

# Arts & Life

## A dazzling start: 'Dancing with the Stars' premiere sets the stage for a competitive season

By **EMILY ADORNO**  
Marketing Director

The ballroom returned in glittering fashion as “Dancing with the Stars” launched its 34th season this week. The premiere had everything fans expect, like the typical sequins, celebrity nerves and more than a few stiff hips. It also hinted at a season full of potential and surprising talent.

Judge Derek Hough, past pro of the ballroom, and experienced — ballroom dancer — reminded viewers that the first week scores are usually lower, allowing space for growth. That context was clear throughout the night as several couples debuted routines that felt more like

introductions than fully realized performances.

Gymnast Jordyn Chiles with pro Ezra Sosa, influencer Dylan Efron with pro Daniella Karagach and singer Scott Hoying with pro Rylee Arnold all landed in that “promising but tight” category. Nerves and rigidity kept many from showing their full ability.

With that, there were still some moments where personality shined

through and hinted that with more confidence, they could become contenders for the highly coveted Len Goodman Mirrorball Trophy.

Others looked surprisingly polished right out of the gate.

Actress Elaine Hendrix and pro Alan Bersten brought a natural stage quality that stood out for a premiere. Similarly, actress Danielle Fishel and pro Pasha Pashkov impressed enough to arguably deserve higher scores than they received.

Some celebs bring a history of dance

experience and confidence to the stage that gives them a real upper hand. Singer Lauren Jauregui clearly showed that in her week one dance, along with Hilaria Baldwin. Even “Secret Lives of Mormon Wives” star Whitney Leavitt displayed a technical skill

that set a high bar for this season.

However, not everyone hit their stride. Comedian Andy Richter got paired up with pro Emma Slater, who always seems to get the older men who usually leave the show early on. It does not seem that she will be redeemed of that this season either.

Their timing issues were not the only ones of the evening. Actor Corey Feldman and pro Jenna Johnson struggled with timing and an awkward chemistry overall. Jen Affleck and new pro Jan Ravnik also failed to make an impact with their number.

While not totally disastrous, those who fell to the bottom of the scoreboard had forgettable dances. For the sake of fan support, it is hard to compete with a dance that falls through the cracks. The challenge for these contestants will be proving they belong in the ballroom once the glitter of premiere night wears off.

That contrast — between those who played it safe, those who flopped and those who were surprising — is what keeps “DWTS” compelling. Unlike scripted competition shows, the magic here comes from watching celebrities transform into dancers in real time.

The stiff, self-conscious athlete who blossoms into a performer or the sitcom star who discovers their inner ballroom diva is the type of arc that makes viewers invest for weeks. Already, this cast seems well-equipped to deliver that kind of narrative variety.

The professional dancers also play a crucial role, and this season’s roster reminds us why they’re the heart of the show. Sosa leaned into Chiles’ strengths with acrobatic choreography, even if her hips weren’t quite ready to follow. Karagach’s charm made Efron look more comfortable on stage than his technique suggested. Meanwhile, pros like Val Chmerkovskiy, Bersten and Pashkov proved why they’ve remained fan favorites for so long, guiding their partners with precision and stage presence that elevated otherwise shaky debuts.

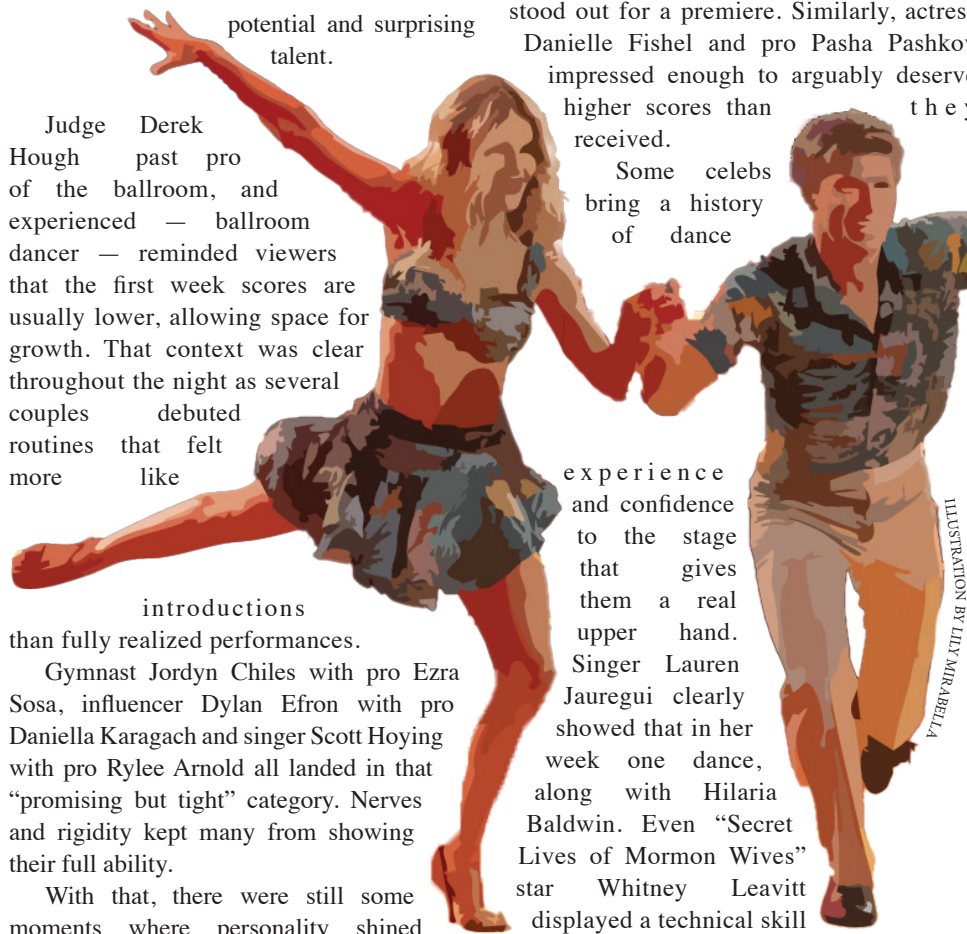
The clear standout of the night — and honestly, my early pick to win it all — was T.V. personality and zookeeper Robert Irwin with pro Witney Carson.

