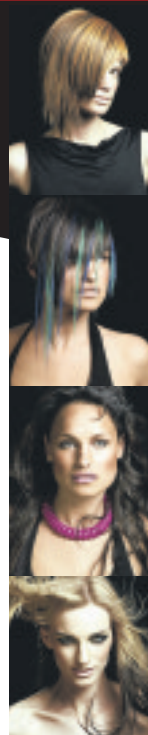


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## THE GLITZ AND GLAMOUR AS OUR REPORTER GETS A PLACE IN AUDIENCE

# Hitting the ballroom for Strictly Come Dancing...

by Georgina Butler

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SEQUINS sparkle in the glare of the glitter ball and I pinch myself to check this is not fantasy. I really am in the studio audience for Strictly Come Dancing.

Nine hours earlier I had left Milton Keynes Central on a train to Shepherd's Bush, full of anticipation and lucky enough to have two coveted e-tickets for the new series of Strictly.

However, these were enough to get myself and my guest into the ballroom only on a first-come-first-served basis - we still needed to arrive early.

My "chuffed" Mum and I (description provided by my bemused Dad) planned to arrive well before the 3.30pm specified on our tickets and when we arrived outside BBC Television Centre at 11.40am, 70 fans were queuing, prepared with picnics and even foldable chairs.

First in line was Sarah, from Bromley, who arrived at 9am and reported seeing rugby star, turned ballroom novice, Gavin Henson going in.

Next, a couple from Aylesbury who arrived at 9.30am, then someone from Manchester, and the list continued.

The queue grew steadily and as people joined, their faces dropped at its length.

Over 800 e-tickets were sent to ensure a full-house but only 200 fans were allowed inside with remaining seats reserved for production guests. Thrilled to have made it in,

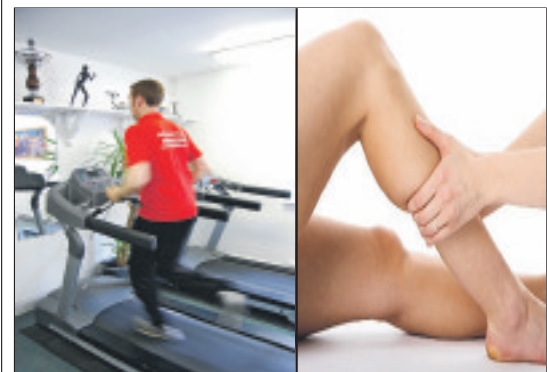
we handed over mobile phones to security before visiting a waiting area. An hour later, we entered the studio and were given seats with a perfect view of the dance floor, to the right of the judging panel. Everything was much smaller than it appears on television and it was surreal to be on the instantly-recognisable set.

Studio audience team member, the jovial Richard, explained the set goes up on Fridays and comes down on Saturday nights, before the studio is prepared for the Jools Holland show on Tuesdays.

Considering the lavish set for Strictly, this seems a mammoth task and, naively, I had thought the Strictly studio remained for the whole series.

From the moment we stepped into the studio, time flew as Brucie ("nice to see you to see you nice") treated us to a song and jokes before the cameras started rolling then, joined by the exceptionally welcoming - and tall - Tess Daly, he was the consummate professional for the duration.

Among the production guests I spotted Gail Platt from Corrie (actress Helen Worth), Debbie McGee (wife of contestant, magician Paul Daniels) and Salsa dance coaches Chris Marques and Jaclyn Spencer.



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STRICTLY ENTERTAINMENT: Far left, Anton Du Beke with dance partner Ann Widdecombe; left, Georgina with studio audience team member Richard, above, this year's Strictly celebrity dancers; right, Brendan Cole with his dance partner Michelle Williams, below, the crowds gather to get in to the show; below left, professional dancer Vincent Simone and Felicity Kendall



I saw every flicker of movement as the pro dancers and their celebrity partners executed their intricate footwork.

Anything I missed, as the cameramen raced around the dancers – so close that there was almost a collision with Brendan Cole – I was able to catch on one of the many monitors dotted around the audience area.

The production staff must be acknowledged, at home you do not realise the meticulous planning that goes into filming a programme like Strictly.

Obviously, the efforts of the dancers and celebrities are the focus of the show and they did not disappoint as the audience was spellbound. Professional dancer Vincent Simone grinned and waved at me, as did head judge Len Goodman, before they both made their entrance.

As if that was not exciting enough, for the results show, which is also filmed

on Saturdays, I sat next to ex-Strictly professional, Lilia Kopylova, there supporting husband Darren, who was performing as part of the new professional dance troupe.

No longer part of Strictly, Lilia nonetheless has plans for future projects and is still teaching and dancing with Darren.

So, not only was I one of a select few to know before the rest of the country who was first to be voted out, I also brushed

shoulders with a Strictly champion.

Finally, I get to place my size 3s onto that famous dance floor.

All I can say is "Keep dancing".



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