LEN GOODMAN'S LONDON



FAVOURITE EATS: Len's love of fish takes him to J Sheekey, in the heart of London's theatreland

You spent your early childhood in Bethnal Green. What is your earliest memory there?

I was part of a typical East End family – my parents, my grandparents. As much as the East End was a community, our house was a community! We had a piano in the front room and on a Saturday night we would all gather round with a crate of beer for a sing-song while my uncle played.

Do you still like to visit the East End? How much has it changed?

I still go back to visit Nick the barber and sometimes go to [men's clothes shop] Whistles next door. The area I used to live in has changed a lot. There used to be a big Jewish community along with the Londoners but now it is far more cosmopolitan, with people from virtually every nation in the world. All those areas in the East End used to be like satellite villages of London but they have now blended into the metropolis.

Do you miss London when you're away filming *Dancing with the Stars* in the US?

Samuel Johnson said 'When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life; for there is in London all that life can afford.' And that is so true. I've been to a lot of cities but, for me, there is no city like London. I feel at home, I feel comfortable, and returning to it is like getting home from work and putting on my slippers.

Do you enjoy musicals?

As a child, I used to love going to the cinema to watch Fred Astaire, Gene Kelly, Ginger Rogers. I also loved musical theatre and remember being absolutely blown away the first time I saw *West Side Story* aged 16 or 17. Recently, I saw *Sunset Boulevard*, directed by [fellow *Strictly...* judge] Craig Revel Horwood. It is an amazing play and has been turned into a very interesting musical.

Do you have a favourite London restaurant or café?

I am a creature of habit. I tend to stick to the same places. I enjoy coming to the restaurant at Over-Seas House – there is marvellous service, a great atmosphere and fantastic value for money. I like fish and therefore go to Scott's and J Sheekey's quite often. I also like The Ivy because there is such a mix on the menu, and La Caprice, just around the corner from the League.

What advice would you give to a tourist in London?

You see far more on your feet, so start somewhere central, such as Parliament Square, and ask a policeman to direct you to the nearest interesting place. Policemen are marvellous. Sometimes my partner, Sue, and I take our bicycles on the train to Charing Cross and then cycle around the streets and the parks. We only ever do this on a Sunday, when the traffic is light, otherwise you are taking your life in your hands! You can pull up and mooch around. Just make sure you have a comfy saddle!

What would you do if you were London Mayor for a day?

Get rid of bendy buses and motorbikes, and change the phasing on lots of traffic lights so that they let more than two or three cars through at a time. In fact, I would make far more of London pedestrianised so that tourists walking around could have a much safer and pleasanter journey.

Do you have a favourite view?

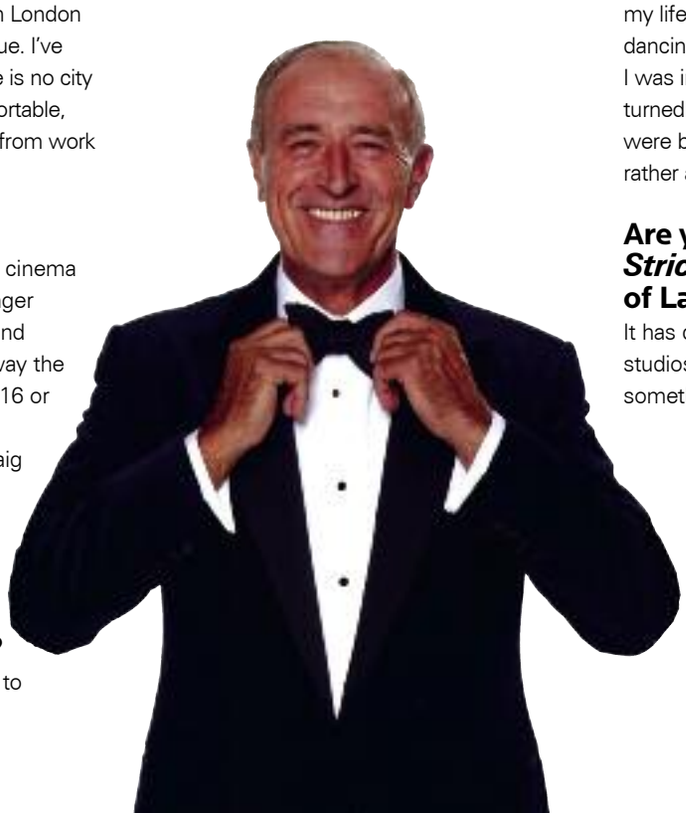
Driving from Kent into London across Blackheath, I love it when you can see Canary Wharf and occasionally St Paul's Cathedral. Also, looking out across the Thames from Greenwich Park. As an area, I love Jermyn Street – with the statue of Beau Brummel, my hero, and so many wonderful shops for men.

Why did you choose the title *Better Late Than Never* for your book?

Craig Revel Horwood and I were writing our autobiographies at the same time, while we were on tour with the live *Strictly Come Dancing* show. We were both trying to think up good titles, sitting in the back of a cab, when the cabbie said, "I've got a good idea, call it 'All Balls and Glitter'," which is a great title! We tossed a coin and Craig won, so I still had to come up with a title. When I thought about it, I realised that most major things that have happened in my life have happened quite late: I started dancing when I was 21, my son was born when I was in my 40s, and *Strictly Come Dancing* turned up when I was 60! All of these things were better late than never, which I thought was rather an apt title to sum up my life.

Are you pleased with how much *Strictly...* has raised the profile of Latin and ballroom dancing?

It has done brilliantly well for all types of dance studios. It's helped get the public out and doing something active. I feel lucky to be a part of it.



League member Len Goodman is a professional dancer, dance teacher and judge. He still teaches at his own dance school in Dartford when he isn't working as head judge on *Strictly Come Dancing* or filming in the US on *Dancing with the Stars*. Interview by Samantha Whitaker.