



A Dinner Theatre Murder Mystery
by
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Customer Taster

Strictly Murder

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About the murder mystery pack

Strictly Murder is a scripted murder mystery set at the final of a Ballroom and Latin dance championship, over two acts, with approximately 65 minutes of scripted dialogue.

The audience, divided into teams or tables, are invited to ask the suspects questions, and are given time to solve the mystery before the guilty party is revealed.

The murder evening is designed to be played by nine actors in a venue with a stage or suitable acting area, or over an online platform such as Zoom.

Structure

The full murder mystery pack contains:

- **The Organiser's Overview** *[extract here]*
- **The Script** *[extract here]*
- **The Accusation Sheet** - for the audience to enter their solutions

Organiser's Overview Contents

- Synopsis
- Character Descriptions
- General Staging Notes
 - Suggested Show Timings
 - Notes on Audience Participation
- Notes on Online Performances
- Production Notes
 - Music Notes
 - Props List
 - Set Description
 - Costume Suggestions
- Suggestions for Additional Clues

Synopsis

Things are heating up in the finals of the St Mark's Ballroom and Latin dance championships after an unusual year of dance. This year, the championships are being covered by the local TV station with a virtual audience. The TV station has arranged an interview with all the finalists before the dancing begins. The interviews venture off from the world of dance and we find there have been squabbles over sequins, frenzies over feathers, and a tussle with the tango, but nobody would ever have thought it would end in a murder on the dance floor!

Character Descriptions

Felicity Foxtrotter – Renowned and revered judge. She has been judging the St Mark's championship since it began, and yet remains an imposing figure with a steely and cold approach to judging. Her knowledge of events and other people's business makes her a dangerous person to cross. She is older than the female dancers, and similar in stature to Suzie.

Julia Jivery – Always the bridesmaid, Julia and her dance partner William have never quite managed to secure the St Mark's trophy and win the prize of a luxury holiday. This year, she has vowed the title will be hers, one way or another.

William Waltzerton – Julia's dance partner, and totally besotted with her. He'll do anything for Julia and often has. He is an accomplished dancer, but the ambition he has is only for his long-term relationship with Julia off the dance floor. He is younger than Julia.

Trevor Tangot – Trevor is a former cruise ship dance instructor and is always on the lookout for that lady who can keep him in the lifestyle he's used to. He and Felicity spent a few months together cruising the Caribbean, but the relationship ended acrimoniously, and Trevor lost his job on the ship as a result. He doesn't really like Suzie, who he sees as a bit of an opportunist, but until he finds his perfect partner, she has had to do. He is older than the other dancers.

Suzie Salsari – Trevor's ambitious and much younger dance partner, but she really wants to dance with William, who she sees as being more talented. She has had run-ins with Felicity in the past, but never about dancing. She tolerates Trevor and sees him as a meal ticket to the final, from where she hopes to find a new partner. It is her first finals day. She is similar in stature to Felicity.

Christopher Charlestone – A traditionalist in his dance, and apparent stickler for the rules. He was banned from ballroom dancing for life after allegedly putting superglue in the shoes of one of the couple's nearest opponents in a competition. Christopher denied any involvement.

Cha-Cha Asenia – Christopher's new dance partner, after his wife Chantelle unexpectedly stayed in Mexico after the couple's holiday, which was part of their prize. It has been said that she looks like a Mexican version of Chantelle, which Christopher explains was one of the reasons he fell in love with her. Her English is not as good as her dancing, which, apart from being more flamboyant, is remarkably similar to Chantelle's.

Detective Holmes – Investigating officer. Very dry, matter of fact. No sense of humour whatsoever.

Charlie Chatty – TV Interviewer. Can come across as being bored by the 'local' aspect of their job, and just tolerating the situation until the call comes from National TV. Male or female.

General Staging Notes

The action is set in the present day and has four male roles, four female roles, and one gender-flexible role; the character of Charlie Chatty is scripted as female, but with some minor changes to the script, can be played as male.

