

Saturday read

with Martyn Tolcher

As an expert choreographer for Strictly Come Dancing, Kele Baker regularly mixes with stars like Anton Du Beke and Erin Boag - due to dance at Beau Sejour in June. Now she's bringing a touch of Latin passion to Guernsey, teaching members of the island's Ballroom Dance Club how to rock the Argentine tango. **Martyn Tolcher** finds out more

Strictly for islanders

GUERNSEY may seem a million miles away from Buenos Aires, the capital city of Argentina, but the unique dance style that emanates from that bustling Latin American metropolis is stirring the passions of dozens of ballroom-obsessed islanders.

In fact, the Argentine tango is so much in demand among members of the Guernsey Ballroom Dance Club that it has brought in a leading exponent of the dance to show us how to hot-step it in true Latin style.

Kele Baker is an American dance teacher who lives in London and the Argentine tango is her specialist subject. For the last seven years Kele has been called in as an expert choreographer for the BBC's hugely popular Strictly Come Dancing, working with the celebrity participants and their professional partners. Over the last few months she has been coming to the island on a regular basis to demonstrate the same moves to our local dance enthusiasts. 'What I'm finding is that the people here are very enthusiastic and have a lot of fun with their dancing,' she said. And with the Guernsey Ballroom Dance Club about to embark on a brand-new schedule for the spring, Kele is looking forward to building on her work and on introducing more island residents to the technicalities and subtle nuances of this most sensual of Latin dances. 'People respond to the Argentine tango by looking at it and going, "Oh, that's sexy" and the rumba is sexy as well, but there's something about the Argentine tango,' Kele smiled. 'The partners really focus on each other and they're dancing for each other. It can be simple in that you can just walk together in a sensitive way and you can have a beautiful Argentine tango.'

'Then you can get fancy and you can start to embellish it with these somewhat risky kicks and flicks. There is what we call the gancho, not to be confused with gaucho, where you kick in-between your partner's legs. It means 'the hook', and when I teach it, let's just say I teach the health and safety elements of these moves so that you're not going to kick your partner in inappropriate places.'

Born and raised in New York City, Kele became hooked on ballroom dancing after moving to London to go on an acting course, and when she discovered the Argentine tango she was doubly hooked. Although she has never been

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Kele Baker



Strictly Come Dancing choreographer Kele Baker and Andrew Cuerden are teaching islanders to dance. (Picture by Adrian Miller, 1294942)

to Buenos Aires, she says the city can be found in London, courtesy of visiting Argentine tango master teachers who have passed their expertise on to her.

Kele was introduced to the Guernsey ballroom dance scene by fellow professional Andrew Cuerden, who has been coming to Guernsey for more than three years to teach other Latin dances like the rumba, the samba, the jive and the pasa doble.

'My dance partner, Hanna Haarala, recently married and had a child and I was also being asked a lot to teach the Argentine tango, which I am not particularly qualified in,' he explained.

Last year the Guernsey Ballroom Dance Club changed its venue to La Trelade Hotel, while this month sees the launch of its brand-new website.

Together with the club's lead pro dancers, James and Claire Taplin, who specialise in ballroom, Kele, Andrew and Hanna will be making plenty more visits to Guernsey over the coming months.

'Our incentive for this year is to develop the club here with the local teachers so there is a support base,' Andrew continued.

'We want to make sure there is a foundation here that maintains what we do, building the community here, not just one weekend every month, not only ongoing classes but practises and social evenings. We have everyone from beginners, the people who walk in off the street, right up to people who travel abroad to compete.'

'Some people come in to learn for an occasion like a ball or a wedding and some take it on as a hobby,' Kele added.

'We know how much fun it is to dance and it's good exercise for the mind and the body, a good thing to share with a friend or a partner, or [to] come on your own and meet people, so we're eager to let people on the island know this is available to them.'

For Andrew the club's regular sessions give islanders an opportunity to escape from the stresses of ordinary life by becoming immersed in a completely different world.

'I think what's really great about dancing is that it takes your focus 100%,' he said. 'You can't be thinking about what you're going to have for dinner or what the boss said to you at work or what your kids are doing. It's so intoxicating and so focused that when people walk out of here they feel like they've

Erin and Anton to dance here in June

STRICTLY stars Anton Du Beke and Erin Boag are to dance in Guernsey.

