

'I say a little prayer'

Our *Strictly* columnists seek divine inspiration

Alexandra Burke

In the build-up to our performance on Saturday night I was truly a bag of nerves. I'm always nervous before any performance but the pressure of rehearsing eight hours a day to impress the judges in a minute and a half is crazy!

I tried everything to get into the right frame of mind for the performance, because the more nervous I become, the more hyper I get, which results in me rushing the whole routine and forgetting my timing.

I've started putting lavender oil on the soles of my feet to calm me down, and I swear by Rescue Remedy. I'm trying to do yoga and meditation every morning using an app on my phone. And just before I went out on stage I said a little prayer.

I prayed that I would perform the routine the best that I could and I prayed that everyone around me was happy and in a positive place for us all to come together and create a great show, because it's not all about me. It takes an amazing team of people to create each performance.

Praying and going to church on a Sunday helps me be positive, hopeful and thankful,

'Going to church helps me be positive and hopeful'

which is a really important part of my life – and if I can't make it there, I stream the service on my phone. The message last Sunday was that God will always give you the strength to continue what you are meant to do on this Earth while you are going through hard times. That spoke volumes to me.

That support got me through my performance and will drive me through this competition. When times are hard or challenging, it's so important to find positivity and a way to see the best in your situation and in other people. For others that support doesn't come from the church but it's important that if you can't find it within yourself, you find it somewhere – it could be watching *Strictly!* Because we all need an escape – and where better than the world of sequins and glitterballs?

HELP FROM ABOVE
Alexandra Burke and the Rev Richard Coles



The Rev Richard Coles

After undergoing our Strictlification in spangles, spray tan and liniment, and being a very tightknit gang of 15 during the launch and live shows, there's a sudden change of gear as we depart the studios with our professional partners to train. I would have pined for the reassurance of my new pals had I not been fortunate enough to be paired with Dianne Buswell, or Reddo as she's known, who not only puts me rigorously through my paces but is also a whirlwind of energy, curiosity and fun. The process of getting to know the steps – and each other – is proving intoxicating.

Dianne is Australian, and practically half my age, so our cultural references do not always overlap. Just as she has been teaching me the mysteries of the rotating hip, the shimmy and how to get your nose over your toes, so I have been introducing her to English country parishes, 80s synth pop and the sleeper train.

The last of these was a big hit, and some compensation, I hope, for her having to traipse around after me and my work commitments, which have taken me to Scotland to shoot *The Big Painting Challenge* for BBC1 and given her the opportunity to empty every shoe shop from Edinburgh to Glasgow. And then, in the evening, we meet to rehearse, taking us nearer to the next live show and me having to perform in front of millions and face the public vote.

'I've been praying fervently to St Vitus, patron saint of dancers'

Far from home, and without my fellow celebs around for solidarity, I have been praying fervently for the support of St Vitus, patron saint of dancers. This did not go unnoticed by my lovely parishioners, who welcomed me back on Sunday with a display in honour of St Vitus for our Flower Festival. I'm pretty sure it's the first time a glitterball has appeared on our 14th-century south aisle. Let there be light!