

Dancing at the Tower

Blackpool's Tower Ballroom is more than just a beautiful place in which to dance. It is iconic: a symbol of Blackpool, a symbol of ballroom itself. "The Tower Ballroom has always been lovely," says Peter Tomlin, a retired Professional champion, "but people had not seen it until 'Strictly' came along. You can't describe it... it's built as a monument. Photographs don't do it justice – it needs to be *seen*."

Peter, who now organises tea dances, including one of the largest in the country at Birmingham Tower Ballroom, was among the dancers at the social dance event "Dancing at the Tower" on April 16, which was organised by Philip Wylie of Holiday and Dance.

Indeed, he brought a group of 60 social dancers from the Midlands with him, who had the time of their lives. "The short break sold out within only ten days," he says, "because of the interest in dancing at the Tower."

"The aim was to get as many people dancing as much of the time as possible," explains Philip, who also organised a Holiday and Dance package around the evening for guests who wanted a more extended

experience and a long weekend in Blackpool. "There was modern ballroom, Latin and a dab of social sequence. Halfway through the evening the young couple – Sergey Kravchenko and Lauren Oakley – did the cabaret."

Sergey and Lauren danced four modern ballroom pieces, with one change for Lauren. "It was

The showcase, says Philip, formed "a great role model" to social dancers that stepped across the Tower Ballroom's hallowed floor that evening, ranging from teenagers to octogenarians. "It was pleasing to see everyone dance – from those who had really just started dancing to those who have danced for many years," he says. "Attendance for the social dance was 490, which provided a great atmosphere and wonderful spectacle on the

superbly spacious ballroom floor."

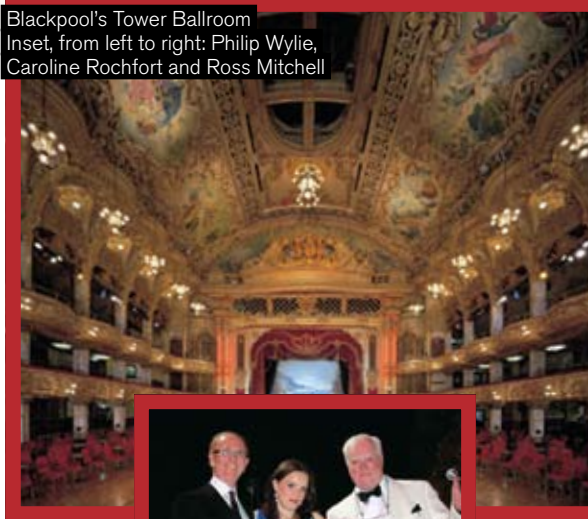
Bandleader Ross Mitchell provided the music for the evening and was thrilled to be back in the Tower Ballroom. "I first played in Blackpool in 1965 when, together with the David Ede Orchestra, I was privileged to open the Locarno Ballroom for Mecca Dancing – I was the quartet leader at the time," he recalls.

"I remember going to the Tower Ballroom

and standing in wonderment at the beautiful gold decoration and thinking, 'I would love to play here!' My dream came true many years later when Keith Holmes [now chief executive for the IDTA] asked me to play for his Dance School Annual Ball, which we did for many years. Until Saturday, April 16, I had not been into the Tower Ballroom for at least 15 years, so to walk in there, set up and play was truly memorable." ●

NICOLA RAYNER

Blackpool's Tower Ballroom
Inset, from left to right: Philip Wylie,
Caroline Rochfort and Ross Mitchell



intriguing to hear their story," says Philip. "They work so hard. Sergey came over initially to do a degree in the UK, at Cheltenham... He is tall, very elegant and artistic in his interpretation. They provided at very short notice a wonderful show of dancing, which was very much appreciated by the audience."