

VERY SUPERSTITIOUS

Ballroom greats share their cherished competition customs with **Marianka Swain**

Karen Hardy, former World Masters Professional Latin champion

My one ritual before every competition and performance is a cup of tea – real English tea! No matter where I am in the world, that's my must-have. I found Russia one of the hardest places to source it and Thailand had the most weird-tasting. A lot of people are confused when they see me adding milk to my tea, particularly when they realise it's cold milk. I'm a true Englishwoman!

Flavia Cacace, Strictly Come Dancing champion 2012

Before every show I have to brush my shoes, and every time I come off stage I do the same before I go back on. I do it as often as I can.

Csaba Csetneki, Men's Same-Sex Ballroom World champion with Balázs Gáti

We have a little break before competitions – we need the rest from dancing, from the routine and from each other! We always say: "Let's have a great performance, just like in training," and before the finals, I like to sing a song from *Funny Girl* with the lyrics changed: "I'm the greatest star, I am by far, and let them know it!"

Dusan Dragovic and Greta Laurinaityte, Amateur Ballroom finalists at Blackpool

Just before a competition or performance we think about our secret word, which we've chosen because it epitomises the movement of our bodies, especially tango – our best dance. It helps us focus on creating a different world, full of passion, emotion and the feelings between a man and a woman. That focus means we can come out full of energy, ready to show the audience something new and exciting.

Shirley Ballas, former International and UK Open Professional Latin champion

I used to always brush my shoes and castor oil them. I had to have the same towel for 20 years. And I always walked on from the left side of the stage.

"A LITTLE TRADITIONAL RITUAL OF MINE THAT I'VE BEEN DOING FOR A LONG TIME, ESPECIALLY BEFORE GOING ON THE FLOOR TO PERFORM, IS SINGING OUT LOUD OR MAKING VOCAL SOUNDS LIKE 'AOMS'"

JOANNA LEUNIS

Mark and Olga Elsbury, four-time British National Amateur Ballroom champions

Olga: On a competition day, I believe you shouldn't lend things to people, as you'll be giving success away, so if you ask me for something, I'm afraid the answer's no!

Mark: I'm not that superstitious, but I'll avoid the obvious ones on the day of a comp, like not walking under ladders, and some less obvious ones, like not walking under signposts or stepping on drains.

Joanna Leunis, six-time British Open Professional Latin champion

A little traditional ritual of mine that I've been doing for a long time, especially before going on the floor to perform, is singing out loud or making vocal sounds like "AOMS". I have to admit I'm not a great singer, so I don't think it's very pleasant for anyone nearby, but I do feel it helps me get out of my mind and into my body.

Gary Lyness and Paula Moulton AKA Strictly Wheels, International Amateur Wheelchair Dancesport Latin champions

Our only superstition before we go on is a big hug! ●