

LET'S FACE THE MUSIC AND DANCE

Does quickstep need Big Band and waltz soaring strings?
Marianka Swain debates musical choices ►



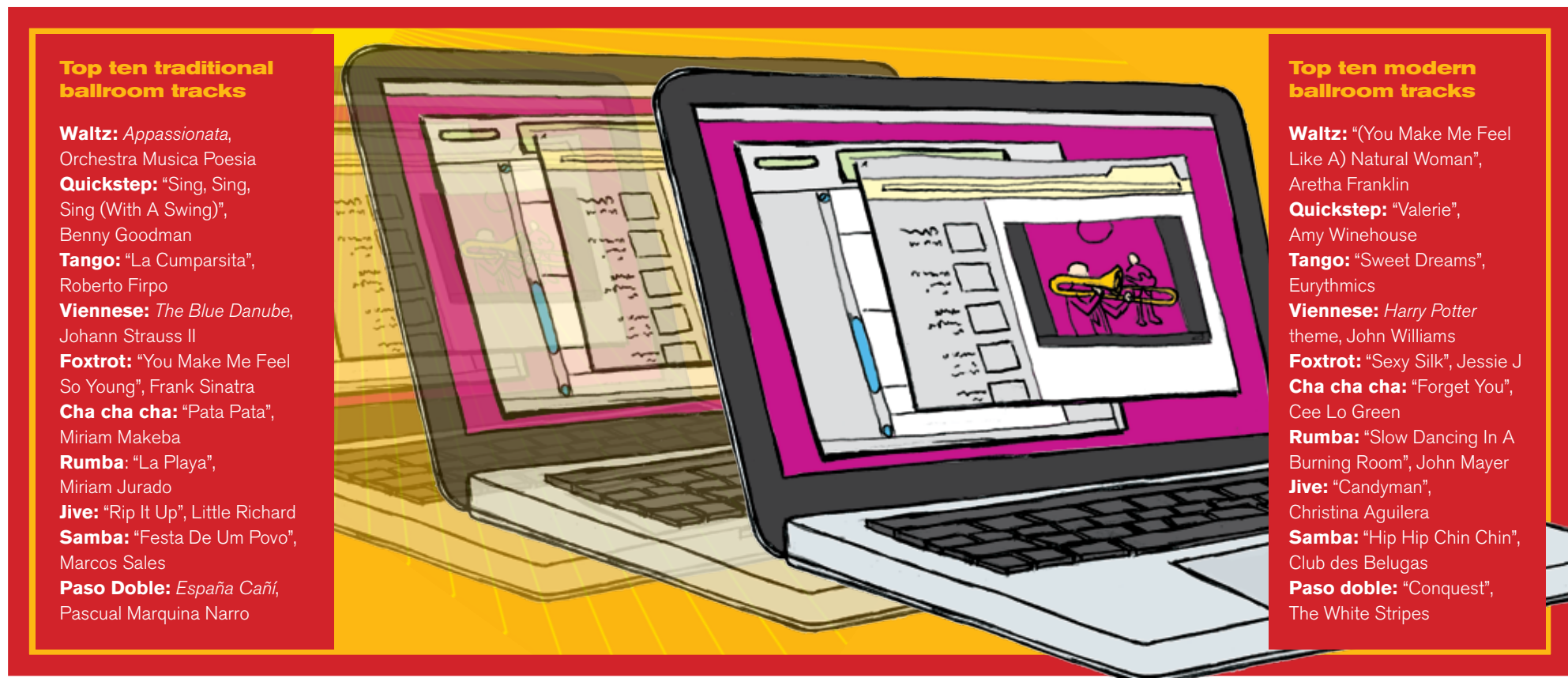
It's one of the most controversial issues in ballroom. Benny Goodman or Cee Lo Green? Ross Mitchell or Amy Winehouse? Johann Strauss or Kelly Clarkson? Do the standard styles work best paired with traditional music, or, like the dance world itself, should our musical tastes constantly evolve?

"Music needs to tell a story," proclaims "Strictly Come Dancing" star and coach Karen Hardy. "When you hear the first few bars, it should be like reading the opening words of a book – you instantly get a flash of an image. That can come from a centuries-old piece or something released yesterday."

