

'Everything I do is for Mum'

SINGER AND THEATRE STAR
ALEXANDRA BURKE, 29,
WON THE X FACTOR IN 2008

I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS is really happening! I've been trying to get on *Strictly* for years, so being asked was a dream come true. I didn't hesitate for a second – as soon as I got the call, I postponed my album and my single. I cancelled everything!

Before I discovered singing, I loved to dance. At school I studied contemporary and street dance and loved every second. But then my mum [Soul II Soul lead singer Melissa Bell] discovered I could sing and encouraged me in that direction. *Strictly* is an amazing opportunity for me to rediscover that first passion.

THE ONLY THING that I'm worried might hold me back is my nerves. Everyone thinks that because I won "the other show" – can I mention *The X Factor*? – I'm comfortable performing in front of an audience and I'm used to being judged, but that was all about singing and I've been singing all my life.

More recently, I've been performing in theatre – I've just finished doing six or seven shows a week of *Sister Act* on stage on the UK tour, but again that was mostly singing, so I felt in control.

My biggest fear is falling flat on my face, live on air, in front of millions of people! The trick I've always used when I go on stage is to pretend I'm in my bedroom and performing to the teddy bears on my bed. So instead of Shirley, Bruno, Darcey and Craig, I'll be dancing for my pink bear, Family. I can't think about who is actually there.

The one thing that will drive me is my mum, who recently passed away. My being on the show was a dream of hers, as well as mine, so doing the best I can on *Strictly* means a lot to me.

My mum was my biggest critic. And she has turned me into a perfectionist; everything I do is for her. So when I step on to that dance floor on Saturday night I want to do the best I can and make her proud.

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Márquez will
be giving
Alexandra
the X factor

SCORCHER
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Dianne Buswell
has faith in
Richard

Meet the *Strictly* stars...

Starting with our new columnists,
Alexandra Burke and
the Rev Richard Coles

Strictly Come Dancing Saturday 6.25pm BBC1

'We stripped to our pants'

THE REV RICHARD COLES, 55, IS
A RADIO 4 PRESENTER – AND VICAR
OF ST MARY THE VIRGIN, FINEDON

THERE'S SO MUCH to enjoy in the *Strictly* experience, but for a nosy person like me, being backstage is particularly delicious. I've watched the show for years, and while I enjoy the world it conjures from glitter and dreams, I've always been curious about how they actually do it.

Who sews the rhinestones on the dancers? Who ensures that the glitter-arrives? How did I go this sensational shade of conker? To the last question the answer is thanks to Gemma, from the spray tan team, whose empire is next to wardrobe and make-up in the Corridor of Strictification.

It is Gemma's job to ensure we are bronzed to ballroom standards. We queue, in batches of "boys and girls", and are admitted two by two for the health and safety briefing (allergies, skin conditions, new tattoos or piercings?). We promise we have exfoliated, and then strip to our pants, an unusual experience for a vicar in his middle years, who would normally recoil from getting undressed even for surgery.

But there's no time for embarrassment and I have now got so used to looking like a blancmange while standing next to the Herculean Davood Ghadami that the anxiety dreams have almost stopped. We step, at Gemma's instruction, into what look like mini bio-hazard shower cubicles and onto two sticky footprints that protect the soles of our feet from the gunge. Then we exfoliate once more, and turn and raise our arms and legs as she expertly applies the spray, which feels a little ticklish and smells a bit of old biscuits.

We step out, five minutes later, looking like we've had a fortnight in Gran Canaria. We're halfway to being Strictlified, base metal turned, if not into gold, at least into tinsel. But anything that adds a bit of sparkle to the buttoned-up middle-50s is worth an open hip twist and a cha-cha-cha.