The murder evening is designed to be played in a venue with a stage or suitable acting area, with tables around the hall for your audience. Alternatively, it can be performed over an online platform such as Zoom.

It is set out over two acts, with approximately 65 minutes of scripted dialogue. The actors perform Act One, followed by an interval in which the audience can be served a meal or drinks, and then Act Two. Between Act Two, Scene One and Act Two, Scene Two, the audience, divided into teams or tables, are invited to ask the suspects questions, and then to make an accusation using their Accusation Sheet.

Timing

Act One – approximately 45 minutes.

Scene One: 20 minutes

Scene Two: 25 minutes

Interval – as required.

Act Two – approximately 35 minutes if including full audience participation.

Scene One: 10 minutes

Audience Questions and deliberation: 10-15 minutes

Scene Two: 10 minutes

Audience Participation

In Act Two, there is a break between Scene One and Two for audience questioning and deliberation, followed by filling in of Accusation Sheets.

Consider how you want audience questioning to work. It is usually better if you have teams or tables rather than normal theatre-type seating, if your venue is suited to this. If you want to allow your audience to ask your characters questions, make sure you give them some paper and pens at the start of the evening so they can take notes. You may also want to explain before the show starts that there will be a chance for one question per team later in the play, so they can start thinking during the performance. Or you can leave the pens, paper and an explanatory note on the tables.

Only the murderers are allowed to lie when asked a question. The rest of the characters should answer as truthfully as they know. This will probably require a bit of improvisation, so you may want to rehearse questions before your performance; you may also want to be aware of the music used for each couple, as audiences can ask some strange questions! So as to keep things nearer to what you'll get on the night, have a couple of the cast or supporting crew come up with questions beforehand during rehearsals, but don't let your other suspects know in advance what the questions will be.

On the day, you may want to limit the number of questions you get from your audience to prevent this section from going on too long. This can either be done by giving the audience questioning sheets they can fill in after Act Two, Scene One, and then selecting one question per character, or by having Inspector Holmes lead questions and ask for one from each table. Remember that, in a larger hall, some people may not be able to hear questions from other audience members; if that is the case, then Holmes, or whoever is leading the questions, should always start by repeating the question and saying who it is meant for.

There is an example Accusation Sheet in this pack; these should be given out for the audience to complete between the questioning session and Act Two, Scene Two. If you do not have any front of house or backstage staff to help with giving out and collecting the sheets, then Inspector Holmes should do this in character, and not comment on any questions. At the end of the allowed time, gather in the sheets. Make sure you know who the winning team is before you start Scene Two, so that it can be announced at the end of the play.

Online Performances

In the script, the stage directions for positions, entries and exits are given for stage performances. However, it is also possible to present *Strictly Murder* over the internet, either as a live show using conference software such as Zoom, or as a pre-recorded video made available via private link to a video hosting platform such as YouTube.

Online performances may want to restrict the ‘on screen’ characters to only those who are talking at the time, to avoid the screen from being too crowded (e.g. during Scene 3, when all six suspects and the detective are on stage at the same time.)

Act One, Scene One:

For online performances, Charlie can be voice only.

Act One, Scene Two:

Suzie needs to have access to a hip flask, which should be in a Co-op carrier bag.

Audience Questioning:

If you are performing live, then allow your audience time to think of questions and use some kind of indication (similar to the Zoom “hand” tool) to identify those audience members who have questions. If you are recording the scenes and playing back, then you may want to have a specific session for audience questions, which could then be a live session, or ask audience to email/message questions if this is a recorded session.

Additional Clues

You may wish to give your audiences printed ‘clues’ to help them with some background to the character’s past. Some examples are provided in the full pack.

