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“Oh, Fair Enough!” Appraisal Analysis of Eurovision Song Contest Commentary

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Abstract

This study analyses the British commentary of the Eurovision Song Contest of different time periods in terms of gender, aspects of evaluation and Appraisal analysis. The research used the Appraisal framework developed by Martin & White (2005). The aims of this study are to find out which gender gets more praise or criticism, as well as which criteria are the focus of the commentator's evaluation. The study also explores the commentary using systems of Attitude and Graduation within Appraisal theory. Attitude splits into Appreciation, Judgement, and Affect. The results show that commentary of both time periods had differing results across praise/criticism as well as criteria. Commentary of the past showcases gender bias by praising male artists more frequently and focusing on female appearance. Contemporary commentary had an equal distribution of praise/criticism as well as a focus on the artist and their performance. Lastly, Appraisal analysis has shown high usage of Appreciation, followed by Judgement and Affect being the least used attitude.

1. Introduction

Commentary, by definition, is ‘a spoken description of an event on the radio or television that is broadcast as the event happens, or the action of providing this description’ (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). The task of a commentator is to provide a better, more thorough understanding of an event to its viewers, while also sometimes bringing an additional layer of entertainment with their comments. This line of work is most frequently associated with sports yet is also found in other types of broadcasts. Sports commentary and language in sports overall has been the subject of various research, ranging from research of interpersonal discourse analysis (Caldwell, 2020) to research of sportscasting in terms of gender bias (Higgs et al., 2003; Billings & Eastman, 2000) to evaluative language in football commentary (Hassanvandi & Golchinnezhad, 2022).

In the analysis of popular sportscasts of the 2000s in America, Billings & Eastman (2000) have found very clear gender bias. As their hypotheses focused on the media coverage of the performance of males and females, they discovered that most of said coverage focuses on male athletes rather than female athletes. Female sports were, in fact, marginalized, female athletes also being compared to male athletes, implying male superiority and prototypicality. (Billings & Eastman, 2000). In contrast to the analysis by Billings & Eastman (2000), the research conducted by Higgs et al. (2003) shows the lack of gender stereotypes or marginalization towards female athletes. The research devoted to sports of each gender, including the analysis of adjectives used by commentators and themes used in the coverage, had balanced results. The commentary, while discussing the lives of female athletes, did not emphasize any aspects that can be considered gender stereotypical (Higgs et al., 2003: 56).

The greatly varying results in research of seemingly similar data leaves many questions. The articles by Billings et al. (2002) and Billings & Eastman (2000) have found the use of completely different vocabulary, which implies gender roles, for female and male athletes. More specifically, female athletes were often found referred to as ‘girls’, evaluated in terms of appearance and attractiveness and references to their strength were significantly less frequent in comparison to males (Billings et al., 2002: 298). What is important to keep in mind is the fact that the event is a showcase of the best athletes in college level basketball, both male and female (Billings et al., 2002: 303). For a sports event, especially of such standard, the use of gender-neutral language is not only expected but also necessary. The fact that athletes are

evaluated based on their appearance and not their skill only shows the extent of the issue of gender bias. This research has also found differences based on the gender of the commentator. Male commentators were more likely to comment on athleticism, while female commentators would focus on personality as well as appearance. However, both male and female commentators upkeep gender bias (Billings et al., 2002: 311).

The methods of previously discussed research do not originate from the field of linguistics, yet examples of linguistic analysis of sports commentary do occur. One of the frameworks, most frequently used in news discourse, yet which can also be used for other types of research, is the appraisal theory developed by Martin & White. The appraisal theory revolves around interpersonal aspects of language, i.e. how the author expresses their stance towards both the material they exhibit and the audience they present the information to (Martin & White, 2005: 1). In order to find out how stance is expressed, Martin & White (2007: 35) suggested three interacting domains of appraisal: attitude, engagement and graduation. Attitude is further divided into three types: affect, judgement, and appreciation, all of which are relevant to the present study. (Martin & White, 2007: *ibid.*).

The article by Hassanvandi & Golchinnezhad (2022) presents research on sports commentary, conducted using the appraisal theory. The important domain both for this research and previous research by Hassanvandi & Golchinnezhad (2022) is the domain of attitude. By analysing radio, television and live text commentary of football games using appraisal theory, the researchers have found very different reactions to the same event (Hassanvandi & Golchinnezhad, 2022: 397). While the live text commentators chose to view a goal in a positive light, using appreciation to describe it, both the TV and radio commentators made negative judgements instead (Hassanvandi & Golchinnezhad, 2022: *ibid.*). In some instances, with radio commentary, no attitudinal expressions were found at all, mainly since this type of commentary focuses on describing the image listeners cannot see for themselves (*ibid.*: 399). By using the Appraisal theory, this research has presented a different way to approach the language of sports and language found in commentary. And yet, sports commentary is not the only subtype of commentary there is and that can be analysed. Little attention has been paid to the language of other entertainment programmes and their commentaries. A prominent example of an entertainment programme with commentary is the Eurovision Song Contest.

The Eurovision Song Contest is an annual song contest uniting millions of viewers around the world since 1956, that is 66 years and counting (Eurovision.tv, 2019). In 2023 alone it attracted 162 million viewers, these numbers highlighting its prominence. (Eurovision.tv, 2023a). Despite its straightforward nature, being a contest of songs coming from Europe (also including

some countries outside it), the contest contains many different layers it could be analysed in. Linguist and cultural scientist Dr. Irving Wolther calls them the different dimensions of the Eurovision Song Contest – the contest is not only musical, but also political, economic, cultural and media-related (Wolther, 2012: 166). At its inception in the 1950s, it was not only an attempt to unify Europe, but also a technological experiment with the goal of a live, transnational broadcast (Eurovision.tv, 2019). With the passage of time, it has grown into a contest with significant cultural value, influencing not only musical trends but also entire economies and being the pioneer of the techniques now widely used in television (ibid.). For the viewers and fans of this contest it could be described as nothing short of a ritual – its structure, the long-lasting tradition creates the feeling of belonging to a community (Wolther, 2012: 166). Such details once again emphasize how prominent and significant the Eurovision Song Contest is.

The Song Contest focuses on a variety of topics, yet the most common research in the field of linguistics revolves around either the songs in the contest or the comments provided by viewers of the contest. A corpus-based approach to language attitudes in YouTube comments by Dejan Ivković was concerned with lexical items and the attitudes towards English used by non-native and native singers (Ivković, 2013: 4). The research shows a positive outlook on singing in a native language of the represented country rather than English, with some claiming that English is the language of most winning countries or emphasizing its status as a *lingua franca* (Ivković, 2013: 22). A qualitative, syntactic, and lexical analysis of comments regarding the Eurovision Song Contest was conducted by Ana Zwitter Vitez & Darja Fišer (2016). The data sample was gathered from an article from the Slovenian national broadcaster regarding the country's representative for the contest (Vitez & Fišer, 2016: 74). The researchers have found that positive comments are not as common as negative comments, often exclamatory and informal in terms of vocabulary, while negative comments, on the other hand, are longer and more complex statements with a general vocabulary (Vitez & Fišer, 2016: ibid.).

Eurovision Song Contest commentary, just like commentary of any other live event, provides important information, as well as entertainment, to the viewers. Commentators have the complex task of explaining the rules of the event and introducing its participants in a short period of time, rather than throughout the entire event as the competing artists perform. Commentators of Eurovision are given merely a minute or even less per each artist and their performance. Despite this time restraint, there is a variety of topics the commentator can focus on and emphasize. As this thesis focuses on British Eurovision Song Contest commentary, the two commentators were chosen for the analysis, Sir Terry Wogan and Graham Norton.

Sir Terry Wogan was a radio and television broadcaster for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), often referred to as 'The Voice of Eurovision' by his successor, Graham Norton. This is a fitting title as Wogan was the commentator of the Eurovision Song Contest for the BBC for over 30 years. He was known for his unique, often very ironic, sometimes even insensitive style of commentary that was divisive amongst viewers (Coleman, 2008: 135). It can be said that his commentary had a dual role. The first objective was to be in the background, a voiceover of the event – provide viewers with the song title, artist name, the country's achievements in the Eurovision, and similar information (Coleman, 2008: 133). The second objective of Sir Terry Wogan, however, was to then step out of the background and be in the spotlight with the use of sharp, amusing phrases he was well known for (ibid.). His comments can be classified as irony in three ways, according to Coleman. Firstly, Wogan's commentary serves as a medium to distance the viewers from the event, describing it as a foreign travesty the viewers unwillingly joined – comparing it to suffering, being strained, and similar expressions (ibid.: 134). Secondly, there are instances where some participating entries are caricatured in terms of culture, yet this style of commentary is never applied to the British entry, which is introduced with excitement reminiscent of sports commentary, cheering the performer on (ibid.: 135). Lastly, his commentary would transform into political ranting later, during the voting sequences of each contest (ibid.). Despite the controversy surrounding his choice of words, Sir Terry Wogan was one of the key figures of Britain's television of the time, having influence not only on the perception of Eurovision but also on the notion of Euroscepticism, still found in the UK (Fricker in Fricker & Gluhovic, 2013: 54). His successor, Graham Norton, is a comedian, television host and self-proclaimed 'long time fan of the Eurovision' (www.bbc.co.uk., 2008). The transfer of the role from Sir Terry Wogan to Graham Norton was described as a 'transfer into capable hands of a witty host' (ibid.). Over the years, Norton has become one of the most popular personalities of the United Kingdom, with a style of presenting that does not revolve around crude or cheap remarks but is rather clever, easy-going and harmless (Rainey, 2013). This difference in style can possibly also have a difference on commentary.

For one of the longest-running and most-watched (non-sports) events, the visible lack of more research on this topic, at least in the field of linguistics, gives the opportunity and shows the need for more research. Looking at this event from a sociolinguistic perspective may show details and intricacies of the Eurovision Song Contest, the perception of the contest and the perception of the artists taking part in it, which other disciplines may have overlooked. The topics that can become the aspects of evaluation within commentary are the focus of this research. By analysing the British English commentary of two time periods, 1997-2009 and

2010-2023 and two different commentators, Sir Terry Wogan and Graham Norton – the findings could then be indicative of the tendencies in Eurovision commentary in the United Kingdom. Those tendencies may then set this commentary apart from sports commentary. As an attempt to provide more insights into linguistic research of the Eurovision Song Contest, this thesis will focus on the appraisal of the performances and the differences in commentary regarding gender of the artist. The research questions in mind include:

1. Which gender is more praised or criticized – males or females?
2. What aspects are targeted by the attitudinal evaluation?
3. Which type of attitude is the most frequently expressed?

2. Data & Methods

2.1 Data

The data for this qualitative research was gathered from the recordings of the Grand Finals of the Eurovision Song Contest with the commentary of both Sir Terry Wogan and Graham Norton.

The recordings were retrieved either from YouTube or an archive published on Reddit (GoreHub_Inc, 2020). Each source of the recordings is provided in the data sources section. Grand finals were specifically chosen as the concept of a semi-final in the Eurovision Song Contest was only introduced in 2004 and evolved into two semi-finals by 2008 (Eurovision.tv, 2023b). Only focusing on the grand finals ensures a balanced sample of only one instance of commentary per performer. The sample for each commentator encompassed 10 years of their commentary, the starting point being the most recent year available for each of them. Sir Terry Wogan's timeframe was 1999-2008 (ESC-Wogan hereafter), 2008 being his last year in this role for the BBC. 2013-2023 was the interval for Graham Norton (ESC-Norton hereafter), 2023 as the most recent accessible year at the time of conducting the research. 2020 was not included as the contest was cancelled, therefore no data was available.

The focus of this research were the comments directed towards solo performers who are either male or female. The comments were transcribed by listening to the commentary before and after the performance of an artist, as those are the intervals usually dedicated to a specific artist while the commentary of the rest of the contest revolves around commenting on the voting sequence and other details unrelated to a specific artist, thus not being of relevance.

Subsequently, the entries excluded from the sample were artists who cannot be referred to as male or female or entries that were classed as a group. A group in this instance was any duet, trio, or band of several people, identified referring to the title cards before a performance and the official information found online. The definition of artists who cannot be referred to as male or female includes drag artists – people who dress and perform as stage personas of a different gender from their own (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024a). Similarly, this applied to nonbinary people who do not have an identity that can be described as simply male or female (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024b). Examples of drag artists include the performance of Austria in 2014 or Ukraine in 2007 that therefore had to be excluded from ESC-Norton and ESC-Wogan samples.

The commentary on the performance of the United Kingdom in 2023 also had to be excluded from ESC-Norton as Graham Norton did not provide his commentary on it, being a commentator and one of the hosts of the contest simultaneously.

Overall, the ESC-Wogan sample consisted of 8368 words for 97 female and 60 male performers. The ESC-Norton sample consisted of 17212 words for 98 female and 88 male performers.

2.2 Methods

The software chosen for research with such an extensive framework is the UAM CorpusTool, version 3.3 (O'Donnell, 2008). This tool provided a convenient way to import the data samples and mark instances of affect, graduation, and the subcategories of those domains. The results could then be easily accessed and used with the 'Explore' and 'Statistics' functions. As this paper focuses on positive and negative evaluation of artists and the performances seen on the stage of the contest, several frameworks were employed.

First, to analyse praise-criticism ratios, UAM CorpusTool was used to assign attitude polarity. If a phrase was assigned positive polarity, it was considered praise, and in case of negative polarity – criticism. In some circumstances, however, the polarity could not be confidently assigned to certain phrases, which meant that the ambiguous label needed to be used. These results were then calculated in relation to the data samples of each gender and time period.

Secondly, to find out the aspects targeted by attitudinal evaluation, an adapted version of the classification by Billings was employed (Billings et al., 2002). The criteria within the research involved physicality, intelligence, determination, appearance, background, and others (ibid.: 305). For the purposes of this research, those criteria were adapted, and such aspects and their descriptions were used:

1. Singer – the achievements and capabilities of a singer, their background.
2. Song – the lyrics and composition of a song, its message.
3. Performance – visual elements, the performance itself.
4. Appearance – physical characteristics of the performer, their outfit.
5. Favourite – the mention of how the song is a favourite amongst fans, music experts.

