



## *Strictly international*

The hit BBC show is a worldwide phenomenon, discovers **Marianka Swain**

**T**he goal is for audiences to tune in and know instantly it's a version of *Dancing with the Stars*," explains Adam Waddell, director of entertainment brands at BBC Worldwide, which is responsible for *Strictly Come Dancing's* global domination. "The

music, glamour, dances, dancers, lighting, costumes, set – and the all-important glitterball – combined provide an indefinable magic."

The challenge, notes Adam, is staying true to the original, but adapting to a different cultural context. The show was first exported in 2004 to Australia and

has since appeared on six continents, in nations as diverse as South Africa, Kazakhstan, Finland and India. Three BBC Worldwide "flying producers" help local broadcasters make the best version for their country, tailoring every aspect.

"The pro-celebrity pairing is essential, as is the 50:50 ▶

India's version of *Dancing with the Stars*, *Jhalak Dikhhla Jaa*



scoring and voting, and we always start with the traditional ten ballroom dances," says Adam. "But the different durations, separate results shows, themed weeks, marathons, group dances, dance-offs and innumerable twists provide a huge arsenal. That and the constantly renewed cast keeps it fresh,

**Strictly stats**

- ◆ It's travelled to more than 50 countries
- ◆ Over 250 series have been recorded to date.
- ◆ Every week of 2013, a version was in production somewhere across the globe.

season after season."

Many countries use the iconic theme music, "and the structure remains the same: rehearsal footage, live performance, judges' comments, backstage chat and the all-important reveal of the scores, plus a weekly elimination". Other fixed elements across the world include the set, with its large dancefloor and twin staircases framing the band, enthusiastic studio audience and judges' desk. "Scoring panels are a must! However, colour scheme, finish and design all reflect local tastes."

*D*arren Bennett and Lilia Kopylova use their insider *Strictly*

knowledge in their work as judges and consultants on multiple new versions. "BBC Worldwide asked for our help setting up the Turkish show, particularly in finding suitable professionals. Not every country has homegrown ballroom talent, so it has to be imported, or we use local dancers but have foreign choreographers working with them. The audience engages more when there's at least a few locals – look at the response to 'Kevin from Grimsby!' – and if we can train up some each series, we leave a legacy of dance in that country. It's great to have new influences as well though – pros like Artem

Photograph © BBC Worldwide



Darren Bennett (far right) judging in the Middle East

**Strictly success**

"It blends celebrity, competition and glamour. It's wish fulfilment for the audience, and you know you'll get great value every single week." *Darren*

"You're so aware it's live and anything can happen. There's the stress of 'Will it come together?' – and when it does, it's incredible." *James*

"It's fun, shiny-floor entertainment and 'event TV' families can enjoy together. There's something inspiring about seeing people striving and excelling at new experiences, and every show is a spectacle, built on creativity, ingenuity and hard work." *Adam*

have brought a lot to the British version."

James Wilson has done numerous *Strictly*-related stage shows and was delighted to join the pro dancer cast for the Turkish debut in 2010. "The biggest challenge was the language barrier – my pop star celebrity didn't speak much English, so we did lots of signalling and I learned some Turkish dance jargon. It meant I couldn't articulate why you place your foot in a certain position, just 'Foot forward' and hope for the best. Still, it meant I got to dance on the biggest show in the world, watched by millions, and learn a new language at the same time!

"With the time constraints, it's more making sure they remember the routine than in-depth technique, though I tried to maintain ballroom standards – it's *Strictly*, after all. Lilia was the only judge with competitive ballroom experience, and the Turkish public considered it more aesthetically than with great dance knowledge. After the third week we stopped doing slow dances, as viewers preferred upbeat numbers – that meant doing styles like salsa, mambo and cha cha every week, so it was tricky keeping it fresh. Music-wise, it was about 50:50 traditional and Turkish. Some of their music is just spectacular and fitted

the dances brilliantly – you get rhythmical drums and that haunting Arabic sound."

"People complain here when *Strictly* doesn't use traditional music, but if you have five tangos on one night, you need variation," argues Darren. "As long as it has the right beat, it's fine – we use lots of oriental music in the Middle East. The important thing is distinguishing the styles in the first few weeks, so the audience familiarises themselves with each, then getting creative later on. We've also added new dances: mambo, hustle, Bollywood, 'contemporary ballroom', which blends the two." ▶

Photograph © Darren Bennett



Pamela Anderson on *Dancing with the Stars* in the US



Above, Lilia judging in Turkey. Below, Veronica Ngô Thanh Vân performs on *Dancing with the Stars* in Vietnam

As for being sensitive to different cultures when it comes to sexiness, “the tiny costumes aren’t a problem so much as how you perform – no grinding!

### Strictly scoring

Darren judged on the Middle East show, and helps develop new panels. “You need a mixed group with different perspectives – Len says it wouldn’t work with four of him. I tell judges to think visually, paint a picture for people at home, and communicate clearly. Don’t overthink the scoring – go with your gut!”

Promote the show with a classy image and people will respect it. Beyond that, lots of companies know TV, but not dancing, so we advise on style, costumes, how to shoot movement. I tell directors if I can’t watch a routine back and copy it as a dancer, it’s wrong – you can have some close-ups of faces, but not at the expense of footwork, body shots, following the line of a lift. Basically, once the show really focuses on dance, it can’t fail!”

“It’s given me amazing experiences and definitely helped my career,” believes James, who did two seasons in Turkey and stayed there to choreograph and perform on *The Voice*. “I’d love to do more abroad – I’m a secret gypsy!”



“Pros on the international shows get lots of opportunities, plus it really changes people’s perceptions of who can dance and what it offers – you see that filtering down to studios,” observes Darren. As in the UK, it can take a few seasons before a male winner breaks through, “especially where it’s not culturally established that men dance. But if you stick with the brand, that joy of dance translates, wherever you are.” ●