

being flexible when it comes to dancing alongside other couples, finding a good space on the floor without being dangerous or overly obstructive. It doesn't take much to make your work judge-friendly, and it could make a huge difference to your marks."

"There are couples who are excellent at making those adjustments," notes David. "But unless everyone adheres to that unspoken code of conduct, it becomes chaos. Too many dancers refuse to budge from their pre-programmed routes, no matter what else is going on; that's a recipe for disaster.

"your best bet is to choreograph in a series of groups that can be reordered, so you can change direction, adapt to a shorter or longer floor, pause when necessary

and ensure you show as many judges as possible your range of motion and technique. The secret to competition success isn't show-stopping poses or eye-watering athleticism – it's the ability to think on your feet."

"The shift from art to sport is definitely a factor," says Richard. "Couples are pushing the boundaries in their lines and tricks, but you can't adapt those contortionist movements – it's really a health and safety hazard! If it's a move you can only pull off in controlled conditions, with plenty of space around you, it's just not right for a competition floor, and you have to remember that vulnerable young dancers

watch these things on YouTube and try to copy them. The top couples should set an example.

"It's really a question of common sense – you wouldn't walk into a studio and cut straight across it when there are couples on the floor! It's the same when you're in motion: you have to respect the line of dance. There are so many figures that take you in and out of the centre without interfering with that line, so make sensible choreographic choices. It drives me nuts to see couples cut across diagonally from corner to corner in ballroom, disrupting everyone else, or sticking rigidly to their trajectory in a travelling Latin dance, even if they're on a major collision course."

"We always used to lower our arms to avoid major crashes," recalls David. "Now, dancers are sharpening their elbows! It's great to see ballroom developing into a powerful, exciting style, but not at the expense of finesse, mutual respect and self-preservation. We want these couples to be around for years to come, challenging one another in lasting rivalries, not being stretched off after the first round."

"It's really up to coaches to guide dancers," believes Shirley. "There's no point creating something flashy and daring that they can't perform safely and consistently or that won't even fit on the floor. And as dancers, remember you're not performing for yourselves; you're performing for the judges, for the audience and as part of a great tradition of partner dance. If you keep that in mind, you're bound to succeed." ●

