

# DANCE REVIEWS

All the latest dance releases

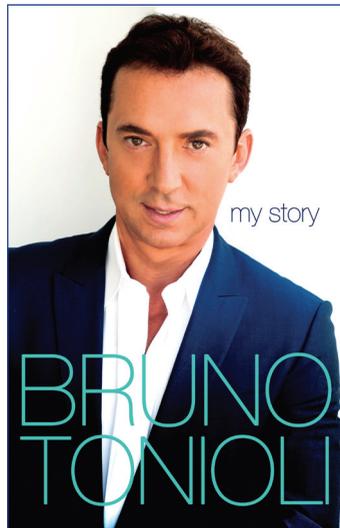
## Strictly fabulous

**Marianka Swain** enjoys the wild ride that is Bruno Tonioli's autobiography

**T**here are few volumes that contain anecdotes as varied as navigating cutlery at a Franco Zeffirelli luncheon, partying with Jerry Hall and Grace Jones, cross-dressing as a geisha for the Rolling Stones, jiving with Saffron Burrows in a 1940s dance hall, marshalling 280 tap-dancing commuters and getting a full-frontal view of "Big Len", but Bruno Tonioli's gloriously frank, funny and flamboyant autobiography is one of them.

*My Story* is a briskly paced, delightfully gossipy read, the book equivalent of a girls' night in with rosé and Celebrations on tap, soundtracked by Gaga. So determined is the garrulous judge to keep us glued to the page that the decades fly by in a heady (occasionally drug-fuelled) whirl, jumping from Italy to Paris to London, from experimental drag shows and hedonistic counter-culture to the birth of MTV and reality television.

While the book is almost as addictive as some of the substances referenced, we



might sometimes wish we could linger a while longer on an iconic Elton John video shoot or fraught *Strictly* pilot; fans of the latter should be warned that it makes a late and relatively brief appearance.

However, this is a wonderfully enjoyable modern fairytale of sorts – the artistically frustrated boy growing up in a

rural, deeply traditional Italian village goes on to play a key role in the cultural and sexual revolutions of the last century. It is a winning affirmation of that much-used phrase "the power of dance"; in this case, to change someone's life and the world around them in equal measure.

Bruno took inspiration from Simon Cowell in exaggerating one facet of his personality to create a talent show persona (in Simon's case, the ruthless record producer; in Bruno's the passionate, verbose Italian), but this book gives us a window into "the real Bruno": struggling with his sexual identity; working a punishing schedule to make up for his lack of early dance training (he only took his first formal ballet class aged 18); and skilfully navigating an evolving showbiz world, from backing dancer on Nigel Lythgoe's variety shows to choreographing sketch comedy, adverts, music videos and drama, working with big names along the way – Freddie Mercury, Duran Duran, Bananarama, Goldie Hawn, Jane Horrocks, Anne Hathaway.

This Bruno does revel in his painted-on trousers and the adrenaline rush of live TV (*Strictly* is "part panto, part soap opera, part Broadway musical"), but he and Len, "The Godfather of Ballroom", bonded over their no-nonsense approach, working-class backgrounds and "ability to spot bulls\*\*t". The little boy from northern Italy who glimpsed another world at his local cinema may have entered the inner sanctum, but he's no luvvy – his favourite thing about *Strictly* is that it opens up the art form to a whole new audience. ●