The pair went down so well at Jersey's Liberation International Music Festival last year that they are expanding this year's visit to perform at Beau Sejour on Saturday 15 June. 'We've always wanted to bring a show to Guernsey and this one will be special,' said

expected to sell fast. They cost from £25 and are on sale at the Beau Sejour box office, 747200, or online at beausejour.gg

● For more on the Liberation International Music Festival go to liberationjersey.com

'This is an amazing opportunity to see us in a spectacular show with some wonderful dancers'

Erin Boag

Erin. 'This is an amazing opportunity to see us in a spectacular show with some wonderful dancers.'

Professional partners for more than 14 years, Anton and Erin may be best known for Strictly Come Dancing, but they've notched up other notable milestones too, among them choreographing the hit stage show Simply Ballroom, which toured internationally for two years, and three sell-out dance tours.

Now in its fifth year, the Jersey music festival has gone from strength to strength and this year more than 15 internationally acclaimed stars and hundreds of musicians will be involved. It will run over five days, beginning on Liberation Day.

'Bringing the tour to Guernsey will be the final part of the festival,' said a spokesman. 'It is hoped that we will be able to bring more of these stars to Guernsey in the future.'

Tickets for the dance event are

been on holiday.'

Zimbabwe-born Andrew is looking forward to Hanna, with whom he appeared in the third series of Strictly, resuming her teaching on the island next month: 'Hanna is an amazing dancer and friend and we will continue to work together as "Latin Emotion" on various projects and events such as the GBDC. However, we both have our own business plans that we are pursuing with the support and understanding of each other. I'm 36 going on 37 now, so my performing days are numbered, with only another couple of years at this level, so I really want to go out with a bang rather than a whimper. I'm trying to do a lot more dancing and really focus on my creative side. I just want to have the freedom to dance and really to develop Guernsey for the ballroom dance scene.'

Meanwhile Kele is keen to develop the Dance Inspiration production company she set up in London a couple of years ago and, of course, she is looking forward to being involved in the next series of Strictly in the autumn. 'It's a very exciting world to go into and I'm very

privileged to have the opportunity to see what goes on behind the scenes, but it can also be very stressful,' she admitted. As one of the show's external specialist choreographers, Kele is allocated just six hours' coaching time to create and develop the live performances seen by millions

of viewers on a Saturday night. 'That's enough to teach some steps and do a bit of styling, but it does make a difference,' she said. 'First and foremost I want it to be a great show for the audience, both live in the studio and for the audience at home, but do I get very excited when it's my Argentine tango coming up? Oh my God yes, nails clutched into hands, sweaty palms, and I'm usually the loudest person cheering when it's done - also the person with the loudest boos when one of the judges says something I don't like. I do take it very seriously...'

WIN tickets to see the Strictly stars

STRICTLY fans will be clamouring to see the golden couple dance in Guernsey, and today we're giving you the chance to fast-track your way to seats at Beau Sejour. We have two pairs of tickets to see Erin and Anton to give away. For your chance to win a pair, call our competition line, 240241, or email newsroom@guernsey-press.com (quoting

'Strictly' in the subject line) and give your name, contact number and the answer to this question:

Name the celebrity winner of this year's Strictly Come Dancing

Competition closes on Saturday 23 March.

You can join too...



THE Guernsey Ballroom Dance Club was set up just over two years ago by UK professional dancers James and Claire Taplin, pictured above, together with Latin specialists Andrew Cuerden and Hanna Haarala, below.

At the beginning of last year the club moved to its new venue at La Trelade Hotel, which has a purpose built ballroom with an excellent wooden dance floor, and over the last few months the club has been given an added dimension with its Argentine tango sessions taken by Kele Baker.

At the end of this month the club's new spring schedules come into effect and, according to James, who has been teaching in Guernsey for 10 years, it is an ideal opportunity for new dancers to discover the joys of ballroom and Latin dancing at the club's regular Friday and Tuesday night sessions.

'In Guernsey we mainly concentrate on the social side of the dance world but we do have three or four competitive couples and we also have a lot of social dancers who go into doing medals. Our dancers can just learn for enjoyment, they can learn to take a test or an exam, and they can also become competitive and take part in competitions in the UK, which a lot of our couples do.'

New Friday night schedule with visiting teachers starting on 22 March

7-8pm - beginners' ballroom/Latin
8-9pm - intermediate ballroom/Latin or Argentine tango (when Kele is teaching)
9-10pm - advanced ballroom/Latin

Tuesday night schedule with local teacher Christine La Belge (also Friday night schedule when there is no visiting teacher).

7-8pm - beginners' ballroom/Latin
8-9pm - intermediate ballroom/Latin
9-10pm - general practice

All classes are £5 for one session, £8 for two sessions, £10 for all three sessions

● To find out more check out the club's new website www.guernseyballroomdanceclub.com