All fitting criteria were assigned to each commentary entry. Lastly, the most detailed framework for the analysis of such data is the appraisal framework proposed by Martin & White (2005). This approach has its roots in the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory developed by Martin Halliday. The framework is based on knowledge not only in educational but also media discourse contexts (Martin & White, 2005: xi). The authors explain the objective of their book on Appraisal theory as follows:

This book is concerned with the interpersonal in language, with the subjective presence of writers/speakers in texts as they adopt stances towards both the material they present and those with whom they communicate. It is concerned with how writers/speakers approve and disapprove, enthuse and abhor, applaud and criticise, and with how they position their readers/listeners to do likewise. (Martin & White, 2005: 1)

As the role of a commentator inevitably ends up involving their own personal stance on what they see, Appraisal theory provides ways to evaluate and categorize the utterances. As the utterances also vary in length, this study focuses not only on specific linguistic markers, such as adjectives or adverbs, but entire multiword expressions. Some of the criteria are adapted from research by Stingo & Delmonte (2016), which focuses on annotation of satire with appraisal theory. Within their methodology, also based around Martin & White: ‘Any instance of evaluation conveyed by means of rhetorical or figurative language, is annotated as a single appraisal unit.’ (Stingo & Delmonte, 2016: 76).

Appraisal theory consists of three domains: attitude, engagement and graduation (Martin & White, 2005: 35). For this research, the key domains are attitude and graduation. Engagement mostly deals with intensity or investment in the utterance of the speaker or writer – acknowledgement, approval/denial, quotation of statements and similar (Martin & White, 2005: 36). As this concept adds further detail to an already complex system of appraisal, it will not be included in the scope of this research.

Regarding the domains that are within the scope of this research, attitude is concerned with feelings, judgements and evaluation of actions or objects. On the other hand, graduation involves the amplification or minimization of said attitudes (Martin & White, 2005: 35). Attitude then splits into three values: affect, judgement, and appreciation. Firstly, affect is concerned with emotion, the so-called key resource used to express all three regions of attitude (Martin & White, 2005: 42). It is used to refer to the wide spectrum of emotions the author or some other person has. For example:

Captain Aubrey, like his hero Nelson and so many of his contemporaries, had been somewhat given to tears – he had wept with joy at the masthead of his first command; (O’Brian 1997a: 10 in Martin & White, 2005: 43)

Expressions of affect range from descriptions, attributions (i.e. ‘sad person’, ‘the person was sad’) to mental or behavioural processes (‘this has upset him’, ‘he cried’) (Martin & White, 2005: 46). The process of identifying emotions is based around factors such as surrounding culture, whether the feelings are an internal process or an external surge, as well as whether they are a reaction to something specific – involving a so-called ‘Trigger’ of emotion and the ‘Emoter’ who reacts to it (Martin & White, 2005: 47). Affect is then split into the categories of dis/inclination (describing fears or desires), un/happiness (cheer, affection, misery), in/security (surprise, confidence, trust) and dis/satisfaction (interest, ennui, dis/pleasure) (Martin & White, 2005: 51).

The second part of attitude is judgement, mainly concerned with behaviour of people. Judgement is realized through either the concept of ‘social esteem’ (normality, capacity, tenacity of a person) or ‘social sanction’ (the person’s truthfulness or ethical stance) (Martin & White, 2007: 53). Some examples of social esteem include referring to the normality of a person (‘he’s stable’, ‘she’s celebrated’ as positive judgement or ‘he’s odd’, ‘she’s unpredictable’ as negative judgement). Social esteem is most often referenced orally, whether it’s chatting, gossiping, or joking, with humour having an important role. Social sanction, on the other hand, is more frequently found in laws and regulations (Martin & White, 2005: 52).

Lastly, appreciation revolves around the values of certain things, most often inanimate (Martin & White, 2005: 56). This category is especially relevant to man-made items and performances. The evaluations can then become entire award systems that show the worth of things. Within appreciation, there are the categories of reaction (related to affect), composition (perception of things) or valuation (opinions on things) (ibid.).

The domain of graduation, concerned with gradability, uses two categories: force and focus. Force is concerned with degrees, intensity, or amount, in phrases such as ‘slightly foolish’, ‘greatly hindered’ and similar (Martin & White, 2005: 140). Focus, on the other hand, highlights or down-scales prototypicality, with expressions like ‘real father’ or ‘true friend’. In other words, which are often seen in other linguistic literature, highlighting is called boosting, and downscaling is called hedging (Martin & White, 2005: 138).

As the commentary of Sir Terry Wogan has usually been described as ironic by scholars (Coleman, 2008) and can be expected in the commentary style of Graham Norton, these notions should also be taken into consideration. However, concepts such as irony, sarcasm or satire are found hard to define and distinguish in academic contexts. The most frequently researched form of irony that is also present in this analysis is verbal irony. This form refers to ironic

contradictions via speech or writing which refer to real events or linguistic depictions of them. Sarcasm is a form of verbal irony, used to harshly amplify the negativity of a statement (Colston, 1997 in Attardo, 2017: 236). The two notions will not be discussed in greater detail yet are defined for better understanding of the data.

Altogether, this section has described the process of data collection and its analysis. The results of the research can therefore be presented. All transcribed data samples can be found in the Appendix.

3. Results and Discussion

After the description of the data and methodology employed in this research, its results can be presented. To analyse and compare the British commentary of the Eurovision Song Contest, the analysis revolved around praise and criticism of male and female artists, the aspects targeted by attitudinal evaluation, as well as determining the most common types of attitudes found after appraisal analysis of each data sample. Previous research on such topics shows ambiguity in the field of sports commentary, ranging from clear instances of gender bias, lack of gender bias, or differing reactions and lack of attitudinal expressions in general. In this section, all findings and interpretations will be presented in the order of the research questions:

1. Which gender is more praised or criticized – males or females?
2. What aspects are targeted by the attitudinal evaluation?
3. Which type of attitude is the most frequently expressed?

3.1 Praise and criticism amongst males and females

The ESC-Norton (years 2013–2023) sample consisted of 98 female and 88 male artists, while ESC-Wogan (years 1999–2008) had 97 female and 60 male artists. The calculations involved dividing the positive/negative/ambiguous polarity phrases from all attitude phrases present and multiplying by 100, to achieve normalized, comparable numbers. All numbers are provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Polarity in ESC-Wogan and ESC-Norton.

	ESC-Wogan (Male)	ESC-Wogan (Female)	ESC-Norton (Male)	ESC-Norton (Female)
All attitude phrases	184	268	552	587
Positive polarity	119	141	392	436
Negative polarity	24	35	85	61
Ambiguous	41	92	75	88

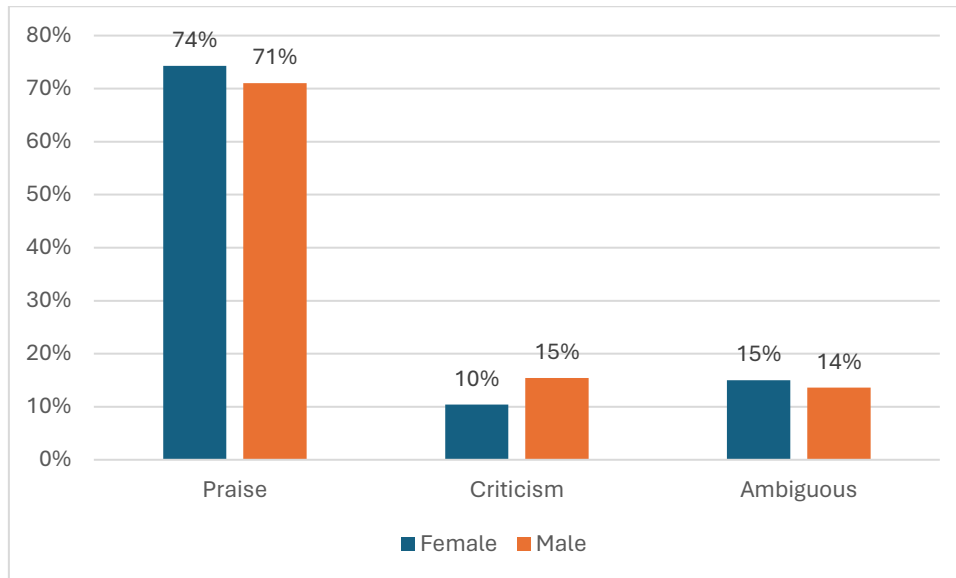


Figure 1: Distribution of Praise, Criticism, and Ambiguous remarks within ESC-Norton.

Figure 1 showcases Graham Norton's tendencies in the analysed period, with no significant differences between males and females in terms of praise as well as ambiguous remarks. Male artists were more frequently subjected to criticism, by a small margin. Frequent praise as well as turning to ambiguous remarks rather than outright criticism could signify fair commentary, not aimed at ridiculing the contestants and instead evaluating their work fairly.

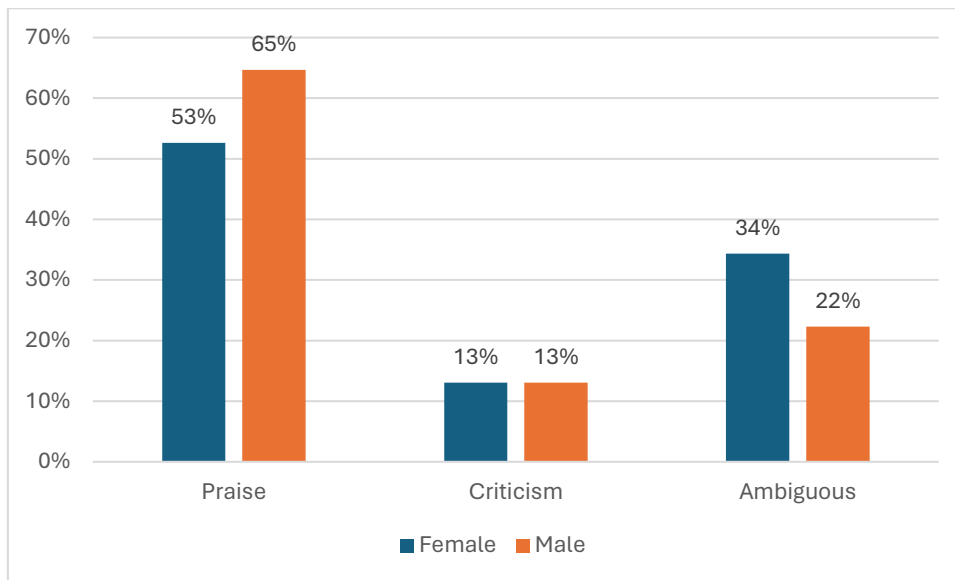


Figure 2: Distribution of Praise, Criticism, and Ambiguous remarks within ESC-Wogan.

On the other hand, differences with a bigger margin can be found in Sir Terry Wogan's commentary, presented in Figure 2. Male artists were more frequently praised and female artists received more ambiguous remarks, the number of criticizing remarks being equal. This can suggest the presence of gender bias which was well documented in previous sports commentary research (Billings et al. 2002; Billings & Eastman, 2000). The following section will cover some of the patterns and elements used by the commentators to express their praise, criticism, or ambiguity.

In many of the examples (1-4), the evaluation is begun by stating the elements worthy of praise, only then following it up with the elements they consider not up to standard or their opinion on the result the performance will have.

- (1) ***Quite a good reaction** in the hall. **I feel like she did it better in rehearsal**, but we'll see how the scores go for her later. (ESC-Norton; Female)*
- (2) *She has a **beautiful vocal**, **it's a perfect, nice song** but it seems to me in need of **that extra something to stand out** on this very very strong evening. (ESC-Norton; Female)*
- (3) *You'll find this, **maybe, a shimmering delight**, and yet, **just a little bit frightening**. (ESC-Wogan; Female)*
- (4) *Find it **a bouncy little number** (...) **It's obviously much more fun to sing than to listen to**. (ESC-Wogan; Female)*

There are also sentences which follow the pattern in reverse, first stating criticism and only then admitting the elements deserving praise, as in sentences (5) and (6).

(5) *Now, ironically, **the song isn't that great.** But **his performance**, I have to say, **is really charismatic.*** (ESC-Norton; Male)

(6) *And **if love doesn't kill us, the choreography will...** **Quite a catchy song, though.*** (ESC-Norton; Male)

Another tactic seen in example (7) is implying that the audience will enjoy unconventional performances and calling them 'special' or 'unique', rather than outright 'weird' or 'untraditional'.

(7) *This is **a rather special one**, you're gonna like this... [...] 4 knitting brides of Frankenstein and **a loonie with a clothesline.*** (ESC-Wogan; Male)

One more prominent trait of Sir Terry Wogan's commentary specifically was to use cultural references – comparing the attributes of artists to other popular musicians or characters from movies, works of literature, and similar (7-9). Artists are compared to the different people and characters usually based on appearance, more specifically the outfit. This has a close relation to the aspects targeted by attitudinal evaluation, which will be covered in the following subchapter.

(8) *And Doris is in the white, looking not unlike **Lady Macbeth.*** (ESC-Wogan; Female)

(9) *...but get ready for **Xena, warrior princess!*** (ESC-Wogan; Female)

For instances classed as praise, the commentators would utter statements that are exclusively positive, without voicing any concerns or criticism that would make them ambiguous or critical. Graham Norton's commentary had the tendency to also sharpen (or intensify) certain statements, as can be seen in examples (10) and (11), presenting the singer or the performance as truly extraordinary. This commentary tactic can be interpreted as a way to maintain the viewer's interest in continuing to watch the show. The commentary also tends to focus on more than one aspect that deserves praise. In instances (10) and (11), Graham Norton addresses both the vocal capabilities of the artist as well as their appearance, or both vocal capabilities and the ability to dance.

(10) ***Her voice is something to be reckoned with, it really is impressive. Equally impressive is her outfit.*** (ESC-Norton; Female)

(11) ***So beautiful, and she can sing, and oh, can she dance.*** (ESC-Norton; Female)

On the other hand, Sir Terry Wogan's commentary would simply declare how good or bad the performance was (12) or present his also sometimes intensified opinion by following it up with

a rhetorical question (13) or a question to the viewers (14). The rhetorical questions could also be interpreted as sarcastic, considering his ironic commentary style.

