

BBC Come Dancing

Alison Foley from Banbury sent me a copy of an article she had enjoyed reading in the magazine celebrating the 70th anniversary of "Come Dancing", in September 2020.

The show started in 1950 and went on to become the BBC's longest running series. In the austerity years after the war it was the right type of light relief everyone needed. The BBC had produced other dancing programmes during and just after the war but it was Come Dancing that took Britain's passion for dancing to a whole new level. The



First episode of Come Dancing

format of the programme gradually evolved to the competition dance off style that viewers enjoyed, tuning in to see who would win the crown tonight, the Home Counties or North East for example. There were an impressive list of



Peggy Spencer (left) on Come Dancing with Terry Wogan

presenters over the years including Peter Dimmock, Peter West, Terry Wogan and of course our own Patron Angela Rippon. Come Dancing brought much joy into our homes for so long and made us all want to keep dancing. Although Strictly has brought ballroom dancing back to our screen it is a shame there is no Old Time section.

When I was preparing this article for our newsletter, I took the opportunity to contact Angela Rippon to ask if she could write an article on her memories of Come Dancing for our newsletter, I was delighted when Angela sent in the article on the following pages.

*Picture right
The Ted Burroughs formation team
competing in the BBC's
Come Dancing, filmed at the
Winter Gardens Pavilion
Weston-Super-Mare*



Being asked to present Come Dancing for the BBC in 1988 was like being handed a dream job on a silver plate.

I had been sent to ballet school when I was about 5 years old – and have loved dance ever since. Attending ballet class, then learning to tap dance and having the chance to study modern dance meant that until I was 17, dance classes took up most of the spare time at week ends and during week day evenings. I just loved it, and as a bonus, I learnt to ballroom dance by doing what so many little girls still do. I stood on my father's feet as he did the waltz and quickstep. My dad was a great, natural dancer – so even though I've never had a formal ballroom lesson, I can still do a pretty neat fishtail and fleckerl. So can you imagine my reaction when I got a phone call from the controller of BBC One at the time, the legendary Billy Cotton, asking "How would you like to host Come Dancing" I think I walked on air for the rest of the day.

It meant that every year until 1991 I spent a couple of weeks working from the spectacular Tower Ballroom in Blackpool, where Come Dancing was recorded. The floor there is just sensational – probably one of the best dance floors in the country. You can stand on the edge, and feel the floor moving as it springs under the feet of the dancers.

The programme had everything, fabulous live music provided by Andy Ross and his orchestra. The colour and glamour of the costumes, the sheer brilliance and dedication of the amateur dancers, the sex appeal of the dances, and the stiff competition between regions of the country.

I used to love the rehearsals when couples, would repeat again and again their Latin and ballroom dances to perfect and hone their technique and presentation under the watchful and critical eyes of their trainers.

Watching the formation teams drill to military perfection the lines and patterns of their routines. Especially the Peggy Spencer Latin team from Penge, a name that has always stuck in my memory.

And then the highlight of every week – a performance by a world or European champion couple showcasing the brilliance that made them world beaters. Couples like Latin stars Danny Burns and Gaynor Fairweather, or Sammy Stopford and Barbara McColl. The world ballroom champions Karen and Marcus Hilton. Our amateur competitors learnt so much watching them, and our audience loved the sheer artistry of their performances. They even allowed me to dance with them occasionally!

I was the show's 16th presenter, following in the footsteps of such household names as Terry Wogan, Michael Aspel, Peter West and Judith Chalmers. Shortly after I left the series, it was taken off air completely, much to the despair of dancers and dance fans all over the country.

Strictly Come Dancing has re-ignited the nation's love of competitive dancing in a show that combines total amateurs with professionals and it's a huge hit. But there was something rather special about watching regions of the country, compete against each other, showcasing the best of that region's dedicated amateur dancers. Many of whom have gone on to become outstanding professionals and champions. Yes there were lots of sequins. But there was also a magic that lit up our TV screens every week.

I do hope that you and all the members will be able to get back on the dance floor very soon. In the mean time warmest best wishes to everyone in the Society.

Regards Angela Rippon

I enjoyed putting this article together and I hope you find it an interesting read, I especially enjoyed Angela's article. Send in your memories of Come Dancing, were you in a formation team? or did you represent your area? It would be lovely to hear members memories of the show, did it encourage you to dance?

Editor Paul



DID YOU KNOW?
At its peak,
Come Dancing
attracted
audiences of
12 million



Members of the Sybil Marks Formation Dance team from Cardiff who in 1974 represented Wales against Home Counties South in Come Dancing