Strictly Murder

Script Extract

Act One

Scene One

(Backstage at the dance competition. Onstage, chairs are positioned for interviews, around a low table with water glasses and a jug on it. Julia, William and Charlie are sat down. Julia is straightening out her costume, brushing away imaginary dust, checking her hair, etc. William is watching her.)

Charlie: So, Julia, William. Just relax and be natural with your answers. We want to engage with our viewers, so please make sure that you look at the camera. And don't worry about what you say, we can always edit things out afterwards. Are you ready to start?

Julia: I was born ready to start. The camera loves me. Doesn't it, William?

William: Oh yes, Julia, you're a natural. Everyone loves you.

Charlie: So, our first couple today is Julia Jivery and William Waltzerton. Julia, William, you've been here at finals day on many occasions, but never quite managed to take the champion's title. What are you going to do differently this year to make that change?

Julia: I think I speak on behalf of both of us to say that we are as surprised as anyone else that we've not won this competition before. Clearly, we have the talent, it is just that the judging is so... what's the word? Objectional.

Charlie: Objective?

Julia: No, I think it's objectional.

Charlie: You think it's personal against you?

William: Julia didn't mean that. I mean, how could anyone have anything personal against Julia?

Charlie: But she said it was objectional – do you think the judging could possibly be called into question?

Julia: Well, of course, if you're saying that, it is up to you. Everyone knows that the more traditional judges often take a while to understand progress in the different genres, so just because we may be doing something adventurous or new, it may not be that everyone has the same good taste as us.

Charlie: More traditional judges? Are you saying that the judges of the competition are old and rigid in their ways?

Julia: Well, of course, if you're saying that, it is up to you. But I do think that sometimes we need to move on, and new blood is always a good way for anything to progress. And new blood in both judging and dancing.

Charlie: How do you feel about that, William? Do you agree with Julia?

William: Of course I agree with Julia, she's usually right about these things. She's very knowledgeable about many things, so I pretty much do as she says.

Charlie: Do as she says? Are you being led by Julia?

William: The man leads the dance, not the lady.

Charlie: But the lady leads the relationship? How would you describe your relationship with Julia, William? It must be difficult dancing with someone who is not your life partner without establishing a firm friendship, or more.

William: (*Flustered*) I, err, well, Julia and I are very close, of course.

Julia: We are dance partners, nothing more. Our relationship stays on the dance floor.

Charlie: Can I ask you, William, about a situation a few years ago, when you appeared in court charged with criminal damage?

Julia: (*Mock laughing.*) Oh, there's no need to drag that up, it was years ago.

Charlie: Nevertheless, I'm sure our viewers would be interested. You were charged with damaging a car belonging to Felicity Foxtrotter, the chief judge of the St Mark's final. Do you think that may go against you in the voting today?

William: I was found not guilty, so I don't think there would be a problem.

Charlie: Yes, you were found not guilty, but you'd admitted the crime. Why was that? Was it to cover up for someone else? Maybe someone you were trying to protect?

Julia: Excuse me, but what exactly has this got to do with our dancing? I thought this was an interview about dancing, not about what we get up to outside of this dance hall? Either you change your questions, or you find someone else to talk to.

Charlie: Sorry, let me change the subject. Julia, you were reported as saying recently that you would do anything to win this year. What exactly does that mean?

William: Julia has worked incredibly hard to come up with a new routine. We both have.

Julia: Yes, that's right, we have an amazing new routine in our Latin section. It will blow people's minds.

Charlie: Can you give us a hint? Will it involve props?

Julia: Oh yes, I'm sure I can give you a hint. It's not like it's a secret from the other competitors, we have all seen each other's routines during rehearsals. Our Charleston is set in Egyptian time; I play the part of Cleopatra, of course, and William is my guard. At one point, he gets his blade out and we dance together holding it.

Charlie: Umm, he gets his what out?

Julia: His blade. His sword. He gets his sword out.

Charlie: Oh, his sword! Right. Well, thank goodness for that. But isn't that dangerous?