(12) ***Good performance*** by Sandrine François, for France. (ESC-Wogan; Female)

(13) *...and I think **this is the best song in the contest by a mile, but what do I know?*** (ESC-Wogan; Female)

(14) ***That was very good, wasn't it?*** (ESC-Wogan; Male)

Unlike praise or criticism, ambiguous statements could be interpreted in more than one way, therefore earning this label. Often enough, they would also be softened. One of the tactics of Graham Norton is to express uncertainty regarding a performance and its further success, seen in examples (15) and (16).

(15) ***I wonder if it'll do any good.*** (ESC-Norton; Female).

(16) ***...but will it stay in the memory? We're not sure.*** (ESC-Norton; Male).

Such statements could not confidently be considered praise or criticism as they do not necessarily praise the artist, nor criticize them for their act. Instead, this usually shows the commentator's concern regarding the song's result. This concern does not directly tie in with the performer's attributes, but rather highlights the unpredictable nature of the contest.

Another prominent tactic in the ambiguous part of the samples is humorous statements. They could generally be called ironic or sarcastic in nature, most often making fun of the performance and the props used, showcased in examples (17) and (18).

(17) ***This performance features a trapeze. Why? Because it's Eurovision.*** (ESC-Norton; Female)

(18) ***Blas Canto, representing Spain with a very big moon.*** (ESC-Norton; Male)

As previously mentioned, irony and sarcasm often signify harsh negativity. However, as this research did not focus on the analysis of humour, a definite answer can only be achieved by conducting analysis with a focus on humour and its different manifestations.

Turning to criticism, it revolved around exclusively negative statements which did not cause any ambiguity, as can be seen in the following examples. Sentence (19) demonstrates Graham Norton's opinion, using what he and the viewers have seen beforehand – the artist's intentional act of turning off the music – how he wishes it lasted longer, as a way to say that he really did not enjoy it.

(19) *I really think we should stop the music – **she didn't do that for longer.** (ESC-Norton; Female)*

If in case of praise or ambiguous statements the commentators employed objective information such as the artist's performance as seen in the rehearsals, the artist's personal achievements, skills, and similar, critical statements would often be highly subjective. The critical remarks of Graham Norton would often shift the blame to his age ('old') or character ('grumpy') rather than blaming the artist for their performance or other characteristics, as seen in examples (20) and (21).

(20) *Maybe I'm just old and grumpy, but **there isn't a single thing about this woman that doesn't annoy me.** (ESC-Norton; Female)*

(21) *But maybe I'm just old and grumpy, **but should you appear in Eurovision with bedhead?** (ESC-Norton; Male)*

In many instances of criticism, Graham Norton would also choose to soften his statements, as can be seen in examples (22) and (23). Softening, within the framework of Martin & White, is the ability to 'down-scale' specifications to show that the concept is marginal, rather than prototypical (Martin & White, 2005: 138). This is also known as 'hedging' or 'vague language' in other literature.

(22) *A very cute song, **but maybe not right for Eurovision.** (ESC-Norton; Male)*

(23) *...**the staging is slightly shambolic.** (ESC-Norton; Female)*

Down-scaling is not as frequently seen in Sir Terry Wogan's commentary as he chooses to generalize his statements and say how 'that' (i.e. the performance in its entirety) was 'awful', 'didn't go anywhere', and similar, as seen in examples (24) and (25). In example (27), he chooses to express his confusion rather than an evaluation of what he has seen. This tactic goes back to the research by Coleman (2008) which describes this as a way to picture the Eurovision Song Contest as a spectacle completely foreign to the British audience (p. 133).

(24) ***That didn't really go anywhere, did it?** (ESC-Wogan; Female)*

(25) ***I wish I knew what all that was about.** (ESC-Wogan; Female)*

In other instances, he would choose to look down upon certain characteristics, in case of example (26) it is the singing capabilities of the artist, describing them as capabilities supposedly not worthy of the descriptor 'singing'. Similarly to his ways of praising, the rhetorical questions are also used in criticism, showcased in example (27).

(26) *Ruslana will be singing it **if singing is the word we're looking for.*** (ESC-Wogan; Female)

(27) ***What was that about? What's it all about?*** (ESC-Wogan; Male)

Despite this, there were also instances where both commentators chose to criticize the artist and their performance without any prior explanation or stating that it is exclusively their opinion, such as examples (28) and (29).

(28) *The song is "Adio", which means "goodbye". Adio! **So, now I know what to say to him later, when I see him.*** (ESC-Norton; Male)

(29) *I'm not so sure, **there's always a lunatic fringe, that give people like this a vote.*** (ESC-Wogan; Male)

3.2 Aspects of attitudinal evaluation

The analysis of this research question employed an adapted version of the classification by Billings (Billings et al., 2002). The criteria within the research involved: physicality, intelligence, determination, appearance, background, and others (Billings et al., 2002: 305). For the purposes of this research, those criteria were adapted, and such aspects and their descriptions were used:

1. Singer – the achievements and capabilities of a singer, their background.
2. Song – the lyrics and composition of a song, its message.
3. Performance – visual elements, the performance itself.
4. Appearance – physical characteristics of the performer, their outfit.
5. Favourite – the mention of how the song is a favourite amongst fans, music experts.

The results of this analysis are presented in Figures 3 and 4.

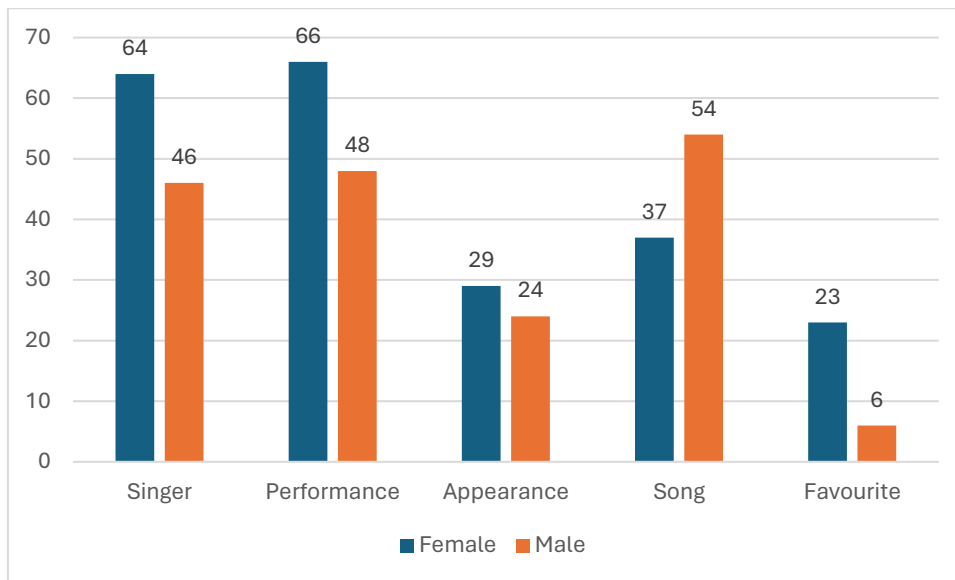


Figure 3: Aspects targeted by attitudinal evaluation in ESC-Norton.

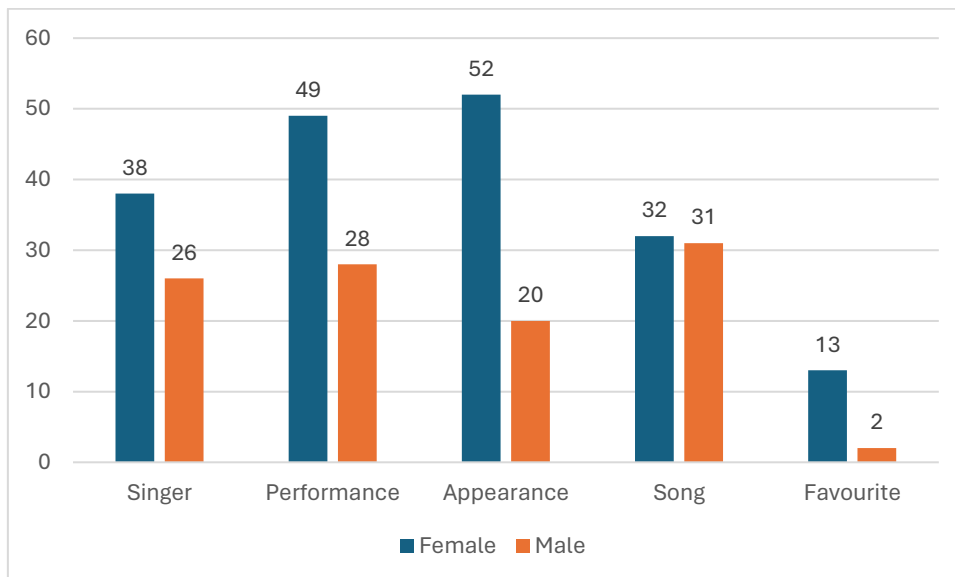


Figure 4: Aspects targeted by attitudinal evaluation in ESC-Wogan.

Both commentaries have their own noticeable differences. In both samples, the aspect of singer and performance are the most prominent, with female artists in the lead in both commentary of Graham Norton and the commentary of Sir Terry Wogan. This finding is unsurprising giving the nature of the process: the commentator focusing primarily on who and what both he and the viewers will see: the artist and the action happening on stage.

Previous research has shown how commentary on female athletes can revolve around appearance, rather than athletic performance (Billings et al., 2002: 309). Male athletes would be characterized focusing on their athletic performance, while the success of female athletes was attributed to external influences, rather than their skills (ibid.: 308). A focus on appearance

can also be seen in the results of ESC-Wogan, where 52 out of 97 female acts were discussed by mentioning appearance. Some of the examples include:

- (30) *This is a **wild haired lovely, tightly strapped into her bustier.***
- (31) *I want you to keep an eye on Karolina, **I think this one has legs.***

The most frequently mentioned aspect regarding male artists being the song aspect can be compared to athleticism within sports commentary. As the Eurovision is primarily a song contest, the song is arguably the most crucial part of any entry, just as athleticism is in sports.

- (32) *This is a **tempestuous song... The rhythms of the Mediterranean about it.***
- (33) ***Gentle song, catchy chorus.***

By interpreting the results like so, it can be assumed that the old commentary of the Eurovision Song Contest shares the gender bias found in the analysis by Billings et al. (2002). On the other hand, ESC-Norton shows a significantly decreased number of 29/98, instead favouring the categories of singer and performance for female artists as well as male artists. Male artists were also very frequently discussed by mentioning the song aspect:

- (34) *He's 19, **he wrote the song himself...***
- (35) *And that song, I have to say, **is the one that's been stuck in my head all day.***

This finding can suggest an overall difference in both the commentary genres and a difference in contemporary British commentary of the Eurovision Song Contest. Within the contemporary variant, appearance was the least frequently mentioned aspect, with Graham Norton preferring to address the artist and their performance.

- (36) *And, I firmly believe this is **some of the best Eurovision staging I've ever seen.***
- (37) *And now, Ryan looks young, but on stage **he's so confident and charismatic and it's because he's been performing for years...***

3.3 Appraisal framework

This section will deal with the question of the most common types of attitudes found in commentary. First, distribution of instances of appraisal and graduation will be presented, followed by subtypes of appraisal: affect, judgement, and appreciation, as well as subtypes of graduation: force and focus.

3.3.1 Distribution of attitude/graduation

The distribution of appraisal is presented in Table 2, numbers are normalized by dividing instances of attitude/graduation with all instances of appraisal. It can be said that the use of attitudinal expressions is quite frequent in both samples. Concerning graduation, the ESC-Norton sample has an increase of those expressions (23.30%), compared to ESC-Wogan (13.51%).

Table 2: Distribution of Attitude and Graduation in ESC-Wogan and ESC-Norton

	ESC-Wogan Attitude	ESC-Wogan Graduation	ESC-Norton Attitude	ESC-Norton Graduation
Raw fq.	493	77	1139	346
Normalized fq.	0.86	0.14	0.77	0.23
%	86.49	13.51	76.70	23.30

3.3.2 Subtypes of attitude

With subtypes of attitude presented in Figure 3, both the commentary of Sir Terry Wogan and Graham Norton is similar, with appreciation being the most frequently used subtype. This is not an unexpected finding as the commentator primarily focuses on the aesthetic properties of a performance, encompassed by the subtype of appreciation.

The personal qualities of a performer, usually falling under the category of judgement, are not as frequently touched upon. However, the difference in instances of judgement between Wogan's commentary and Norton's commentary suggests a shift towards commentary which chooses to incorporate information about the artist's capabilities or achievements, rather than relying solely on visual elements.

Affect being the least common attitude is consistent with previous research using the Appraisal theory. The analysis of sports commentary by Hassanvandi & Golchinnezhad (2002: 404) has found that affect is the least common between three different types of commentary altogether, comprising only 11.53%.

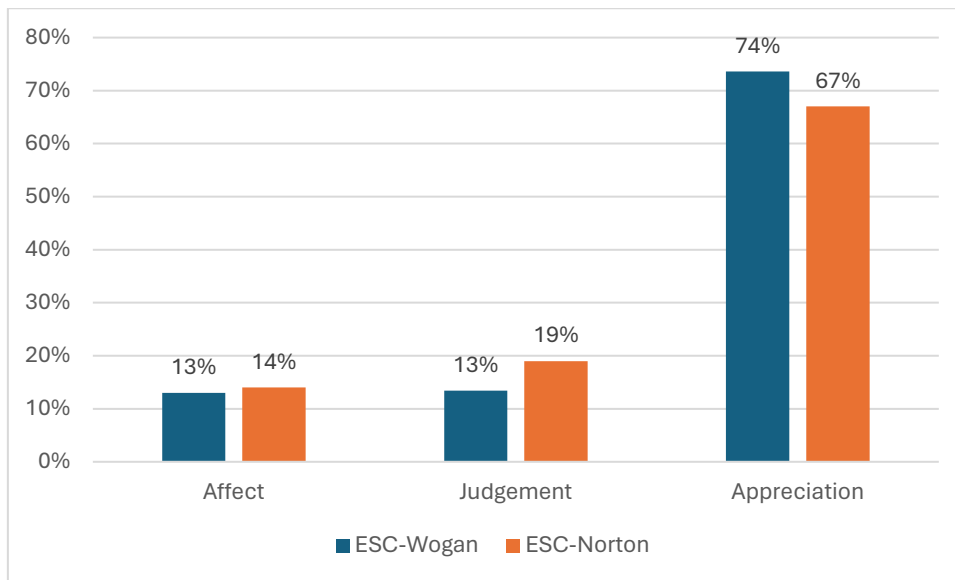


Figure 3: Distribution of subtypes of attitudes in ESC-Wogan and ESC-Norton

3.3.2.1 Appreciation

The most common subtype of attitude was appreciation, usually used to evaluate inanimate objects or people when it is not behaviour that is being assessed. The distribution of subtypes of appreciation is presented in Table 3. The most common subtype in both cases was reaction, followed by valuation and then composition.

