

'I'VE NEVER FELT MORE NERVOUS!'



TV Q&A

Ashley Banjo feels the pressure when it comes to helping singletons find love

We're not surprised Ashley Banjo has landed his own dating show. After all, the Diversity star is charming, talented and certainly easy on the eye!

But obviously, with Ash knowing a thing or two about throwing shapes, there's a twist. *Flirty Dancing*, which kicks off this week on Channel 4, is a genius hybrid of *Blind Date* and *Strictly Come Dancing* – and on that basis, we need to know more!

Here, Ashley, 30, gives us the lowdown on the show and dishes on expecting his first baby with wife Francesca Abbott...

Go on then, Ashley, tell us all about *Flirty Dancing*...

It's like a blind date, but rather than meet up with somebody and then do something more conventional, you dance together to a choreographed routine. You'll hear the music that you've been rehearsing to for a week start to play,

but it'll be the first time you've ever seen the person you're dancing with, and you have a few minutes to dance together. Then, once it's finished, you decide if you like them, what they made you feel like, and if you want to actually go out on a second date.

Sounds great! Why did you want to get involved in a dating show?

It's a dancing show as well as a dating show, which was important to me because as you know, first and foremost, I love dancing. Everything I do normally revolves around it in some way.

You're responsible for choreographing the routines – sounds like a lot of pressure to us!

Yes! I know that they've put their trust in me and I've never felt more nervous! I feel more pressure watching them dance for the first time than I do over any Diversity performance.

Your brother Jordan and pal Perri Kiely are helping you out, too. It's almost like a Diversity team effort...

I love having the boys with me, because Diversity is like my baby. But it's not just the boys, I've got some amazing girls with me, too. Diversity is big enough that we've got girls who dance with us all the time, so the company grows and is bound to get bigger.

And speaking about growing families, congratulations on the imminent arrival of your daughter...

Thank you! My family and friends are going baby crazy at the moment – they are being born left, right and centre, so I think I'll be getting plenty of advice. I'm so excited to see our little one grow up and, if by any chance she wanted to be like her daddy and bust a few moves, I've already got the dancing shoes covered!

Flirty Dancing starts Thursday 10 January at 10pm on Channel 4



Ashley in rehearsals for *Flirty Dancing*



STAN & OLLIE

FILM

STARRING: STEVE COOGAN, JOHN C REILLY RATING: PG

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

It's 1952 and film legends Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy are well past the peak of their powers. With the golden era of Hollywood long behind them, the comedy duo face an uncertain future – so they embark on a tour of the old music halls of the UK. As they perform to just handfuls of fans, their partnership is threatened by Hardy's health problems, money issues and long-buried tensions.

WHAT'S GOOD?

First of all the performances from Steve and John are superb. Even if you know very little about Laurel and Hardy, you'll be swept up by the heartbreaking portrayals of a washed-up pair who deserved much better. And for fans of the iconic

comedians, this insight into an overlooked period of their careers will be an eye-opener.

WHAT'S BAD?

For a movie about two comedy stars, there are few laughs in what is actually a pretty bleak film. As a look at celebrity culture back in the 50s it's pretty fascinating, but it won't be for everyone.

new! VERDICT: JOHN AND STEVE SHINE! ★★★



Steve as Stan Laurel and John as Oliver Hardy

DIRTY DANCING

While Ashley Banjo's busy *Flirty Dancing*, Baby, Johnny, Penny and co will be *Dirty Dancing* across the UK, as the successful stage show hits the road.

If you regularly recite phrases such as, "Nobody puts Baby in the corner," and, "I carried a watermelon," or still think it's a good idea to recreate that iconic lift scene after a few proseccos down the local Wetherspoon, you'd be mad to miss the gang as they tango their way into your hometown.

The tour starts on 19 January in Gateshead and runs until August throughout the country – and we guarantee you'll have the time of your life!

To book tickets, head to dirtydancingontour.com

TOUR



LEICESTER SQUARE KITCHEN



FOOD

Orlando Bloom has been spotted at this chic Mexican/Peruvian restaurant in London, so we made sure our beady eyes were on celeb watch when we arrived to check out what's on the menu. But once we had a selection of tasty tacos and salads in front of us, we quickly forgot all about the prospect of dining with Hollywood's finest and focused all our attention on the delicious dishes.

Our waiter recommended a selection of small plates, so we tucked into the

flavoursome seared scallop salad with lemon rocoto dressing (£12), beef tartare with aji amarillo in hard tacos (£6) and crispy duck and pomegranate ensalada (£8). We rounded off with warm chocolate doughnuts and dulce de leche ice cream – which might be the best £7 we've ever spent!

Being so close to Theatreland, this is the perfect spot for a pre-show dinner to make your night out even more special.

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