William: Not if you're a professional like Julia – she could dance with a brick wall and make it look easy.

Julia: Dancing always carries an element of danger. Anything could happen during a lift.

Charlie: But dancing with a sword? Is it a real sword?

Julia: Of course it's real. Everyone would be able to notice if it was a plastic sword.

William: It all adds to the drama. Not that Julia needs anything added to her dancing, she is an incredibly talented lady.

Julia: Thank you, William.

Charlie: You seem to have a very trusting relationship. Are there any other surprises in store for us tonight?

Julia: Well, there are always surprises on finals night, but we can't tell you what they will be, or we'd have to kill you! **(Laughs)**

Charlie: Thank you, Julia Jivery and William Waltzerton. We wish you every luck in the finals.

Julia: It's not a case of luck, it's a case of talent.

(Exit Julia and William.)

(Enter Trevor and Suzie.)

Charlie: Next up, we have Trevor Tangot and Suzie Salsari. Trevor, Suzie, welcome to what is your very first finals day. How excited are you to be here?

Trevor: Well, of course, it is not my first finals day, I've been here on many occasions.

Suzie: As you keep reminding me.

Charlie: So, as your first year as a couple...

Suzie: **(Interrupting)** Dancing couple.

Charlie: Sorry, as your first year as a dancing couple, what do you think your chances are of winning the competition? To be honest, did you think you would even get this far?

Trevor: Of course! I mean, I've been here before, why wouldn't I expect to get to the final this year?

Charlie: There have been reports of rifts between the two of you. How has that affected your performances?

Suzie: Rifts? In what way?

Charlie: Arguments, quite heated arguments, it has been said.

Trevor: Look, everyone goes through rough patches in any partnership, and whilst it's true that Suzie and I don't always see eye to eye on things, we always leave that to one side when it comes to our dancing.

Charlie: Do you think it is important in a dance relationship that you both want the same goal?
(Takes a sip of water.)

Suzie: Absolutely! And I'm out to be the best, to get the top. I want to be the next professional dancer on Strictly.

Charlie: **(Coughs and splutters.)** Sorry, some water went down the wrong way. That's an extremely ambitious statement, Suzie; do you think that you and Trevor will be able to go that far?

Suzie: Who said anything about going that far with Trevor?

Trevor: Oh, charming.

Suzie: Well, let's face it, you're no spring chicken, Trev.

Trevor: And you're no fresh-faced fancy yourself, Suzie!

Suzie: How dare you! At least I don't spend my time offstage leering at people's bank balances!

Trevor: That's enough, Suzie.

Suzie: Oh no, I'm sure the viewers at home would love to hear about your exploits with the ladies on the cruise ships.

Charlie: Umm...

Suzie: Like the elderly lady who you were teaching to waltz on one cruise and you told her that you could offer her private lessons for a reasonable charge.

Trevor: Suzie! Enough!

Suzie: Only the charge wasn't reasonable, was it, Trevor?

Trevor: We're here to talk about dancing, nothing else. You need to shut up, Suzie, before people learn about how you really got your way to this final.

Suzie: What do you mean, Trevor?

Trevor: You know exactly what I mean. That poor judge in the quarter finals was ruined.

Suzie: That was nothing to do with me.

Charlie: What happened?

Trevor: The judge had to resign his position because of some alleged compromising photographs taken with him and a certain lady.

Suzie: I said that was nothing to do with me!

Trevor: Maybe not, but wasn't the new judge one of your cousins?

Charlie: Really? Tell me more?

Suzie: Yes, it was one of my cousins, but I didn't even realise he was my cousin until my mother mentioned she had a long-lost sister.

Charlie: So you had a family reunion as a result of the change of judges?

Suzie: Yes, well, after the event, of course. It was actually very touching, because my brother was there as well to cover the event for the local newspaper.

Trevor: As a photographer.

Suzie: Now it's your turn to shut up, Trevor!

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[Continued in the full script.]