Table 3: Distribution of subtypes of appreciation in ESC-Wogan and ESC-Norton

	ESC-Wogan		ESC-Norton	
	Raw fq.	Norm. fq.	Raw fq.	Norm. fq.
Reaction	259	0.71	494	0.64
Composition	33	0.09	51	0.06
Valuation	71	0.20	222	0.28
Total	363		767	

Reaction is often described as an answer to the questions ‘did it catch my attention?’ (subtype of impact) or ‘did I like it?’ (subtype of quality) (Martin & White, 2005: 56). Some of the examples include:

(38) *Oh, fair enough!* (ESC-Wogan; Quality)

(39) *...very catchy song, I’m sure it’ll do well...* (ESC-Norton; Impact)

- (40) *And it really is a very optimistic anthem, it's perfect for Eurovision.* (ESC-Norton; Quality)

The instances found in ESC-Wogan are often vague, to the extent that they do not provide further explanation as to why this is his remark of choice (38). The examples of ESC-Norton showcase more detailed insights into what caught his attention, why the performance will get a high score, or why the performance is 'perfect for Eurovision' or 'will do well' (39-40).

The second most frequent subtype was valuation, concerned with answering the question: 'was it worthwhile?' or is related to opinions overall (Martin & White, 2005: 56–57).

- (41) *That's it – that's the favourite.* (ESC-Wogan)
(42) *That'll always do well, they'll get a few votes.* (ESC-Wogan)
(43) *They're loving it in the hall, singing along, they all know it!* (ESC-Norton)
(44) *That is top 5 and a great position in the running order... They're loving it.* (ESC-Norton)

In most instances, the phrases which belong to valuation were referring to the voting sequence that follows all the performances. The comments would cover potential placements of songs (44), their ability to gather votes (42), reactions of the attendees (43), the song's status of being a favourite (44) or several of these criteria altogether.

Lastly, composition is the least used subtype. Across all appreciation phrases, it only makes up the normalized frequency of 0.9 in ESC-Wogan and 0.6 in ESC-Norton. This could be explained by the overlapping nature of the framework when categories and subcategories tend to overlap with each other. Very frequently, the concepts of composition such as balance ('did it hang together?') or complexity ('was it hard to follow?') would intertwine with categories such as impact or quality, ultimately resulting in a phrase more fitting in those subcategories of appreciation. Despite this, examples of composition include:

- (45) *Slightly bizarre ethnic rhythms will feature here* (ESC-Wogan; Complexity)
(46) *I'm about to say they didn't sound all that together to me.* (ESC-Wogan; Balance)
(47) *It's very simple, little ditty, called "Kedvesem" ...* (ESC-Norton; Complexity)
(48) *It's quite lengthy.* (ESC-Norton; Balance)

These examples usually were not sophisticated from a lexical standpoint, with simple statements regarding the song's complexity, such as 'bizarre', 'very simple' or just 'lengthy' in (45), (47) and (48). They are also all backed up with some form of graduation. Example (46)

stands out as a direct answer to the question of the subtype – the artist and their backup vocals did not ‘hang together’.

3.3.2.2 Judgement

The second most common subtype of attitude was judgement, usually concerned with people, their behaviours, and ethics. The subtypes concerned with ethics, such as propriety or veracity, were not the focus, as seen in Table 3.

Table 4: Distribution of subtypes of judgement in ESC-Wogan and ESC-Norton

	ESC-Wogan		ESC-Norton	
	Raw. fq.	Norm. fq.	Raw. fq.	Norm. fq.
Capacity	26	0.39	124	0.57
Normality	29	0.44	56	0.25
Tenacity	7	0.11	28	0.12
Propriety	4	0.06	7	0.03
Total	66		216	

What stands out in the table are the high rates of capacity and normality. The Appraisal framework describes capacity as a subtype focusing on ‘how capable’ the person is, while normality describes how ‘special’ they are (Martin & White, 2005: 53).

The descriptions by Graham Norton choose to intrigue the viewer by choosing a variety of ways to refer to an artist’s capability or uniqueness – example (49) showcases the artist’s voice beyond the usual descriptors such as ‘strong’ or ‘unique’. Example (50) intensifies the statement, this being a frequent attribute of Graham Norton’s commentary. Sir Terry Wogan would instead comment on the artist’s age (51) or status in their country (52), both being quite common elements.

(49) *Her voice is **something to be reckoned with**. (ESC-Norton; Female)*

(50) *But he’s a **very engaging, charismatic performer**. (ESC-Norton; Male)*

(51) ***Been singing since she was six**. (ESC-Wogan; Female)*

(52) ***...the most famous pop-star in all Croatia**. (ESC-Wogan; Male)*

Regarding normality, the descriptions would range from lexically simple, only including one adjective (53, 56) to comments that used several at once for emphasis (54) or which simply highlighted an abnormality in the context of the contest (55). The phrase ‘youngest singer’

would often be used by both commentators in case of the artist being 16 or 17 years old. This is not as frequent of an occurrence, with the minimum age of a contestant being 16.

(53) *Credible performer...* (ESC-Norton; Female)

(54) *Such a positive, warm, lovely man!* (ESC-Norton; Male)

(55) *Youngest singer in the competition...* (ESC-Wogan; Female)

(56) *This is a lively fellow...* (ESC-Wogan; Male)

The choice to assign phrases like ‘youngest singer...’ to normality, rather than capacity, comes from the phrasing. By informing the viewers of how long the artist has been in the realm of singing (53), their capabilities are directly admired. By mentioning how the artist is the ‘youngest’ or ‘oldest’ in the competition (55), this instead focuses on how unique the age may be in the context of the contest.

3.3.2.3 Affect

Affect was the least common attitude in both samples. However, it has a surprisingly equal distribution in both ESC-Norton and ESC-Wogan. In the case of ESC-Wogan, the most prominent and statistically significant subtype was dis/satisfaction. In ESC-Norton, it was un/happiness.

Table 5: Distribution of subtypes of affect in ESC-Wogan and ESC-Norton

	ESC-Wogan		ESC-Norton	
	Raw fq.	Norm. fq.	Raw fq.	Norm. fq.
In/Security	3	0.05	9	0.05
Dis/Inclination	13	0.20	39	0.25
Un/Happiness	11	0.17	59	0.37
Dis/Satisfaction	37	0.58	49	0.31
Total	64		156	

For affect being an attitude which revolves around emotional reactions, the instances found in ESC-Wogan do not reference specific emotions directly, with words such as ‘cry’, ‘rejoice’ and similar. Dis/satisfaction deals with accomplishment or annoyance in the activities being participated in.

(57) *Well done!* (Female)

(58) *Just being silly, aren't they...* (Female)

(59) ***He gets my vote, I'll tell you that. (Male)***

(60) ***I think it's going to do well for us. (Male)***

In this context, Sir Terry Wogan expresses his satisfaction by exclaiming it as a compliment to the artist (57), predicting success (60) or as rewarding the artist with his vote (59). The instance of dissatisfaction (58) can be interpreted as annoyance with the actions he is witnessing.

Current commentary of the Eurovision Song Contest provides contrast to such findings by providing more un/happiness based affectual statements. Un/happiness most directly focuses on emotions, involving the feelings of happiness, sadness, and involving them in liking or disliking something (Martin & White, 2005: 49). Graham Norton's most frequent subtype of affect being un/happiness suggests higher emotional investment in what he is witnessing. Unlike the old commentary of Eurovision which used affect to almost exclusively express satisfaction or annoyance, the contemporary commentary shows signs of more direct emotions (62), instances of cheering (63) or affection (61, 64).

(61) ***Aww, bless him! (Male)***

(62) ***Anyone has a tear in their eyes? Just this old fool? (Male)***

(63) ***That was worth the price of admission! (Female)***

(64) ***I love moments like that in Eurovision. (Female)***

It can be said that instances like (64) could instead be assigned to appreciation (quality) as it answers the question whether the commentator liked what he saw. It can also be interpreted as an instance of happiness and a certain admiration of the moment that was witnessed.

To conclude, this chapter has presented answers to the research questions as well as an analysis of the collected data.

4. Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to explore the British commentary of the Eurovision Song Contest with the help of the Appraisal theory developed by Martin & White (2005) as well as an adapted version of the commentary category classification by Billings (Billings et al., 2002). These frameworks have provided insight into the language used by commentators of this event and the notions they choose to focus on with their commentary.

From the perspective of gender bias, there were some differences between Sir Terry Wogan's (1999-2008) and Graham Norton's (2013-2023) commentary, considering the sizes of the data samples. Sir Terry Wogan chooses to more frequently praise male artists (65%) compared to female artists (53%) across all samples of his commentary. Furthermore, female artists received more ambiguous statements (34%) than males (22%). Of interest is the equal distribution of criticism between both genders (13%) within this data sample. Contrarily, Graham Norton has more equalized results across all categories. There were no significant differences between genders in his data sample, with only female criticism (10%) being lower than male criticism (15%).

On the topic of aspects targeted by the attitudinal evaluation, the contemporary commentary by Graham Norton seems to coincide with previous findings. However, the commentary by Sir Terry Wogan does not. Previous research by Billings et al. (2002) suggests a heavy focus on appearance regarding female athletes. The contemporary commentary of Graham Norton instead chooses to have a balanced coverage regarding both the artist's personal qualities and their performance, rather than physical attributes.

Lastly, the appraisal analysis based on the framework by Martin & White (2005) has shown high numbers of appreciation-based statements, followed by judgement and only then affect. Very frequent usage of appreciation and/or judgement is a common result found in research of sports commentary which uses the Appraisal theory (Hassanvandi & Golchinnezhad, 2022). As the objective of commentary is to inform the viewer of everything that is happening during the broadcast, frequent usage of the two subtypes can be expected. The commentary of Graham Norton chooses to also more frequently use valuation, highlighting his opinion on whether a performance was worthwhile.

This research has provided an insight into a topic that can and should be further explored. The Eurovision Song Contest has evolved beyond being only a music competition or an experiment

in television broadcasting, therefore researching it as a cultural phenomenon could reveal more details not only about the contest but also the cultures that form it or the social, cultural, and even economic changes caused by it.

The thesis has its limitations that can inspire some future research. Firstly, the time restraints do not give an opportunity to analyse the materials in greater detail. As this research was conducted by only one person and using a self-compiled sample, misspellings or unintelligible words in the samples were present. With more researchers or more convenient ways to acquire transcriptions of commentary, the overall quality of the research could be improved. For further research, more different commentaries could also be used and compared, possibly even including languages beyond English especially since the Eurovision Song Contest is now a global event that is broadcasted beyond Europe.

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Summary in Lithuanian

Pagrindinis šio darbo tikslas buvo ištirti britiškąją Eurovizijos dainų konkurso komentavimą lyties atžvilgiu, naudojant Martin & White (2005) vertinimo modelį. Analizės metu buvo analizuojami komentatorių pasisakymai ir buvo siekiama rasti atsakymus į tris klausimus: kuri lytis sulaukia daugiau pagyrų ir kritikos, kokiems aspektams komentatoriai skiria daugiausiai dėmesio ir kuri kategorija vertinimo modelyje yra dažniausiai naudojama.

Tyrimui buvo surinkti duomenys iš dviejų britų komentatorių skirtingais laikotarpiais. Pirmasis komentatorius, laikotarpyje nuo 1999 iki 2008-ųjų, buvo Terry Wogan, o antrasis, nuo 2013 iki 2023, buvo Graham Norton. Šie laikotarpiai pasirinkti atsižvelgiant į naujausią turimą konkursą abiem komentatoriams. Duomenys buvo apdoroti naudojant UAM CorpusTool, turintį visas funkcijas vertinimo modeliui pritaikyti. Taip pat buvo panaudota tyrimui pritaikyta komentarų klasifikacija, naudota Billings et al. (2002) tyrime.

Tyrimas parodė, kad šiuolaikiniame Eurovizijos dainų konkurso komentavime pagyros ir kritika yra subalansuotos. Senajame komentavimo pavyzdyje vyrai dažniau giriami už moteris, kurios gaudavo daugiau dviprasmiškų komentarų. Nustatyta, kad komentatorius Graham Norton dažniausiai skiria dėmesio dainininko(-ės), pasirodymo ir dainos aspektams, o Terry Wogan – išvaizdai, pasirodymui ir galiausiai dainininkui(-ei). Galiausiai, dažniausiai aptinkama vertinimo modelio kategorija abiejuose laikotarpuose – pripažinimas (*appreciation*).

Appendix

Commentary of Sir Terry Wogan (ESC-Wogan; 1999-2008)

They think this is a very good chance, it's one of the favourites. What did we do before drum machines? And of course we're back to the old disco. Let it all hang out, girl.

Called "Nanana"... Well, "La la la" won in 1968, why "nanana" shouldn't in 2003, but I don't think so... And I think you'll find she bears more than a passing facial resemblance to Toyah Wilcox from "I'm a celebrity, ???"

...Maria is a comely Bosnian with 4 rather frightened looking friends and a strange looking fella with a bouzouki. It's a sort of prayer for forgiveness. -- I told you it'd end badly.

...performed by Claudia Benny, a pleasing youngster... A welcome return of the Wonder Bra here and restrain the urge to shout "they're behind you!!", this is not a pantomime. -- I have a feeling she'd end up in their arms. Absolutely the likely last, that from Croatia...

find it a bouncy little number, uh, Croatia's answer to Elizabeth Hurley releasing in this. it's a sort of shout along. it's obviously much more fun to sing than to listen to. and keep an eye out for there's a fellow trying to play a ukulele with a bow. -- why don't you sing along to this? -- Oh, I thought that frock was getting in the way. -- Where have we seen this dance step before? Yeah. That'll get votes.

