

## Behind the Scenes at... 'Strictly Come Dancing'

"Would you like a couple of tickets for the production of Strictly Come Dancing next Saturday?" was the question put to me. I nearly bit off his hand! I have been a fan of the programme for many years and an invitation out of the blue like this was fantastic.



not know, but he did tell us that there had been one million applications from the general public for that night's show - a staggering statistic and a measure of the show's popularity. The team then started to pre-record various elements of the show - principally the

introductory act by the professional dancers and the singing element from the visiting artists (Madness); some of which had to be done twice to get the best results.

### **A Great Vantage Point**

It was for the Halloween Night edition, and my wife and I had to be at Elstree Studios by no later than 4.15 pm for the 6.30 live show. We made it in good time and, after waiting in an anteroom until 4.30 pm we, along with some 200 or so 'Production Team Guests', were ushered into the huge hangar-like building in which the stage, dance floor and auditorium were built. For those who are familiar with the programme we were seated some four rows behind and to the right of where the judges sit - an ideal position to observe everything. I estimate that there were some 800 people seated around the dance floor and, at this point, we faced a two-hour wait until the live performance went on air. This time was orchestrated by a 'continuity man' (for want of a better name) who walked around with a microphone briefing us on what we were expected to do. He was charmingly amusing, and great fun. He told us as an audience when we were to clap, shout out, stand up, laugh (at presenters' jokes) and generally conduct ourselves as a body. How true it was I do

### **Brucie at 85 - Amazing**

Then, with 15 minutes to run, Sir Bruce Forsyth came on stage for his warm-up session. I was so impressed. For an 85 year old man he was outstanding! Without notes, prompts or any outside help he entertained us with songs, little dances and jokes right up till the launch of the show - and I am sure every guest there warmed to him. Meanwhile the judges had all arrived in their positions, stage hands had been unobtrusively arranging props, camera men and sound engineers moved about practising their positionings - all of whom were dressed entirely in black to be as inconspicuous as possible. The whole atmosphere was amazingly relaxed as we ran up to the 'on air' time when the show started at 6.30 pm. There was a TV screen high above us where we could watch what was actually going out on air and of course the introduction was all the pre-recorded stuff we are all

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familiar with. Then Bruce and Tessa arrived and the show started live. If you are a fan of the show it will need no explanation. But the glamour was there, the performances were delightful and there was no obvious tension whatsoever. There were, of



course, pre-recorded interludes, for example when Bruce invited the audience to see the performers - "here they are in training?" - prior to their individual dance. This allowed about two or three minutes for the stagehands to set the scenery. This was fascinatingly slick. They moved about, placing this item here and the next item there while the dancers stepped into their start positions. Then we were back to the live show again for the dance, the judges' verdicts, and the subsequent interview before the next round started again. The audience needed no prompting as we all gave our applause and standing ovations spontaneously.

### **Comfort Break at Last!**

At the end of the live show the whole place relaxed with an audible sigh. The judges moved away, the celebrities in the audience (including last year's winner and Andy Murray's mother) all disappeared to some 'entertainment' venue, and our continuity man reappeared with his microphone to entertain us. At last we were allowed out for a 'comfort break' which, to accommodate 800 or so people in a very short time, was a remarkable feat of organisation! We were each also presented with a small packet of fruit juice and a bar of chocolate to sustain us for the rest of the evening.

It is surely no secret that the 'Results Show', broadcast on Sunday evenings, is recorded immediately after the live show - it does not need a genius to work this out.

### **Dreaded DDO**

For this show Darcey Bussell put on an even more glamorous dress and the performers

awaited the 'Dreaded Dance Off' (DDO) competition between the two lowest performances as voted by the judges and the 13,000,000 viewers. The tensions certainly rise for this part of the show. Positioned under the spotlights, each of the performing couples only relaxed once Tessa had called their names to confirm their continuation next week. The two couples destined for the DDO really were distressed, as were the audience. We felt that neither deserved to be there and there was real sadness at the departure of one of the competing pair of dancers.

Memorable points for us were the wonderful design of the studio, all glitter and lights hiding the scaffolding structure behind, and the sheer number of people involved in putting on the show - we guessed at some 100 by the time all the stewards, stage hands, camera men, prop makers, costume designers and so on were all totted up. There may even have been more.

The whole event deserved our praise and admiration and as representatives of 'Jo Public' it was a fascinating experience. Even though we did not get home till after midnight, I would gladly go again tomorrow!

**Hamish Harvey**