The routine had a rare mix of confidence and charisma. It was the kind of performance you’d expect to see later in the season, not the premiere. It was polished without feeling stiff, and it set a bar that’s going to be hard for anyone else to reach.

The rest of the night wasn’t perfect, but that’s the beauty of a premiere. The full range of nerves, missteps, surprises and glimpses of who might take home the trophy.

After all, “Dancing with the Stars” is fun to watch for that reason. It’s more than just dancing, but also the transformation of each star.

Week one gave us a baseline, and now the real growth starts. Scores will rise, stakes will get higher, and the ballroom will keep delivering its drama. One thing’s already clear: this season won’t be predictable when it comes to who’s taking home that Mirrorball.



## Fans priced out of Ariana Grande's tour

By **GINA LORUSSO**  
Managing Editor

After taking a seven year hiatus from touring, singer-songwriter and actress Ariana Grande is back on the road in 2026 for her Eternal Sunshine World Tour.

Her announcement on Aug. 28, over a year after releasing her seventh studio album “Eternal Sunshine” and its deluxe version “Brighter Days Ahead,” sparked massive excitement among fans. Me being one of them, I signed up for presale tickets as soon as I could, but unfortunately, I was left empty-handed.

I couldn’t get tickets as soon as they dropped, so what? No big deal, I can wait for the resellers and buy tickets then, right? Wrong.

The resale ticket prices for the tour’s North American leg are currently selling at a premium — thousands more than what they were purchased for.

For the opening show at Oakland Arena in Oakland, California, a lower-level ticket in section 128 is priced at a whopping \$21,420, according to TicketMaster.

In an Instagram story posted on Sept. 13, Grande released a statement showing her concern for the issue.

“hi my angels, i have been on set all week but i wanted to let you know that what’s been happening with the secondary ticket resellers has been brought to my attention and of course i am incredibly bothered by it,” Grande wrote. “i’ve been on the phone

every second of my free time fighting for a solution. i hear you and hopefully, we will be able to get more of these tickets into your hands instead of theirs. it’s not right.”

This comes as a shock following Grande’s decision not to use dynamic pricing — a strategy that adjusts ticket prices based on demand. Instead, the ticket prices were set in stone, ranging from about \$75 to \$799 to ensure fairness and affordability. Now, these resellers have made the tour almost completely inaccessible.

Being that Grande hasn’t toured in so long, demand for tickets was already high. “Eternal Sunshine” is acclaimed as some of Grande’s most transparent work, resonating heavily with her global audience, and making them eager to hear her hits “we can’t be friends,” “the boy is mine” and other nostalgic tracks from her discography live.

“I would love to do shows, I love being on stage, I miss being on stage, I miss my fans so much,” Grande said in an interview with Zach Sang in February. “Just like music, I’m really excited to redefine my relationship to shows, when I’m ready...”

Following her Sweetener World Tour in 2019, Grande opened up about her mental health issues, stating she was doing therapy sessions, dealing with PTSD, anxiety, depression and grief. Now that fans understand how difficult this time was for her, they’re excited that she has now not only deepened her connection with

music, but made this tour a testament to her personal growth.

That is what makes these ticket prices so outrageous. This tour should have been a celebration of Grande’s return to music after filming “Wicked” and “Wicked: For Good,” not an opportunity for scalpers to make a quick buck on fans who have been waiting almost a decade to see her live again.

While Grande has spoken about pushing for solutions, this is a much greater issue that could potentially taint live music for any artist. Take Rihanna, for example. She hasn’t released an album since 2016, but if she were to drop an album and announce a tour soon, fans would most likely face the same issue Grande fans are facing now.

Stricter regulations need to be put in place — there is no reason you should be reselling a ticket for hundreds, or even thousands, more than what you paid originally. Don’t

be that person who ruins something that could be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for someone else.

Get a job. Exploiting fans isn’t your payday.