Let me tell you about the twist that's coming up, it's going to be sung by Sidsel Ben Semmane who's currently taking her A levels at AHU's Cathedral School. These are the little details that make a difference. she's here with her four sisters. In white and cream, naturally, and somebody's boyfriend, and I don't think it's Chubby Checker. Ok, get twisting! -- That's the twist but not as we know it, Jim.

It's lowkey, to be honest and... Slightly depressing. But there's a quick change in the middle that's going to excite you. -- That's the general sentiment, that's the spirit!

...This is Mando, and she wrote it along with Terry Saganos... This is a wild haired lovely, tightly strapped into her bustier. If you had a pair of handcuffs and a whipper, they're very welcome here. -- Was that the return of Ema Sumac? The Greeks liked it.

...And you know, lots of people think they could do a double with this... The crowd are going big for this one. -- There she is! in the classic Melina Mercouri Tradition.

...Elena giving us a tantalizing whiff of the East and the usual dancers clogging up the stage. and look out for the ragged denim short making a fighting comeback. -- Saucy! If you keep an eye out on the contest, I think last year was a kind of... kind of navel year, this year the legs have it.

...I want you to keep an eye on Karolina, I think this one has legs. And you'll be relieved to know there's some traditional pawing later on. -- The inevitable firework at the end! Have to give it to Karolina and Macedonia there, doing their best in the forced ?-gale...?

...Now, for the life of me, I never understand why Julia Savicheva sung this, a demure girl, during their national contest in Russia - sung alone with a guitar, and some genius has decided to surround her with a crowd of half-naked wallopers. -- Y'know, I wouldn't care if I never sung ?on? the sixpack.

Now this Marija is a homely looking girl and getting support from, what look like, 5 prison wardresses. Must've rushed down stage, didn't have the time to tuck in her shirt or do up her tie. -- Well... I wish I knew what all that was about. They're coming to take me away. That was Marija and the wardresses.

Will introduce the Swedish entry called "It hurts" by Thomas Orrup Eriksson. "So it hurts it really hurts in the middle of the night" – that'll be the acid indigestion. I told you to leave that baklava alone! The singer is Lena Phillipson looking not unlike Helena Christensen, the supermodel. And you're gonna like her, a roguish Scandinavian charmer and purple pampooties. Last song, make the most of it, be another year before you have to hear this kind of stuff again. -- I must say, it certainly smarts a bit.

Superstar is the Turkish entry sung by Sibel Tüzün I think Tüzün may be Turkish for tattoo but I'm not... Can't be sure. She's surrounded by British dancers choreography by Gary Lloyd... There'll be a measure of the old belly dance in this --

Actually this song is written by DJ Pasha who's doing the commentary for the Ukraine in the box next to me, so I'm just going to endorse this because he is a tall chap and probably punches his weight... "Show Me Your Love" - show me the money! The first serious case of a short skirt and boots and men in frocks. -- That's another one that's gonna go big in the Baltic!

This is a lady in slinky red and ??? with a rather nasty rash on her back. There is a Cossack accompaniment and there will be swordfighting later - hurrah! -- What did we do in the Eurovision before fireworks?

You'll find that this is a breath of the Mystic East and indeed full of crowd-pleasing crawling and groping and then the navel gets full play and this is very refreshing... Bring me the bellies! -- Ahah, I jinx in the hareem!

Now as the song from Finland – Nina Åström, born in the town of Kokola... It's called "A Little Bit". The Finnish entry rousing up the ol' bold air! -- (singing)... Finland!

First song of the last Eurovision of this century, in her native Samogitian dialect. -- Well, false taps, they're always a mistake in the Eurovision. That's the Lithuanian entry, I don't think it's a winner, but what do I know.

...The Albanian entry and they were surprise qualifiers from the semi-finals, which I was unlucky enough to miss on Wednesday... It'll be sung in English, you're relieved to know. And the singer, 40:1 in the bookies, is Anjeza Shahini, and the saucy baggage she is. -- That's fine strapping, lassie.

... The Albanian entry is called "Zemrën e lamë peng", go on, tell me I'm wrong. That's translated as "Hearts Trapped In Time"... And a pleasing view of the first bellybutton of the evening. -- Say what you like, not easy to sing in a high wind like that. Like Romania, the Albanian diaspora has been such that they're gonna get a lot of votes from various European countries.

The Armenian entry is called "Qele Qele", at least, that's as close as I get to it... And it's a... It's a breath of the warm south. And keep an ear out for the old Mongolian nose flute and of course, the statutory 3 gyrating eejits. -- Sirusho! A bouncy Armenian.

...Now if you look at this closely, you'll see that one of the Corr sisters has escaped for the evening through a family ?compound?. And it also features the welcome return of the hareem pant! -- Lovely! Blinding.

We find her sprawling, moodily on the stage. -- Very enthusiastic crowd here. I would say perked, but not a winner.

...We think, and we know nothing, as I've said before - this is a, got the ?-side?, this. Hold on, be strong... Just cling for the wreckage, it'll be over soon. -- That's a gooden... That'll undoubtedly get some from the other Baltic states.

...Pretty unremarkable entry by Romania... When I last looked, the lady was making a brave fashion statement with jeans and the liberty bodice, and there's some intriguing light engineering work being done on stage as well. And just tell me, does she remind you of

anybody? What about a young Ruby Wax? -- I hope somebody is going to give that a personal chance. Thank you Ruby! A brave effort!

And the Russian entry will please the eye and the ear. A performer called Alsou who's sixteen. And Alsou is a Tatar name meaning "rose water"... The song is called "Solo". "I'm sitting alone, here in my room...". You'll like this. Bit of heavy breathing there, and in the audience! Alsou, oh with those two big girls' blouses behind her leg though! The Eurovision, you can't beat it.

Spanish entry has been sung by Rosa, Spaniards have taken it to their hearts. Won the total, unconditional support of all Spaniards after winning the 5 month long, Big Brother style Operación Triunfo"... "Europe's a celebration", the politically correct will vote for this! -- All of Spain is convinced that's gonna win!

Charlotte Neilson, 24, sings for Sweden... Now, this perk Swedishness, touch heavy on the old purple eyeshadow, this might have been written by Benny and Bjorn - "Take Me to Your Heaven" -- Mmm... Hey! A face full of hair. I thought that was a strong Eurosong, very typical, very like Abba.

I don't mind telling you, I've had a couple of quid on this... The Swedish entry is sung by Carola, who, informants tell me, won the Eurovision Song Contest in 1991 for Sweden... A fine lump of a girl... you'll see that she's lumbered but what looked to be trousers of kitchen foil but she's not a woman that believes in standing still in the teeth of a gale. -- Let's hear it for Scandinavia! they'll all be voting for each other anyway! ...All the best then.

Sweden, of course, have won this before. You'll find this, maybe, a shimmering delight, and yet, just a little bit frightening. -- Lasers streaking across the arena...

And this is gonna be sung by Jane Bogaert, born in 1967... Now this is called "What is Life" "I wake up in the morning, coffee still warm from yesterday, the rain on my window leads my thoughts". Just being silly, aren't they... Lots of armpits and pointing in this, too. -- It's not unregarded. Obviously, the Italian canton's turn here for Switzerland. "La vita cos'e" -- "What is life".

...The Latvian entry, you wanna get ahead? Get a hat. -- There's cheeky. And people ask us why we love the Eurovision.

Vanessa Chinitor, released her first single in 1998 and is a popular singer in her homeland. now you'll be pleased with this Belgian entry because it's a very... An early but very welcome flash of time and there's a man on the Mongolian nose flute that I'd like to keep your eyes over for. -
- ...But that was pretty good, yes, you know it's pretty good. yes, attractive Vanessa Chinitor.

...Sung in Bosnian and English Mia Martina is the lady who's going to sing it... And black... Black is the New Black in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and I think Tom Jones and the writers of Sex Bomb could probably sue here. -- Well done yourself! Yes, yes, thank you!

It will introduce the Croatian entry for which I have a sneaking regard, but then, I'm well known as the kiss of death. It's gonna be sung by Doris. Doris has been the queen of Croatian pop music for a number of years now... I want you to keep a close eye on this, watch out for a crowd-pleasing strip... And Doris is in the white, looking not unlike Lady Macbeth. -- Oh, they loved that in the hall! Just a whiff of the souq... I think that's gonna do well.

"Let the fiddler let play on the strings of my heart", this is a tempestuous blonde lovely, singing for Croatia. Tumboy! -- Grand!

...Marlain has lived around the world, studied at Boston University. She's now at the Royal Academy of Music in London studying musical theatre... And it's a good entry from Cyprus... Just the faintest hint of a Geri Halliwell here. -- ...That was great.

The Cypriot entry, for which I have a sneaking regard, which of course, kiss of death... The singer for Cyprus is 16 year old, the youngest entry, Lisa Andreas. Confident, charming, from Chillingham in Kent, she's about to undertake her GCSE's. Her mother is from a small village in Cyprus.. As I say, I like this one, but i've been wrong every year for the last 31. -- Well, there are 36 countries voting this year, it's going to be a long hard road and I wonder if they're going to go for that kind of song, or will they go for the walloping.

Watch this one, it's got a really good chance... The Estonian entry is gonna be sung by Sahlene, there's been a bit of a fuss here because she's Swedish. But I think it's got a tremendous, tremendous chance... Like Buffy, the Vampire! -- Homeboy! I've never seen a hall in the Eurovision erupt like this one in Tallinn. Must have a great chance. Some have detected a resemblance to R. Kelly's "I Believe I Can Fly", but... ?Unworthy?.

This is a good one... Finnish entry is song 13, lucky for some... Laura, she's a bit of a valkyrie!
--

...And it's gonna be sung by Natasha St-Pier, who's a French Canadian, and I think this is the best song in the contest by a mile, but what do I know? That's probably not a reason for it to win, of course. This is about 3:1 in the betting, about a second favourite. I didn't draw it in the sweep, so I don't care. But I'd still like to see it win, just 'cause it's a good song. -- That is the best song, might win! And it's the first time you've ever heard English sung in a French entry.

This is a good song from France. A moody French temptress, Sandrine. -- Good performance by Sandrine François, for France.

Louisa Baïleche, born near Paris an Italian mother and a Cabae father... You'll find, this girl has a fine pair of arms and that she's performing, doubtless in the tribute to Sandy Shaw, barefoot. There's a hint of the jungle about this, a whiff of the primitive, the moon and the stars... -- That's a nice performance from Luisa Baileche...

"Who Lives Love", is that a question? ...And the odds against the German entry are about 20:1, the artist is Michelle. And I think you'll like her. It's a power-Schlager ballad, this. Got everything in it that you expect in a German entry in the ESC... So, it's Michelle, a chest to remember! -- I was a bit distracted during that, I don't know about you.

German entry sung by Corinna May, who has been blind since birth, a big voice. "Can't live without music..." Now this is the favourite in the betting. German entry, 3:1. -- Yes, that's the pre-contest favourite.

Ahh, you'll like this woman! ...Lou is her name, a fine mouth full of teeth... Jolly, upbeat Eurosong. Sure to get 12 points from Turkey, which they'll reciprocate.

...And there is again, just the vague hint of the zorba. -- And... yeahh, not bad at all! I think that must be well up there in the top 10, certainly.

And it's a really good one... This is good! -- ...It's good to hear that, isn't it? Sort of relief from all of the bellowing and explosions. Oh, human life is here...

The Icelandic entry, which again, I think has a very strong chance... Selma will be singing for Iceland, and very well, born in 1974... She'll be singing in English, which I think is on-line in the contest this year, not that I'm being the Anglo-maniac, but pop is an Anglophone thing. Once again, keep an eye out for the gray - gray and silver! I just have a word of advice for Selma - Never turn your back on a crowd like this.. ??? ..See if you can listen to this without being totally distracted by the two eejits in raincoats. -- Not unlike Bjork!

...And it's a very catchy song... -- That's got a really, really good, catchy chorus.

...Some turn up in frocks torn to piece, and those are outfits that wouldn't disgrace "Come Dancing". Now then, keep an eye on this girl, she seems demured, Karolina, but apart she's Zena, the warrior princess. -- That certainly brought out the disciplinarians among you... I liked that. And you liked it too, c'mon.

I've lost the track of this... Stockholm harbour. Lot of water here, and you'll see very shortly, when the spinnaker unfolds on this yacht, the Maltese cross so you'll put the two and two together like a ????. And it's Malta next. The artiste is Claudette Pace, born in 1968, well known TV personality... The song is called "Desire". And it owes a great deal more to the Caribbean than it does the Mediterranean, but I like this! It bounces along, and so indeed, does the good Claudette. -- That's a good one for Malta! And is it bad? Well done! Could we be in the sunshine, this time next year?

...The Maltese entry is sung by Ira Losco, very pretty girl, I know somebody's lost his heart to her already... --... I don't know about you, but I got slightly worried when she reached inside her frock there, I wasn't sure what was she hiding with that tinsel.

Chiara wrote the song herself, it's called "Angel"... You remember her, she's not all that easy to forget, the fine well set up lump of a woman. -- ...Let's hope they do well.

...She's 27, very pretty girl. This has a good chance. Marlayne is diaphanous net covering silver truths and Doc Marten boots. It's a sartorial melange that will please. And it'll be sung in English like so many of the songs, because they've lifted the restrictions, as you've probably heard. -- Pretty girl. Good song too, must have a chance.

The vivacious and bustling Netherlander called Esther Hart... and this has an outside chance I think... She's all in gold lamé and once again a team effort with the backing group. And keep your eye out for a fine big lump of a woman in a cap. -- They're there, my dear. And that's not the last you're going to see of the tightly laced bustier, knowing where that came from - oh you cheeky little thing.

...You'll find six listen lovelies, all in white. There's the surprise, and a couple of fiddles give the thing a vaguely Irish feel. The singer of the "elves dance" is the ice blonde Christine Guldbrandsen. -- Hard to beat the old fiddle, isn't it? And nice to hear the Jews' harp get an airing.

