

# Holding out for a hero

Marianka Swain asks leading industry figures to name their dance hero or heroine



Kristina Rihanoff  
and Colin Salmon

## **Kristina Rihanoff,** *Strictly Come Dancing professional*

I have always been a big fan of **Patrick Swayze** [her subject on *Celebrity Mastermind*]. He was a truly great dancer and partner, but also an amazing human being. I devoured his biography – it was one of the best and most fascinating life stories I've ever read.

## **Betsy Gregory,** *Dance Umbrella artistic director*

Without the vision, flair, generosity and pioneering work of **Val Bourne**, founder of Dance Umbrella, the flourishing contemporary dance scene we now have in London simply would not exist. Thank you, Val, for bringing such inspirational work to the public and for supporting and developing the careers of so many wonderful dancers and choreographers from across the world.

## **Shirley Ballas,** *former World Latin champion*

**Sammy Stopford** has inspired me since I met him when I was 17. He's a wise owl! He has an amazing eye for what looks good on a couple, and you'll always get loyalty and honesty from him – he would not trade his friends for anything. He is the industry's mastermind, responsible for such dancers as Marcus and Karen Hilton, Donnie Burns and Gaynor Fairweather, myself and Barbara McColl, to name but a few. I am who I am today because of the skills this great man taught me. I will be eternally grateful. ▶



Dance icon  
Gene Kelly

**Arlene Phillips,  
choreographer**

I saw **Gene Kelly's** films when I was young, and he made me fall in love with dance. The way he could tell a story through movement, and his strength and power, was just overwhelming. He was the hero I dreamed of dancing with. He inspired me to explore every style, not just ballet, which was my first love, but ballroom, Latin, tap and American jazz. He showed me the meaning of expression through dance, and that the body is an amazing tool you can work with to create whatever you want and to speak any language.

Photograph from the Dancing Times archive

**Monica Elbs, Chrisanne designer**

**William Pino and Alessandra Bucciarelli** are amazing to watch. They're absolutely breathtaking – so much passion and art in their performance. I also love Donnie Burns and Gaynor Fairweather, and Walter Laird and Lorraine Reynolds, the creators of the Latin technique book – they inspired so many people, and the technique you see people using today is based on their work.



**Ross Mitchell, bandleader**

**Peggy Spencer** (pictured left) is a great inspiration, and she helped me enormously throughout my career. She always encouraged and supported me, involving my band in functions at her dance school and giving me advice on how to succeed in the industry. Best of all, she never lost her love of dance, and her passion reminds me to keep enjoying what I'm doing and share that with others.

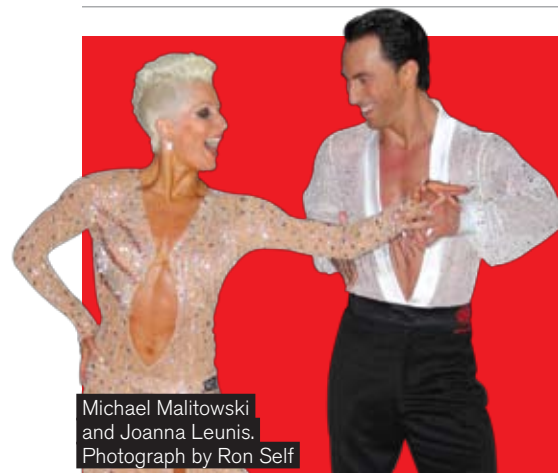
**Patrick Swayze was a truly great dancer and partner, but also an amazing human being. I devoured his biography – it was one of the best and most fascinating life stories I've ever read" – Kristina Rihanoff**



Andrea Ghigiarelli  
and Sara Andracchio.  
Photograph by Ron Self

**Andrea Ghigiarelli  
and Sara Andracchio, current  
European Standard  
champions**

Our dance heroes are **the wonderful professionals we admired as children**, such as Marcus and Karen Hilton, Luca and Loraine Baricchi, Augusto Schiavo, Massimo Giorgianni and Alessia Manfredini, Andrew Sinkinson, Fabio Selmi and their partners. We were so inspired by their quality of movement and how beautifully they inhabited every style, and we always said: "One day, we want to become like them!"



