kurt Browning called "A Tisket A Tasket, a Child's Rhythm Basket" for a children's show he performed in with Kristi Yamaguchi. "I really enjoy doing choreography, but for me it is not just a matter of setting steps — it is the development of technique," Beacom said. "My own personal choreography is a distillation of my whole repertoire over the last 35 years so I find it somewhat of a challenge to choreograph other skaters."

Beacom recently published a book on skating entitled "Vade Mecum" (which translates to mean a handbook or guide that is kept constantly at hand for consultation).

"When I originally set up my website, I was going to write instructional kind of articles which I thought would make my website more interesting," Beacom explained. "But I eventually



Considered a rebel during his amateur career, Gary Beacom found his niche in the professional ranks.

COURTESY SKATE CANADA ARCHIVES

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In 2002 Beacom published his first book “Apology,” a detailed account of events leading up to and during his incarceration in a U.S. prison for tax evasion. Beacom views that experience as “an unfortunate aspect in my life.”

Beacom is one of many skaters from his era who has enjoyed a long career. He attributes this to the surge in popularity of professional shows and competitions starting in the 1990s that provided considerable incentive for skaters to stay in shape and prolong their careers. “I attribute my own longevity partly to nutrition and other lifestyle factors,” he said, “as well as to an experimental and uninhibited approach to skating, which keeps me interested and motivated to practice

regularly.”

At 46, with a career that has spanned 35 years, Beacom shows no signs of slowing down. His career is managed by Chicago based Danari Entertainment LLC. Beacom regularly conducts skating seminars and recently performed in a number of Davos Ice Spectacular shows in Switzerland. “I actually feel like I am skating with more gusto than ever now,” he said. “I have kept myself in shape. I have many years behind me, a lot of experience and I have reached a level that makes it quite rewarding for me.”

Last March Beacom was invited to join the *Olympic Russian Tour* that went to 10 Russian cities. “It was a very good tour with a very good cast,” he said. “We skated 13 shows starting in St. Petersburg and went to some cities in Russia I had never heard of before.” The all-star cast included Evgeni Plushenko, Tatiana Navka and Roman Kostomarov, Tatiana Totmianina and Maxim

Marinin, Irina Slutskaya, Naomi Lang and Peter Tchernyshev, Silvia Fontana, and Elizabeth Putnam and Sean Wirtz.

Beacom thoroughly enjoyed the experience. “The shows were very well attended and there was not a seat to be had in any of the cities,” he said. “The tour was completely sold out well in advance.”

When asked about performing in Canada, Beacom said that he would love to tour in Canada. “But I am just not able to find a job here,” he said. “I do little shows with the Canada Ice Dance Theatre here on the West Coast.”

His classic comedic routine “I’m Your Man” is probably his best known and remains a fan favorite. Beacom had retired the routine because he felt like everyone had seen it. “When I went to Russia I was asked to throw it in at the last minute,” he said. “The Russians loved it. Even though English is not their first language and some of the audience members didn’t even speak English, the number went over extremely well. I was kind of amazed and quite pleased.”

Choreographer David Wilson said he grew up marveling at Beacom. “Gary is an inspiration to many people for many different reasons. There was never anyone like him before and there has never been anyone like him since,” Wilson said. “I love people that are so into what they are doing. It is admirable.”

When asked if he was aware of the respect and admiration his peers have for his work, Beacom seemed genuinely touched by their sentiments. “It is very gratifying to hear that,” Beacom said. “My peers are the ones who are immersed in skating and who have made skating a big part of their lives and have reached a considerable amount of success. Toller Cranston was quite an inspiration to me through the years and came as close as somebody could to being my idol when I was younger. That is very encouraging and very touching to hear.” ●

decided, as I was putting them together, that they would fit nicely into a book, so I decided to go that route. When you take on a project like writing a book it makes you think a lot more deeply about things. It sort of came together. Whenever I stumbled across a new idea that I felt was important to become a better skater, I would write about it.”

Trend Setter

“Never one to follow trends, he would set them,” contemporary Robin Cousins noted in the foreword to “Vade Mecum.”

“He would challenge judges, fellow competitors and coaches alike. Controversial? Yes! But he was and still is ... unique. Regardless of how you feel about him as a person, his passion for the art and especially the craft [yes, they are two different things] of figure skating is very evident,” Cousins went on to say.