Now the Polish entry is something I'd like you to bear a bit of attention. Winsome, lovely, who's time has not been ill spent on the sunbed... She wrote the music and the lyrics and if she's not going to sing it I'll be a-- Anyway, there are 4 girls pretending to play the violin and a huddled figure over the piano and you haven't seen teeth like this since the ?Osmos?. -- Very grand Swedish person... And again... Somebody Swedish- Polish! The Polish diaspora has been such that again, there'll be many votes for that from all over Europe.

You're gonna like this, nice song... And this, let me tell you, is not over when this lady has sung. -- Some sing it. The Portuguese never really get far away from the ?fire-dough?... Terrific, that, I liked that...

...19 year old singer is Lydia from Madrid... Lydia's voice is fresh and powerful full of nuances and tenderness, it says. Now watch to keep your eye on this one, she's like a barbershops' pole. If you're a little astigmatic, I would avert my eyes. -- Now blaze a colour on a sunny evening. The full moon over Jerusalem, plentifully firmament over you too... Sorry, we are not that far away, are we, although we are two hours in advance.

...She's Kylie in dreadlocks, really. Pretty seniorita, and keep an eye out a couple of particularly Butch wallopers dressing the act in the background... -- Now, I must confess a sneaky regard for that. Mainly because I've drawn it in the sweep.

...a sort of quaint old-fashioned song from Slovenia. Not without its charm.

The Slovenian entry is called "Energy" and there's plenty of it... Second favourite in the polls, this was. "Energy" - oh, the world of leather! -- Well, the ol' leather fetishists had a wonderful time! Lock em' up!

...The performer, the composer, the lyricist is Francine Jordi! Used to play ?on the wing for Men United?. You'll like her... Cheery, pixie-like person. -- Ahh, give it a chance! I've drawn that in our little lottery here. Lucky Wogan, they call me.

The composers are Suhan Ayhan and the lyricist is Pinar Ayhan and Orkun Yazgan. And Pinar Ayhan will also lead the group, she's an English literature graduate for 1972, Pinar Ayhan. This is called "Yorgunum Anla", I'm weary. Pinar and the S.O.S. -- The old hand waving again... Ahh, thank heaven, I thought it'd never appear again, ???! -- Ahh, breath of the ??? . Very nice. Not a winner, I'd say, Turkey had never won it... But they're winners for these guys.

now we might be in for a bit of the old belly dancing here, I don't want to build up your hopes. Anyway, navels play a big part, I'm glad to say, the bellybutton in this year's Eurovision. And I want you to keep a very close eye on the woman on the right... Yes, it's bellybuttons and handclapping. -- Certainly different. I bet that gets 12 marks, 'douze point', from Germany. Don't ask me how I know.

...Nicki, of course, you know, I love. Had a massive hit in 1995 with "Total Eclipse of the Heart". Song is gonna be "Don't Play That Song Again", it's quite well regarded in some of the experimental and unofficial voting. The UK was well up in around fifth or sixth position. Can see the big hand from the huge crowd. Let's cheer along with a warm gesture. Nicki French.

-- Big performance! Big performance! Big hand for the little lady. Nicki French for the UK. Wave them flags!

...This is the one we're coming to cheer for... Youngest singer in the competition, a girl that oozes confidence... We're all wishing the best for Lindsay. Big roll of applause for the girl! Keep smiling! -- She got it! She got the note! Great performance, that's the best she's done throughout the rehearsals!

...Already been a success around the UK, of course, she's perhaps the best known singer to represent the UK for some time, having featured prominently in Pop Idol. She won the UK song for Europe with almost 70% of the votes, fine singer... Mind you, her frock's been through the shredder. -- Actually can't do any better than that. ?Pride? from Wales, 21 y.o Jessica Garlick singing for the UK. That's our best song from many year, I'd say.

...This has more than a flavour of the Mystic East... But there's plenty of traditional British writhing and squirming. -- Ah that'll soften their cuffs. Great performance from Javeen.

It's Ukraine next, a naughty lady of Shady Lane... No, "Shady Lady" it's called. And I'm strangely drawn to this lady... Oof, hmm... You've been my superstar... As I say, I think you want to hear it again for the ol' sunbed... We think this is a potential winner, but then, what do we know? -- You know, that bobbing head thing? I could just catch on... Oh, she's drained of all emotion. That's a big one.

You'll find Birgitta per lovely, favouring the tight trouser, which is such a welcome feature of life in Riga.

...and it's the best Israeli entry for ages. Shiri Maimon is another leesome creature, as you'll see, in an elegant gown... "I was like a blind woman at Daybreak", of course, the drink is a terrible curse. She's got a backing group, they look as if they've been cloned. -- That won the frock contest, I think, by a mile.

...and once again we return to the strutting and the ?point?. -- I don't know about you, but my particular favourite there was old tubby in the waistcoat

Bobby is 18. Singing at number 18, is this a significant thing... The Austrian entry... Is straight out of the early 70s, it's a flower power song, it's called "Reflection"... And they really could be John Fred and the Playboy Band, yes, I know that dates me. -- ??? that was.

...Yes, it's the old backing singer-syndrome again there, isn't it?

...it's been touched by the sentiments of William Butler Yates, it says here...

...you know I remember in 1966, Portugal was represented by a woman with a ukulele, I miss that woman. Rita Guerra in a hairstyle that even the great David Beckham might ?have been?...

And I'm terribly terribly sorry, but I do not believe that anybody in Albania looks like this girl.
-- Oh, fair enough-ski!

And so... It'll be an introduction into the Belgian entry, which'll be sung by Natalie Sorce. Been singing since she was six... "Envie de vivre" – this'll be singing in French... Sorry, will be sung in French. It must be the ??? -- Oh, I understand that that was a nul point there but... It's been sung in French so the French will give it a few... Trust me.

And there... Is the favourite, really! The Estonian entry, Ines... Ines is actually Estonia's Britney Spears... Now this girl is a comely cowgirl from Estonia! ... party girl! With trousers so tight you can tell what she had for breakfast. Hey, ??? party girl! Is she from Preston? That's it – that's the favourite. Must have a good chance, Estonia... Lot of the favourites are coming in the beginning of the contest.

Now, this, I'm afraid, there's a bad-tempered looking lassie. Meet the shadow of the pike's backbone, The Blue's Brothers are the backing band. -- On the wrong side of her...

...Now France haven't had the most distinguished of times over the last few years... Watch this girl, for France. She's got one of those... Necklaces. A necklace to remember... A neck to remember. -- ???, scham neck! Cruella de Ville sings for France! (laughter) ... Sorry.

And the French entry is sung by Sofia Mestari, born in Morocco nineteen years ago... "On aura le ciel" – "We'll be in heaven". Song no. 5, for France. -- That's the French entry! Erm... As always, pleasing... But not a winner, I would say. But it's art for art's sake. You know, it's the taking part that counts here.

...Was born in Israel, Berber and Andalucian origins. Lives in Paris, singing for France. -- well no offense ?me brave?, but I don't think that's going to trouble the judge.

...it's the same song the French have been singing since they hung out the washing of Maginot line.

...Gracia, a bit of a rock chick... this a bit of a bit of unashamed pandering to the raincoat Brigade in this, I'm glad to say. and this is another girl who, if she's not careful, is gonna catch her death. -- Tell me this - is nobody here ever heard of a vest? Wasn't that awful, everybody?

And it's called "Fight"... Should just as well be called "Fright", when you see Natalia Barbu... There's a lot of tempestuous headshaking and scarve-waving and it's the outfit of the evening,

lads, from Natalia! All together now, when she's finished playing the fiddle, I want you to shout: "pull your trousers up!" -- Only hope her mother wasn't watching that... That was quite frightening.

...This Romanian song called "Don't Break My Heart", they're convinced they're going to win with this, performed by Nicola... Again, she's going to try and make herself seen and heard over dancers, who are trying to upstage her. Not only that, they're stripping as well! -- Well, if I was the soloist, that kind of behaviour going on on the stage behind me could well break me heart. How many layers of clothes did you take off?

...Russia, the great big bear! Actually, she's from Belarus herself. -- That didn't really go anywhere, did it?

This'll introduce song 7, the Slovenian entry, which is called "Cvet z juga", which of course means "The next round is yours"... A dark-eyed beauty in a leather bustier with operatic pretensions! Actually, the real title of this song is "Talk to the hand"... -- Pride of the Valkyries from Slovenia! Hurrah, they like that. That'll do well, trust me.

...And as you'll hear Turkey hasn't yet got over winning this a couple of years ago with the dance of the seven veils. now this one features the usual gymnastics and belly buttons and keep an eye out for Akimandrite, high Priests of The Bongo. -- Well, I just think that Turkey have probably gone to the bazaar once too often with that kind of thing. Do stop shouting, your turn's over.

You'll need some strong drink for the next one, thank Heaven ours has just arrived. Unfortunately, the man with the ice was accosted by the security and still trying to get into the building. This is the house of the virgin Mary from Ephesus, and it's entirely inappropriate way of introducing the Ukrainian entry song 10 "Wild Dances" by Ruslana... Ruslana will be singing it, if singing is the word we're looking for. You'll have to make up your mind whether this is a song contest or a dance contest but get ready for Xena warrior princess! The Goths are coming! -- Oh no, not the whips! -- Well. It's a far cry from Paul Carr and Teddy Johnson. That's gonna get a lot of votes when the pubs close.

The Netherlands' singer is Linda, Linda Wagenmakers, born in Haarlem, studying law in the University of Utrecht. The song is called "No Goodbyes". "Don't you know what you're doing to me? That ain't the way to work things out!". "No Goodbyes", just watch this frock -- it's a kind of circus tent! -- That's a big favourite, you know, that's a second favourite, the

Netherlands, with that. There was somebody in that circus tent, apart from that girl. Fell under the shredder.

Now this is the favourite coming up next. I'm sorry, Helena Papparizou, is another one of those plain looking girls with which this contest is, I'm afraid, afflicted this year. Still, she's overcome her shyness to be with us... And those of you having parties better get in line, get the hanky out, a bit of the old Zorba coming up. -- As a friend of mine used to say: the last time I saw a pair of legs like that, they were standing in a nest.. Honestly if half the women taking part tonight don't go home with a chill on their kidneys, I'll be amazed. And I wouldn't mind, but there's a breeze out there on the stage...

...I think you're gonna like it. Don't worry about the baldy woman on stilts, cuz' she hasn't fallen over yet. -- Well I read that the motif behind that is based on Saint Exupery's "Little Prince", so that's cleared that up for you.

Aw it's cowboy time, hey, cowboy time in Germany! The performer is Stefan Raab from Cologne... The composer and lyricist is Stefan Raab as well... This is the stand-up of the stand-up, this is Germany ridiculing the ridiculous. They're all in gold lamé and, quite frankly, I could do about the fellas. Bring on the Danes! Yes, so funny! -- It's okay lads, It's okay! Laugh? ...Could we just have the girls, okay?

...Now the Greeks are co-favourites with Xena, the warrior princess from Ukraine. And you'll soon see why... The artist is Sakis Rouvas, good looking fellow. Who appears to be persecuted by pawing women. And be a good cheer, there's a bit of Zorb of the Greek in this and everybody gets their kid off in the end. -- i hope Casey Boyle is not watching this. That's what the tabloids would call a three on a stage romp!

Just when are you beginning to lose faith in the Eurovision, on come the bagpipes, the whole samoleon, the old melodion, yodelling! Euro-cred is restored! -- You can never tell, with the recessitudes of Eurovision voting, but I don't think that that has a great chance.

The song is too long. Not that I wouldn't say that, but it's long enough. The odds are long against this. Mid-paced and poppy, but I don't think has a great chance. I want you to keep an eye on the backing singers of this. -- Striking a blow for the fuller figure, here's the boy in the anorak.
--

It introduces the Russian entry, which is called "Believe". Now, if you believe in political voting, rather than, perhaps, voting for the best song - this must have a really good chance! Now watch out for Michael Flatley Riverdance on skates. -- Good chance, that one.

This one is going to tickle your fancy... The Spanish entry is... Different... Even Franco's Secret Service couldn't help this one. -- What can you say after you've said you're sorry...?

...once again there's so many distractions in the background it's hard to keep your eyes and ears on the singer and the song. Turquoise is the new black in the Ukraine. -- First ever entry from the Ukraine, well received here...

The fiddle has made a bit of a comeback this year as you'll see. These two girls on the old fiddle here delivering the sad old song... -- Can remind you of a young Oliver Reed. That's it. That's the Polish entry, not going to set the ?Jordan? on fire.

...and it's in mark contrast to the last entry. Ivan Mikulic, on top of the Croatian charts for several weeks with this, suave, besuited.

This'll be sung in English by Hayko. Sort of ??? Hayko, there'll be pan pipes and drums and North American Indian, if I'm any judge, or maybe it's just the feathers. -- Flesh wound there, is it... Or is that his bleeding heart? Armenia, Hayko, which I always thought was a short Japanese poem.

Now, the Belarus song has got two supermodels fiddling about with side-screens, to reveal, as you'll see throughout the light, a fine big boy in black. With a whale's toenail around his neck. That is Koldun. As depressing this is Wogan likes this one - I personally think... ?It's ya man? - - Steady man! Black is the new black in Belarus. Koldun... My word.

This is a rather special one, you're gonna like this... This song is called "Pokušaj", as close as I get to it, it means "Experiment". And it certainly is on the experimental side. 4 knitting brides of Frankenstein and a loonie with a clothesline. -- You see? They loved it! I wish you could see the stadium...

...Which is a foul slow, and ?we'll be having monsters?, I won't have it... Remember earlier when I thought I'd heard a bagpipe? -- Well that did everything, really. He was a bit of a boulevardier, three women who looked like they were off of Christmas cake, drummer who could do hand Springs...

I think this is a terrific song, a welcome change, the throbbing of the jungle drum. A pleasing effort from a fresh-faced lad Jacob Sveisthrop... This fella is not a professional singer, he's actually a teacher of autistic children. This is a terrific of itself, but will anybody vote for it..? - - It's a good little song, that, but will they vote for it in Vladivostok? The Danes like it. Don't think much of me, but I like this... Then that's nowhere in the betting, incidentally, 33-1.

...Fair enough-ski! -- Some frantic frolicing here, get used to it! There's plenty of that about this year. You know, Spanish pop is as good as any in Europe, but for some reason, possibly nationalistic, eventually has always got a latin flavor, there's always a whiff of the flamenco there...

