

# Mad about the boys

New boys: Artem Chigvintsev (left)  
and Jared Murillo (right)

We introduced you to “Strictly” professional Robin Windsor in our July issue. Now, **Marianka Swain** asks the two other new boys, Artem Chigvintsev and Jared Murillo, about joining the cast and what they’re planning to do with their celebrities

**A**rtem Chigvintsev and Jared Murillo have just come off set after a gruelling eight-hour day of rehearsals. “It’s definitely tiring,” admits Artem. “But I really don’t mind. This is a dream come true!”

The invitation to join this year’s cast of “Strictly Come Dancing” gives Artem a second chance to live that dream. “I was approached for the previous series, but unfortunately, I had other commitments. I then started the world tour of *Burn The Floor*, so I didn’t expect anything. When my agent called to say that “Strictly” had asked me again, I was so happy. I decided then that I had to do whatever it took to make it possible this time around.”

Jared first heard about “Strictly” try-outs from a couple of friends who were keen to audition.

“Then my agent got in touch and said they were looking for new dancers, and it could be a great

opportunity for me. I had to really prove myself, with an interview and an audition, and I was so excited when I got through.”

However, Jared was almost stolen away before “Strictly” audiences could get a glimpse of him. “Even though I’ve done a lot of work in the US, “Dancing with the Stars” hadn’t heard of me. When it was announced that I was in ‘Strictly’, they suddenly asked: ‘Who is this guy? Why haven’t we spotted him?’

“They actually contacted me and tried to persuade me to come on their show instead. I turned them down, as I’d made the commitment to ‘Strictly’, and I’m really glad I came to that decision. It’s fantastic for me to have the chance to go somewhere new, dance for a British audience and get to know the amazing cast over here, and I love London – you don’t need a car to get around! – very different to California.”

Artem did guest appearances on “Dancing with the Stars”, but it wouldn’t have been possible for him to compete. “I was dating a judge [Carrie Ann Inaba] at the time,” he explains. “But I’m really glad to be on ‘Strictly’ – it’s the best you can get in our business. It makes the hard work worth it.”

He began his commitment to ballroom in Moscow, “where it’s snowing eight months a year. As a little kid, I would get home late from school, because I was running around with the other guys, having snowball fights. My parents were worried about not knowing where I was, so they told me they were taking me somewhere interesting – and they took me to dance class. At first, I thought it was terrible, as I was really worried

about what my friends would say. We don’t understand, at that age, how blessed we’ll be to be dancing with a girl all the time!”

“I was really bad to begin with, but my mum told me to try it for a month. At the end of the month, I’d made loads of friends – dancing is so sociable – and I won a mini competition. That convinced me to stick with it, and then I met the first girl I ever had a crush on, and that was it. I’m so blessed that my parents got me into ballroom, and have been supporting me ever since.”

**J**ared also took his first steps because of his family, although his inspiration was his older siblings: “I saw them in a recital doing hip hop, and I wanted to learn it too. I then started tap, jazz and ballroom, and I kept going with ballroom because... well, you get to dance with a girl! At school dances, all the girls wanted me to show them what to do. I actually had a lot of support from my male friends, as I did sports as well – baseball, soccer, ski racing – so that made it easier for them to accept me.”

He went on to pursue a career in music, as well as ballroom, Jared is in a boyband called V Factory – “although I’m taking a break to do ‘Strictly’” – and put ➤

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his song-and-dance skills to good use as a principal dancer in the *High School Musical* films. "It was such a surprise when it became this huge phenomenon," he explains. "I was in California, and my parents told me to come back to Utah to audition for this film. I was competing, and didn't want to, but they persuaded me. I'm so glad they did! It's fantastic that, after having this musical-theatre void for so long, it's back in fashion. I'm so lucky to be in the industry right now."

Artem agrees: "I've been blessed to be born at the peak of ballroom dancing's exposure. It's great that it's become so popular with a new generation – and shows like 'Strictly', 'Dancing with the Stars' and 'So You Think You Can Dance' definitely help, showing different sides of ballroom, with contemporary music and real emotional content, as well cool tricks and lifts."

As a contestant on the first series of "So You Think You Can Dance" in the US, Artem flew the flag for ballroom. Will he bring his reality-show experience to "Strictly"? "I think doing that show, and also doing *Burn The Floor*, has given me a greater understanding of what the audience responds to.

"In 'Strictly', I'm there for my celebrity, and I really want to develop a partnership with them." (Neither of us knew when we spoke that he was to be paired with "Eastenders" pin-up Kara Tointon.) "People love the show because they see someone struggle to learn something new and they relate to that, and then they share that person's joy when they succeed. But, ultimately, it's not about the steps – it's about



At the launch show on September 11 Artem was partnered with Kara Tointon

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the relationship between a man and a woman, and communicating that to the audience."

He admits he'll be nervous for the first show, but thinks that's a good thing: "If you're not nervous, you're dead!" Jared has a strategy for coping with nerves: "I try to block it out and tell myself it's just a rehearsal, otherwise I psych myself out. That's what I'll say to my celebrity. It's just you in your own world, doing your thing and enjoying it."

