

# 🎵 *The sound of "Strictly"*

Photographs courtesy of the band and dancers



The Strictly Come Dancing Band

**Marianka Swain** gets in tune with Dave Arch and his orchestra ahead of their first live music tour

**"T**his is a huge gig!" confirms "Strictly" singer Lance

Ellington. "Not only in terms of the vocal stamina and ability required, but also the fact that you're being

heard live by millions of people – it puts a touch of pressure on!"

The live music, performed weekly by four singers and 15 musicians (three trumpeters, two trombonists, three saxophonists,

two guitarists, one bass player, one drummer, one percussionist and three keyboardists), is a crucial part of the "Strictly" experience for both dancers and viewers, but it's a rarity, notes musical director Dave Arch: "There really aren't any other programmes like it, so

it's a unique experience.

"We love performing together and our personnel has pretty much stayed the same during 'Strictly's nine-series run. It's amazing to be on a show that features a band of this size performing completely live, and I'm proud to be a small part of it."

Lance realised he wanted to be a singer "when I heard my first Nat King Cole record" and loves being able to cover so many different songs on "Strictly": "Between our four singers – two male and two female – we can handle most styles. For most performances, we have a lead vocalist with a strong

three-part harmony behind them."

Dave's parents were both musicians, so he caught the bug at a young age – "I've played the piano as long as I can remember" – and with tastes ranging from The Beatles and Hendrix to Beethoven and Stravinsky, he also loves the diversity on the show. ➤

"It can be challenging, especially when we're covering tracks by distinctive vocalists like Michael Jackson and Queen, or highly produced records that feature far more than our four singers, and we have to work hard with less familiar styles like South American classical music, but it's always rewarding. We have the most fun with legends like Frank Sinatra and Stevie Wonder."

"Strictly" trumpeter Tom Rees-Roberts also started young, telling his dad he wanted to play the trumpet aged eight. "He introduced me to the greats – Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis, Wynton Marsalis, Maurice Andre – and I love Roy Eldridge, Dizzy Gillespie, Chet Baker... the list goes on and on!"

"We're incredibly fortunate to have some of the greatest brass players in the world here in the UK, including our 'Strictly' brass section, who are all star players in their own right."

Tom agrees with Dave that this is a unique experience, citing the sheer scale of the "Strictly" cycle: "We play on the show for three months, then head off on a live arena tour in January and February, so with the addition of our new music tour, this cycle of 'Strictly' will be about six months and we'll have played to thousands of people live in arenas and theatres and millions through the TV show."

Dave's cycle begins when the professional dancers and



Former "Strictly" champs Artem Chigvintsev and Kara Tointon will "dance to the music" during the tour

the production team choose the songs for the show and agree on the 90-second edits. "The music producer co-ordinates that process and I oversee editing and generally advise on what will work live. I then write everything out for the musicians."

Tom notes admiringly that this process involves Dave transcribing each track by ear and arranging it for the band and singers – "and every week he does as many as 20".

The musicians first see the finished product on show day, and it's an early start,

explains Tom: "We typically arrive at BBC [Television] Centre at about 7am, although some of the rhythm section begin the night before and have to be up at 5am to do more setting up."

At 8am, Dave begins with a sound check, "and we run through as many numbers as we can in the hour or so we have on our own, then do two run-throughs with each competing couple, a dress run and we're live that evening. There are rarely any major changes, but I'm often asked to speed up or slow down slightly or sometimes musically accentuate a certain dance move."

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Musical director Dave Arch



"Strictly" trumpeter Tom Rees-Roberts



"Strictly" pros Robin Windsor and Kristina Rihanoff

Dave admits to nerves just before they go live, "though I try to use that nervous energy in our performance. I have a big responsibility, but the band's made up of experienced, world-class musicians, so I trust them to do what they're good at."

Tom focuses on the smaller studio audience, "which has a great buzz", and the camaraderie amongst the band – "we all concentrate and just go for it!" Lance also tries not to think about the millions watching, "as it only takes a momentary lapse of concentration to make a mistake – I once replaced 'feather' with 'leather' during a live show!"

All three cite the legendary Mark Ramprakash salsa microphone tangle as the biggest mishap, "although, of course, the legend that is Sir Bruce saved the day,

and it's become a real 'Strictly' moment," notes Dave. Lance's favourite performances include some of the recent extravagant showstoppers, "like Ann Widdecombe and Anton Du Beke's *Titanic* homage or Russell Grant being fired out of a cannon", as well as the more light-hearted tracks, like "Americano" and "That's Amore" and "anything with rap". Tom, meanwhile, loves all the Big Band and Latin numbers, "as they're usually brass heavy, so they're great fun for us".

That fun continues on the band's first live music tour, accompanied by "Strictly" favourites Artem Chigvintsev, Kara Tointon, Robin Windsor and Kristina Rihanoff. Dave credits the BBC's Richard Curwen for the idea to team up with the dancers for *Strictly Presents... Dance To The Music*,

which will feature "full-length songs, incredible routines, plenty of surprises and some classic favourites from the show."

"We'll be doing two sets of roughly an hour each, so it'll be very different to the stopping and starting that TV entails." Lance adds: "You'll get more insight into the music you hear every week on the show and us as individuals. There's nothing like the atmosphere of a live gig, getting into the flow of it and reacting to different audiences around the country, so we can't wait – get ready to party!" ●

*Strictly Presents... Dance To The Music* tours the UK from June 5 to July 3 and will be reviewed in the July issue of *Dance Today*.