Every time I enter the foyer of the hotel that I'm staying, I meet his entire family. Decent people. He's educated in London, Mikael Sarbel! The song is called "Yassou Maria", translated as "You're Next, Maria!" 4 sourcey-dressed lovelies doing the kind of choreography that went out with Pan's People. Much thrusting. Shaking about! -- Y'know, I think they were Pan's People.

"En Davar" which means "Nevermind" by and Yair Klinger, Shimrit Orr, Tal Sondak is the singer. Nobody will mind if I say it's an archetypal Israeli entry. Can't be discounted, this. Kind of thing they love at Eurovision. You'd be pleased to know that flared trousers are making a comeback in Israel this year. At some point, I feel, we're all gonna hold hands and sing together. -- Hahaha! They love it here!

Now then, another fashion statement. A sweater with the Greek fisherman's cap. Backing singers knitted those outfits themselves. Didn't have time to finish 'em but... Very colourful.

...Going to be sung by a Rui Bandera, 25, born in Mozambique... This is a cheery chorus to this, and it's really the return of the Bee Gees, pretty serious hair all round. -- ???, as far as the eye can see, I was playing a bit of air guitar myself when that was going on. Portuguese entry... I'm afraid, I'm afraid not this year. No Lisbon next year, I'm afraid.

The singer is a fella called Dima Bilan who's a big big star, a big sex symbol in Eastern Europe, as you'll hear from the applause it gets when he comes on... Dima is backed by some graceful ballet, touch of the old Swan lakes and a surprise entrance later, you'll have heard of dancers emerging from cakes, but there's a novel twist to this. -- That piano will never play again! That's the Russian entry, probably the best one they've had for many a long year.

...it's another example of Western European pop and the man singing it is Martin Stenmarck, a rangy son of Sweden. -- It seems an awful shame that the Swedes can't get any good-looking girls to act as a backing group. That went well in the hall, but then everything's going well in the hall, this is an enthusiastic crowd.

Now keep an eye on the belly dancers, because every one of them is British... It's gonna be sung by Kenan, who you'll quickly see - is Chris Moyle's better looking and younger brother. Ends up by throwing his underpants at the audience, which is a little bit distasteful. -- Sekerim!

Reverting back to the belly dance that won for them in 2003. Turkey there and Kenan and 4 fine British belly dancers.

This is a tempestuous song... The rhythms of the Mediterranean about it. They're all in white, from the island of Aphrodite... He sort of touchy, feely, grubby Robbie... Feeling alive - and they live up to it. -- And here's an Eurovision song!

...Now the singer of The Armenian song is Andre, born in Nagorno Karabach... This'll go big, You've only got to hear that to know why. -- Nice hat! -- This song brings suspenders to an entirely new level. -- Bring back races!

...Good one, this. -- Manuel Ortega! Austrian with a Spanish orde, singing in English, like the majority of the songs tonight.

This is pretty good, it's a catchy one from Denmark. It'll get a few votes from Iceland, you'll see. -- Love the cap and the braces!

Ah, the French! Now the French have high hopes for this and probably with justification, because a very famous French artist is singing it. Sebastian Tellier, he wrote it along with ...
...So cool, he's positively "fuad"... -- Oh, full marks to France for trying something completely different.

...A bit of musical sophistication here just a hint of Jamie Cullum about this. -- Well that's different, full marks for Germany for giving it a go with something else.

The song is called "Frauen regier'n die Welt" - "Women Rule the World", wise words indeed... So, he may be dressed up like a local neighbourhood butcher, but it's a cool hip and swingin' number, this, for Germany. -- I wonder how Big Band music is gonna go, as far as the Eastern Bloc voting is concerned, be interesting. Roger Cicero - brave effort from Germany, I'd say.

...Very popular in Iceland and he hasn't got a drum machine, a backing group, or a half-naked dancer anywhere near him. He gets my vote, I'll tell you that. Come on, Jonsi. -- oh yeah - mean, moody and pale, Jonsi from Iceland.

They're singing a song by Gerry Simpson and Raymond J. Smyth, and I wouldn't discount this because you can never discount the Irish entry. It's called "Millenium of Love". It's got "our footprints leave a harvest for the children", which is quite a difficult concept, but I know that you'll warm to it. -- Hug a child to the new millennium and go on.

Of course, Ireland has the hottest record of any country in this contest. The odds on this one are a little long. "Without Your Love" written by Pat Sheridan and sung by a lawnmower salesman

called Gary O'Shaughnessy. Irish entry, "Without Your Love" - good man yourself, Gary. -- That'll always do well, they'll get a few votes.

And this is Mickey Joe ... Mickey Joe is from Donegal, the pride of Donegal... Seven-time winners, they've won it more than anybody else. If they got relegated the other year and they're back with this, and I think they've got a good chance, they can never be discounted.

It's Ireland next, never dismiss Ireland, they've won it too often. Seven times, three times in a row 92 93 and 94... Gentle song, catchy chorus. --

...and I think the best Irish entry for ages. And if they go for a gentle ballad, and let's face it, they haven't gone much for a gentle ballad lately, this could be it. -- One of the best singers in the contest... We wish him well.

Now I think this is probably the best entry from Israel for a long, long time. It's written by Dana International who won the Eurovision, you remember, in Birmingham all those years ago! -- Not at all, thank you! That was very good, wasn't it?

This is a quiet 7:1 in the betting. A properly cheery number. "You and me, down by the palm trees by the sea", so you get the general idea... And you'll find him with a quartet of lively lovelies behind him. Memories of Pam's People here! And if I were him, I'd give the choreographer a slap. -- Get over yourself! That boy is a god in Malta!

And I think this is the best song so far, but there's not a lot to beat... It sounds like they should be wearing horned helmets, carrying double-bladed axes and shouting "Always pillage before you burn!". Norway are singing from 4th from which position no one has ever won the ESC. - Big finish from the boy! ... will get a few votes. He lives here, in Denmark, singing for Norway. That has a real chance, I think.

I don't know what you're gonna think of this, but it's 10:1... Now if the voters of Europe go for a slow ballad, this could do the best you know, it's a very nice song. The only thing is that nobody has ever won this contest just sitting at a piano... It's got a nice quiet well-behaved backing group as well. -- So, what do you think? Nice song.

...This is a silver suited son of the fjords. -- ...I think he'll do better than nul point this year. Quite a few supporters.

...Now people think highly of this, he's a good singer, this fella - Mikhai is his name... Lively number "Tornero", long time since a male won this contest, good singer, this boy.

It's Spain next and it'll be sung by a blind singer, Serafin Zubiri. Actor, host, sportsman! // Of particular interest in the Spanish entry, which is good enough on its own, the really good news is that we're halfway through the contest. That sort of petered out, didn't it?

...And the Spaniards like this one. I drew this in the sweep, I like this one! Sing your heart out, boy! There's a lot of money riding on this. Hey now! -- Well, Ricky Martin will never be dead when he's alive! Spanish navals there! Sorry, it's the drink.

...I think it's going to do well for us. And never mind, he's a very charming fella, he's going to do well... Let's hope he can do it for us. -- Good reception in the hall, good performance... Terrific.

Daz Sampson, a man who's known for his engaging modesty... I know you're going to be rooting for Daz, he desperately wants to win this. He's a composer along with John Matthews. "Teenage life" it is... -- ...They've never ever given less than a top performance! Big, big applause for them here!

And here's the United Kingdom's entry! We coming up early, but mightn't be a bad thing... Now, the United Kingdom's entry, you need the likes of me to tell you - "Even If", he's been singing a storm throughout rehearsal... Here he comes! -- Fantastic! That's our best entry for years. Fantastic performance from Andy Abraham, unfortunately you can't vote for it. But he deserved to do well with that. Terrific. Great start.

Just wanna point out that in Turkey, white is this year's black. -- Oh, fair enough!

This is a lively fellow.... Alf Poier. And he'll be singing for Austria and he's 100:1, and he's favourite for last place. I'm not so sure, there's always a lunatic fringe, that give people like this a vote. This is Riga's Zoo and a very suitable place for old Alf who's written the words and the music for this and sings it after a fashion... Alf favours a beret and is a hairy man. -- Alf Poier! Well, Alf is quoted it saying: "My song is on Hindu individualism and against collectivism", c'mon, Alf, we knew that!

And the odds are about 200:1 against this winning. Slightly bizarre ethnic rhythms will feature here. Even if from a clear blue sky a thunderbolt struck me, you wouldn't care. This man is mean and moody, in a beret. Bosnia's answer to Citizen Smith. -- Now, they'd cheer anything here.

..."In The Disco" it is, more like a night out at Stringfellas... The crowd love this kind of thing, but will the various 36 countries like it just as well? Underwear music! -- Sometimes... Some of these songs are a little too subtle for you.

...And the performer is Goran Karan, the most famous pop-star in all Croatia. This is the performer, the man with the longest hair in the contest. And keep an eye out for the Elephant Man in the background. "And the Angels Fall Asleep". -- Yes! We're right in the middle of the lunatic fringe of the Eurovision Song Contest, and this will be reinforced, as if it needed to be, by the Swedish entry.

there's more shouting and roaring coming up... There's a lot of fire about it... The Cyprus entry, a trusting young man from Limassol. Feel like I heard this tune before. -- Cyprus, they'll get a few votes from Greece, I'll be bound. And they shall return them in kind as ever was.

...I don't know whether you agree with me but I think that the backing dancers and singers are beginning to take over this contest. It's true of this song as well... Israeli entry and once again the chemise being hurled recklessly aside and for some reason, I don't know, it just reminds me of school dinners. -- do you think everybody's got the same choreographer? ...Israel sung in Hebrew and English.

Israeli entry is all in white & White is the New Black this year. -- I'm about to say they didn't sound all that together to me.

...More rhythms of the mystic East... Not a moody business with furniture in this. Just a warning. -- ...What was that about? What's it all about?

Oh for Heaven's Sake... it's going to be the dreaded drums again, do you? -- Ooh, it's a sore thing landing like that chick. All life been dragged back and forward across the stage by strapping. I could have sworn I heard a bagpipe there it's figment of my imagination

"that's the Maltese entry and they're quite proud of it because ""I do I do I do I do I do I love you like a fool""... Fabrizio Faniello sings for Malta, we wish him well because Malta is the most enthusiastic Eurovision entry every year. You've got four dancers for whom modern dance stopped about 30 years ago and there's an old drum machine and he's a man with serious eyebrows. -- What were those dancers like? "

Sting van Eijk, 18 years of age, a Colombian by birth will be singing the Norwegian entry. Norway of course always in the history books of the Eurovision for so many nul point. And all the better for it... They could well get nul point with this one, they're bringing the contest roaring into the nineties - dreadlocks!

That'll just give you a flavour there! The Swedish entry is sung by Roger Pontre, who's a fine singer. Which is not the ???..."When spirits are calling my name", and suitably enough, from

Sweden at the Eurovision Song Contest, it's a tribute to the North American Indian. -- I don't know whether that was Shoshone or ?Uglalasu?. I blame the herrings and the meatballs.

Commentary of Graham Norton (ESC-Norton; 2013-2023)

Song number 2 is Albania. Now, of course, no one has ever won in this position, will tonight change things? Who knows? Her name is Anxela – Anxela Peristeri. And you'll notice there's a lot of performers tonight in this sort of "silver-Vegas-leotard" look, this is the lady what can sing. She is terrific. Have a moody staging but a powerful performance. I'm not sure what Angela's lockdown diet was, but there do seem to be rather noxious gases emitting from her. See what you think. -- Wow! Is there nothing Carol Vorderman can't do? Extraordinary! No! Her name is Anxela Peristeri, she's representing Albania and what a great performance.

Now, if you look at this lady and thinking - "What, Kirstie Allsopp got tattoos and she's representing Albania?" No! Her name is Jonida Maliqi and her song is called "Ktheju Tokës" - "Return to Your Land". Now, Albanian Kirstie Allsopp has been given the dreaded no.2 slot and... I'm sure you know, no one has ever won performing in the second position. Will she change everything? I'm not a mystic, but no. -- Well done, Kirstie! Now she can repurpose that dress as Christmas decorations. So Eurovision, I love that that followed, kind of, Malta's cheesy pop song.

Song 27 is fantastic, and this is song 26... She loves entering competitions, she was in Albanian show "Star Academy", moved to Italy, won "The Voice" and now, look, she's driving a snow plough! Dreams can come true! -- Ok, it's 3 minutes we'll never get back, but, look at it this way - we'll never have to hear that again.

Now this is Eugent Bushpepa, with a song called "Mall", which means Yearning and he's representing Albania. It was Eugent's tattoos that fell foul of the Chinese broadcasters and their new laws in China. You can't have tattoos on television... -- ...I have to say he's got an extraordinary voice and that was his best performance to date. In all of the rehearsals, he really cut through there, that was fantastic.

The artist is Rosa Linn, the song is called "Snap". It's a lovely song and Rosa Linn sings it very well, she's sort of an unassuming performer, so they've done a very clever thing and rather than just leaving her on the massive Eurovision stage, they've created a small space for her. It's sort of her own bedroom. And there's a great moment at the end where there's a reveal and you'll think - oh, could the audience not see her? Actually, the room moves slowly in front of the crowd. If you wondered, who bought all that toilet paper at the beginning of the first lockdown, turns out - it was Rosa Linn! -- Rosa Linn there for Armenia! Just showing what clever staging can do to elevate a song and a performance.

Moving on to Armenia now, this is Aram MP3, that's his actual name. Yeah... He's a comedian as well as a singer. Also does tapestry. He was the bookie's favourite, but he has slipped to 4th place. The thinking is, he said some quite rude things about Conchita, Eurofans didn't like it. He didn't do a great performance at the semi-final last time, for the jury, let's see what he's like tonight. -- It's like a store ??? there, isn't it? "You're not alone! What- What-? Where are you?!" I thought I looked tired and sweaty! Wow! Still, it was very well staged and Armenia again - consistently top 5. So, you never know. He may be our winner this evening.

...Brunette is the name of this lady; she is just 21 years old! It was a sleight that she made it through the semi-finals and yet, I don't know why, because she's beautiful, she's got a great voice and it's a very sweet pop song. I guess it's just such a strong field tonight. This might slightly go without notice. Quite interesting staging for the song "Future Lover", it's on kind of a big slope from a skateboard park and she's wearing heels...! I mean, I guess she's 21, young people can do these things... -- Song 17 there, Brunette is her name, the song is "Future Lover".