He would love to have a partner who wants to entertain the crowd and have fun. (As we later find out, he is partnered with former "Corrie" star Tina O'Brien.) "That's my way of teaching – you learn more when you're having a good time and the audience feeds off that energy. My big inspiration is James Brown, the ultimate entertainer. You can tell he's really feeling the music and living the moment."

Artem says he'll try to play to his partner's strengths: "I've taught Hollywood actors how to dance back in LA, so I understand someone in the spotlight trying something out of their comfort zone. But everyone brings something to the show. If she's an actor, I can use her performance ability; if she's an athlete, she'll be able to do physically demanding moves. You have to find the star potential in every person, draw it out of them and help them look good."

Jared admits the judging process might be nerve-racking,

but thinks he and his partner will be able to handle it: "We just have to be open to constructive criticism." Artem fears he might take it personally. "It's my job to teach my partner, and I'm responsible for them, so I may be a bit defensive," he explains. "But the judges are there to help you, not put you down, and it's great to have things to work on, otherwise you get lazy."

"I'm a bit of a workaholic, and I want to do the best job I can possibly do. I love teaching when the person really wants it – that's the greatest feeling you can have. So, if they want to, I'll be there rehearsing 15, 20 hours a day! And I don't mind doing things over and over and over again, even if we're getting sick of it. At the end of the day, the more effort we put in, the better they'll look when they're performing."

Jared admits that he sometimes misses competing at a high level, but he says "Strictly" offers the best of both worlds. "You're

competing and you're having fun and I'm looking forward to connecting with a new audience." Artem hopes the British audience will accept them: "We're the new guys, which can be hard! We'll definitely bring something different, but I'd never take anything away from the other pros. We'll just have to do our best and hope it works out."

As for the dances, Jared is most enthusiastic about doing cha cha cha and jive: "They're both fun, party dances. Cha cha

is quick and staccato, and in jive, you get to bounce around and show a lot of personality: I think they're both crowd-pleasers."

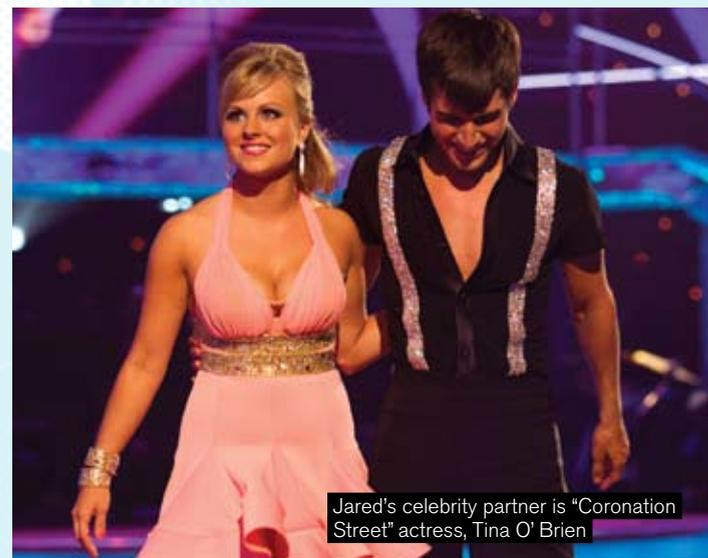
Artem loves the paso doble. "It's really about strong male and female roles – it's the most masculine dance for the leader, and the follower can show both beauty and drama, but there's something in every dance that I love. If you get a good chemistry between you, you really get to the heart of ballroom dancing."

**B**oth Artem and Jared have had relationships with co-stars or fellow dancers in the past: Artem with dance partner Giselle Peacock and Jared with *High School Musical's* Ashley Tisdale and Ashley Galvan of "Dancing with the Stars". Are they hoping to develop a special chemistry with their "Strictly" partner? "A good relationship, definitely," says Jared. "I'm looking forward to working with someone completely new, and getting to know them well."

Artem believes you have to be careful not to get too close: "I don't think it always works out dancing with your wife or your girlfriend. Obviously, it helps to have some attraction between you, so you can tell a story and have a strong bond, but it can get a bit much, seeing them all day at the studio and then at home as well."

One "Strictly" couple that famously made that commitment work is Brian Fortuna and Ali Bastian, who starred together in *Burn The Floor*. Did they give Artem any tips when he was working with them? "Yes. Ali said the golden rule is make it easy for your partner!" he smiles. ● ►

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Jared's celebrity partner is "Coronation Street" actress, Tina O'Brien

# Strictly starring...

This year's celebrity line-up – who will you be voting for?  
Back row, from left to right: Felicity Kendal, Gavin Henson, Goldie, Kara Tointon, Matt Baker, Michelle Williams, Jimi Mistry, Peter Shilton and Scott Maslen. Front row, from left to right: Paul Daniels, Patsy Kensit, Tina O'Brien, Pamela Stephenson and Ann Widdecombe



To keep up with the latest "Strictly" gossip, visit [www.dance-today.co.uk](http://www.dance-today.co.uk) for Marianka Swain's new blog "Strictly speaking"