Michael Malitowski  
and Joanna Leunis.  
Photograph by Ron Self

**Luke Miller and  
Hanna Cresswell,  
British Youth competitors**

**Luke: Michael Malitowski and Michael Jackson.**

Both really dance to the music and get lost in the movement, making every step their own. That inspires me every time I step onto the competition floor.

**Hanna: My idol is Yulia Zagoruychenko** because she has the most incredible work ethic and determination to succeed! Also, she has a passion for inhabiting the music when she dances, just like me and Luke, and she inspires me to keep fighting for my dream.

**Rachael Heron,  
British Professional  
Latin champion**

The one person who inspires me most is my own dance partner, **Gregor Rebula**. The reason is very simple: he believes in me like nobody else and pushes me to want to be better and believe I can be better – I'm no longer afraid to try different things or go outside of my comfort zone.

**Kele Baker,  
choreographer**

**Gene Kelly** was athletic and masculine but also emotional, a master at telling the story of the character through movement and expression. He only started dancing as a teenager, relatively late in life, which shows you can embrace dance at any age. I also love **Mikhail Baryshnikov**, because he made the difficult look easy. He is short in stature (1.68m/5"5") but was a giant as a performer with the most incredible stage presence.

Photograph from the Dancing Times archive



Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers  
have inspired countless dancers

**Darcey Bussell, former  
Royal Ballet principal and  
Strictly Come Dancing judge**

**Fred Astaire** was so iconic, and he looked absolutely amazing in tails! He had incredible rhythm and was a very natural dancer, making him a joy to watch. Choreographically, he was very ahead of his time and he didn't have that prototype "Hollywood" look, which I think made him stand out even more. ➤



### **Karen Hilton, former World Standard champion**

My dance hero would have to be **Mrs Bobbie Irvine** (pictured above with *Bill Irvine*). When I was a little girl, competing in all-girl competitions with my sister Cheryl, we chose bright-yellow dresses just like the one Bobbie wore on the cover of an LP record. Even at that early age we could recognise her film star glamour and we tried to emulate it.

Later, I was privileged to have Bobbie as a teacher, a mentor, a colleague and eventually as a very close friend. Bobbie's greatest inspiration was not only her absolute professionalism and attention to detail but also her kindness to one and all. Elegance personified, Bobbie influenced everybody she met. I think of her often and repeat her words of wisdom and advice to my pupils and friends. Bobbie gave me a legacy for life!

### **Jason Gilkison, director/ choreographer of *Burn The Floor***

My grandfather, **Sam Gilkison**, is my dance hero. It wasn't until later in my life that I realised the part that he played. He was a real pioneer, taking [ballroom] dance from Scotland, on a boat, to the other side of the world, Perth, Australia, and starting a ballroom dancing studio in 1931.

### **Sharon Watson, Phoenix Dance Theatre artistic director**

**Nadine Senior**, founder and principal of the Northern School of Contemporary Dance, was not a dancer but a teacher and a visionary. She did so much behind the scenes, allowing talent to shine through. The Leeds dance scene thrives as a result of her tenacity, and the sector is the better for her ongoing contribution through and for people. Her teaching helped inform and strengthen my and future generations, and her wonderful legacy lives on.

### **Nicola Rayner, editor of *Dance Today***

So many dancers have given me huge pleasure to watch: Junior Cervila, Tommy Franzén, Neil Jones and Ekaterina Sokolova, Rocío Molina, Vincent Simone and Flavia Cacace, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers of course – and many, many more. But for their gentle teaching style, natural approach to the dance, patience and lack of ego, I would pick as my dance heroes **Paul Lange** and **Michiko Okazaki**, who taught my husband how to tango for our wedding. ●

Who is your dance hero or heroine? Let us know, by post, email, Facebook or Twitter! Contact details on page 5.