"Music generates an emotional response, so a song that inspires one dancer might leave another cold," observes "Strictly" professional Kristina Rihanoff. "Also, different tracks suit different situations, from a wedding dance or a beginners' lesson to a theatrical production or a professional competition."

"The most important thing to understand is the texture," explains teacher and choreographer Kele Baker. "Modern or traditional, the music should have an essence that complements the dance style, whether that's rhythm, melody, narrative or feeling; you can have a piece with the right time signature that just doesn't fit with that particular style, or a track with a less obviously appropriate beat that can be adapted into something amazing."

Musician and DJ Charles Scott disagrees: "It's rare that a modern track has spot-on rhythm, so you end up fudging the style just to



Top ten traditional ballroom tracks

Waltz: *Appassionata*, Orchestra Musica Poesia

Quickstep: "Sing, Sing, Sing (With A Swing)", Benny Goodman

Tango: "La Cumparsita", Roberto Firpo

Viennese: *The Blue Danube*, Johann Strauss II

Foxtrot: "You Make Me Feel So Young", Frank Sinatra

Cha cha cha: "Pata Pata", Miriam Makeba

Rumba: "La Playa", Miriam Jurado

Jive: "Rip It Up", Little Richard

Samba: "Festa De Um Povo", Marcos Sales

Paso Doble: *España Cañí*, Pascual Marquina Narro

Top ten modern ballroom tracks

Waltz: "(You Make Me Feel Like A) Natural Woman", Aretha Franklin

Quickstep: "Valerie", Amy Winehouse

Tango: "Sweet Dreams", Eurythmics

Viennese: *Harry Potter* theme, John Williams

Foxtrot: "Sexy Silk", Jessie J

Cha cha cha: "Forget You", Cee Lo Green

Rumba: "Slow Dancing In A Burning Room", John Mayer

Jive: "Candyman", Christina Aguilera

Samba: "Hip Hip Chin Chin", Club des Belugas

Paso doble: "Conquest", The White Stripes

use something current. You should suit the music to the dance, not the other way round, especially for competitions. When I'm DJing, I always make sure beginners and younger dancers have tracks with a good strong beat, and actually I've found that even very experienced dancers appreciate strict tempo."

"There is a danger of restricting competitive dancers," concedes Karen. "If you have a samba – which has so many rhythms anyway – with a crazy melody, couples are focusing all their attention on making it work rather than pushing themselves to a higher level."

"It's certainly useful to have recognisable elements when you're teaching," adds Kristina. "When you're not used to picking out the rhythm and matching your steps to it, it's an extra challenge if you have to wade through a tricky vocal or percussive riffs. When I'm teaching beginners Latin, I'll probably use a Cuban track rather than pop – it helps you understand the rhythm and also the roots of the dance."

On the other hand, modern music can be a real draw, notes Karen: "Sometimes you need to bait the hook! If people

think of ballroom as old-fashioned and then see couples dancing to something current, or putting a fresh spin on a style with unusual music choices, that draws them in. Once they start learning, I've found that, at every level, there's a desire to hear music that relates to the dance, so actually traditional music becomes cool."

"The key is finding that unity," explains Kele. "If the music, style, story and dancers all work together, it creates a full performance. I pick Argentine tango tracks for 'Strictly' with the celebrities in mind – for example, 'Assassin's Tango'

from the *Mr and Mrs Smith* soundtrack has great dramatic content, which suited actor Jason Donovan and thus gave the wider viewing audience something to instantly connect with. I didn't pick it just because it's contemporary, but because it worked for that situation."

However, Charles thinks the "Strictly" music can make life hard for the dancers: "If a male celeb is trying to lead, it doesn't help him when the tempo is completely up the creek. I know some of the judges get annoyed when couples don't do enough basics, but if the tempo's that

confusing, it's not surprising we can hardly tell what style it is."

"Ultimately, you have to use your judgement and decide what's appropriate for certain dancers," says Karen. "We definitely shouldn't be afraid of experimenting and reinterpreting – that's what keeps ballroom fresh – but we shouldn't dismiss traditional tracks either. A good compromise is an interesting cover of a classic song – you have the solid base with a twist sparking new ideas. You need to have that excitement in what you're creating so you can maintain your passion for dance – and communicate that to others." ●