It's a real build of a song, ?a cheese god?, an extraordinary voice and real stage presence. -- I think that might do well! I mean, really sincere, passionate performance, and might just cut through in the way Jamala did last year for Ukraine.

It's one of those songs, it has a slow build and then it just kicks off. So, I think it'll be a great final and really get this "Globen" moving.

Ah, now, this lady is a real fan favourite. Everybody loves her. Her name's Jessica Mauboy and she's performing We Got Love for Australia. She's an enormous star in Australia. She started in Australian Idol but she was only 16 then, that was 10 years ago. Since then, she's released 5 top 10 albums, 15 top 20 singles and platinum selling albums. And there's something about this performance, it's a great song, it's very fun, the staging is slightly shambolic. She sort of just throws herself around in this... Dress... But she's so likeable, you'll just hear the crowd going mad! -- Wow, that is a terrific pop song and she can rock a room! Jessica Mauboy, she had some patchy rehearsals, but that was her best performance I've seen her do, terrific! And very popular here. That could be Australia's first win? Never know.

Here's another of the bookie's favourites, song 25 - Australia. Katie Miller-Heidke is the performer and the song "Zero Gravity". I've spoken to a member of the Australian delegation, you'll all agree, that when this was selected, everyone was a bit iffy about it. It was, sort of, on the wrong side of novelty. But they've worked their socks off and turned it into something really special. And, I firmly believe this is some of the best Eurovision staging I've ever seen. It's actually thrilling. They're at the top of very tall poles... Well, you'll see in a moment. It really is

fantastic. -- Wow! If windscreen wipers could sing! That was really magical! So theatrical, but wonderful and really popular in the hall.

(Australia are) and not just in it, they're in it to win it. This is one of the bookie's favourites. Her name is Dami Im and she's performing a really great pop song called "Sound of Silence" and... Without doubt, one of the best vocals in the competition tonight. She was born in South Korea but immigrated to Brisbane in Australia with her family at the age of 9. She won the Australian "X factor" back in 2013. I don't know what's in the big box that she's sitting on. Possibly just her way home, I'm not sure. Song 13, it could be a winner! -- Seriously impressive lungs on that girl! ...And they're loving it in the "Globen". It's really, either it's between that and Russia tonight.

That's Guy Sebastian, he's a big star in Australia, he's had 6 no1 singles, 2 no1 albums, sold millions of records and tonight he's performing a song called "Tonight Again". It's a pretty standard pop song, it starts off with a Michael Jackson hurt song and then morphs into Britney Spears, Justin Bieber, sort of, pop song... -- ...A good strong pop song! It was tipped to do very very well, but now you see it in the context of the other performances - I'm not sure if that's a winner.

...Now this is a big deal for Isaiah, he's only 17 years old. He's never been to Europe before, and this must be an intimidating experience for a young man like him. It's a catchy pop ballad, my one tip would be - don't start looking at his eyebrows or you won't be able to stop.

Next up is Australia. I don't know why! Build a bridge, get over it! They've been here since 2015... After we see Sheldon Riley performing "Not The Same". He loves a competition, this Sheldon, ooh! America's Got Talent, the Australian "X factor", two series of The Voice, been in them all! And now he's here. Last year they didn't get to the SF, already he is doing well. It's a big sing... And a big outfit. You'll see he's wearing a mask, that isn't complicated Australian COVID protocol. He normally wears it, to sing. -- Put down those stairs. Sheldon Riley there!

This is the first time there's been any French in an Austrian entry since 1966, but then they went on to win, with "Merci Cherie". Her grandparents are French, she's very comfortable speaking French. It's a really pretty song, but I think maybe the staging overwhelms it. -- A really charming young performer there, Zoe! And a pretty pretty song, but it might get lost on a night like this, we don't know.

That man riding a bike is Cesar Sampson... This is a really solid song, it's called "Nobody But You" and he's a great performer and all you need to know, ladies and gentlemen, is that Cesar's

aunt is Pepsi from Pepsi & Shirlie, yes! He's also found a very good use for unwanted grey ??? leather. Cesar Sampson for Austria, he can be really proud of that performance. Ter-rific! And now he can go get out of that outfit... Looks like a paddling ??? in those trousers. Not a very breathable fabric.

Nathan Trent is actually his stage name, his real name is very difficult... -- Ooh, it's magic! Nathan Trent there, got the memo that more people have won wearing white than anybody else. All smiles now, of course Nathan, but tomorrow he's gotta log the moon back into the air.

This is Samra! And she's representing Azerbaijan with a song called "Miracle". Azerbaijan always do well, and I'm sure they will tonight. -- Quite a good reaction in the hall. I feel like she did it better in rehearsal, but we'll see how the scores go for her later.

This performance features a trapeze. Why? Because it's Eurovision. -- Well, whatever you think of that, I imagine it'll do well. Azerbaijan - consistently top 5.

Next up, song 21, great position for Azerbaijan. They always do pretty well, and this is another crowd favourite – it's a crowd pleaser. Her name is Efendi and the song is "Mata Hari". I know a lot of people back in the UK have picked this as their favourite. Let's see how she does. Come on, this is a strong grand final! Efendi representing Azerbaijan...

...And undoubtedly will do well, because Azerbaijan always do. But well, I think you'll enjoy the classic Eurovision staging. Answers on the postcard, please: there's a man on a box, a man in a box and a woman who really should've hemmed her dress. Enjoy! -- Answers on the postcard, please! Not sure if that man in the box was dancing or he just ran out of air... Again, that will be oh, top 5 for sure.

Nadir Rustamli is his name and the song is "Fade to Black". He is an extraordinary vocalist, this is quite the performance. And the song, I like it as well. I think there's a slight problem with the staging. Hard to... Dance on steps. We're thinking of the Madonna Memorial Steps, here at Eurovision. She left them behind. -- What a tremendous vocalist. Nadir Rustamli is his name, representing Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan have done very well in this contest since they began entering. And I think, tonight, will be no different... The song is called "Hour Of The Wolf", and it is actually quite a good song, but you may not notice because you'll be distracted by the... Oh, let's call them dancers, that are on stage with him. I point, you'll think they've had a bad oyster, but truly, it's choreographed. -- Yep, I think those dancers did him in. They're very good, but it's a bit like on

"Strictly", when those American pop stars come and people are waltzing in front of them or a ?palls? breaks and things, which is very very distracting.

Azerbaijan are next and this is a terrific pop song and is bound to do well. Chingiz is the performer and he will be performing Truth, though, the thing that'll get stuck in your head will be "shut up about it", he says that a lot. They didn't qualify last year, Azerbaijan, which was a surprise, because they have been doing very well in the competition and I think tonight will definitely be top 5. -- That boy can sing! Those Alexander McQueen robotic arms promised so much! And they did so little! With a little laser pen scribbling on his chest.

The staging, well... Answers on the postcard, please! I read the lyrics as if it'd help me and they didn't. There's a chalkboard, a ladder and a man with a horse's head on top of the ladder. And you keep thinking, oh, this'll make sense in a moment. No. 3 minutes. You really can't figure it out. But I'm sure they'll get lots of votes. -- She's very kind to give us some promotional chalk, I'll be bringing that home with me.

He's only 18, bless him... But the song, that comes in chops... Songs in the Eurovision are often about love - how it can heal, how it brings peace and harmony... Yeah, this is called "Love Kills". And if love doesn't kill us, the choreography will. It is woeful. Quite a catchy song though. -- Aww, bless him! He's only 18 years old, representing Belgium there. Very catchy song, Love Kills!

This young lady... Is a young lady. Her name is Blanche and she is another one of the contestants who's only 17. It is a song that has been a big radio hit across Europe, so the crowd will react when the music starts - they know this song. And it's a very credible pop song. The problem is, as she's so young, she is sort of overwhelmed by this experience. Hopefully, she can try and enjoy her performance tonight. -- It is a cracking pop song! But I just hope she's enjoying it a little more than she ?reels? to. She's happy it's over at least. Just so vulnerable, you know, only 17. So great job, Blanche.

...Young girl, she's 19, she's Laura Tesoro and the song is called "What's The Pressure?". Age 11, she performed as Annie. And now she's doing this upbeat, sort of funky number. It's a catchy pop song, but it is difficult performing in the first place. -- Song no1, "What's The Pressure?". I think the pressure is being 19 and being asked to open this show.

He's 19, he wrote the song himself... It's not your typical Eurovision fare, some people loathe this - I quite like it! But not sure if it's gonna get the votes... -- well now, they liked it in here,

it's... it's hard to know whether that'll go well or not, it's not your typical Eurovision fare, but maybe that'll help it.

I am really fond of this next song... That's Gustaph, hello Gustaph! He's 42 and he's been in the music industry for over 20 years, he signed his first record deal at age 18. The song is "Because of You", and I think why I like it, is because it's not like anything else in the competition tonight. It has a sort of early 90's, almost disco feel, it's really fresh and bright and... So far, in semi-finals and rehearsals, people have really really liked it. It also features a performance from voguing and ballroom legend PussCee West, she shows up halfway through. This is Gustaph and "Because of You", for Belgium. I mean, this whole arena seem to know every word of that! Song 16 for Belgium, hoping for great things for Gustaph and "Because of You".

That man you can see there is Jeremy Makeese representing Belgium with his song called "Miss You". It's a sort of Justin Timberlake Lite. Something we're slightly surprised has got through 2nd semi-final over Ireland's Brooke. Oh, there you go, here he is. See what you make of him. -- ...I imagine, the career guidance officers of all those dancers are quite surprised to see them dancing at Eurovision.

Wonder what the lyrics to this are... Imagine a sort of, cut-price Justin Timberlake, if you will. Not even any circus skills to cheer this up... No, look, read it for yourself - it's actually called "Cheesecake", I didn't make it up. -- Oh, Teo, so rough! No song in position 2 has ever won ESC. After witnessing that, I probably didn't need to explain that fact to you.

With Zena, representing Belarus. Zena is the youngest performer in the competition - she's just 16 years old. Likes to get the main things over early, isn't it. Get on with the rest of your life. Good luck, Belarus! ... "Like it", might'nt... -- Ahh, the confidence of youth.

She loves riding her bike, working out in general, in fact, oh and feeding pigeons. To give you an idea of how seriously the contest is taken in Belarus - Aliona originally won the national selection last year, but then the Belarusian president ordered a recount of the votes and she was replaced. This year, she... The song the she won with, it wasn't in copyright or something, so they've replaced it with this song. -- Thank you.

Song 8 is really terrific, and I think will do very well... Now, when I say this next performance contains flashing images and strobe effects, it really does, and some of them are on her. She might've been in a Bulgarian version of Dragon's Den, I don't know. Maybe there's poor street lighting in Bulgaria, but she's invested in some lovely light-up kneepads, handy for... Gardening

at night, I'd imagine. I don't know what she gets up to. But it's a really catchy pop song. Song 8 - enjoy! -- Top 5, I'd say.

"Next up it's Bulgaria, song 17, the artist is Victoria and the song is "Growing Up is Getting Old". there's a very moving story behind this song, you'll notice on stage there's a photograph of her and her father, and her father has been diagnosed with motor neurone disease or ALS, and part of the staging references the sands of time running out. I imagine it's a very difficult song for her to perform, but it is very pretty. -- Well done, that woman, that can't have been easy. Victoria representing Bulgaria."

That boy, is a boy... He's literally just turned 17... This might be a winner as well, again, its been a big radio hit across Europe. and compared to some of the other youngsters this guy is so at home on stage, he loves performing. -- ...I do think it's remarkable that such a young performer has that amount of poise and presence on an event such as this and on a stage like that. When you see him backstage, I mean, out of that sort of androgynous garb, he's just a KID. Doesn't look old enough to be here.

Ladies and gentlemen, if anyone's in the kitchen or upstairs, call them NOW. This is a classic moment of Eurovision Song Contest... and when I heard this song on the CD I just assumed it was a slightly mismatched duet. But, ironically, for a man singing a song called "My Friend", he doesn't appear to have any. So he's singing it all himself. It is something to behold. I've seen it about 6 times, I've not tired of it yet, it's genius. -- You're watching the Eurovision Song Contest. I love that! You know he's done a version where he's half-man, half-drag! He must've! Surely!

This lady is a tree hugger! And her name is Nina Kraljic...I feel that the backing singers may be in some sort of witness protection program. ?They'll get additionally? mobbed when they get back to the streets of Croatia... ??she lost some weight since she bought this dress. --

(Could it be Ireland's 8th win?) We'll find out soon, because this is the penultimate song! Song 25, and right now, what I think, quite surprisingly, this is the bookie's favourite. I mean, it's good, it's a big europop song, but it's fairly standard Eurovision ?fare/fair?. -- Ah, must've ?loved? the use of fire-retardant hairspray there, that was impressive. Cyprus, they are, as I say, the bookie's favourite.

That's Andrew Lambrou! He's been here for over a week and obviously ran out of laundry, so bravely performing this evening without a clean shirt on. Australia are in the show later on. They didn't get through the semi-finals for the last few years, but this year they did – with their

band “Voyager”. But this man, Andrew, is also from Australia, so a lot of Australian interest in the show tonight! He was born in Sydney. Three of his grandparents are Cypriot. Oh, that’s it! But they asked him to take part, and he said yes! And what a great performer he is! He really has fantastic voice, it’s a big song called “Break a Broken Heart”. Cyprus, 38 entries, no win... Might this change everything? Andrew Lambrou. What a voice! I can tell you, I can feel the heat of those flames up in the commenting box! Then there’s people in the front row watching the rest of the show without the benefit of eyebrows!

And oddly, I think he suffers following Lucy, because that is such an overwhelming performance. This is a very nice, catchy pop song, but following on from the United Kingdom, it kind of disappears. See what you think. --

Now, already, this is a great night for him because they've made it through the semifinal. They didn't do that very much for the last... Ooh... I think, in the last 8 attempts and got through twice, so tonight is great for him... I like this song! There's lots of cheese, but this seems authentically romantic, and it's really quite nicely staged as well. -- ...He's a very nice guy, very well liked amongst the other contestants, I wish him well.

...They came second last year with “Fuego” and this is very much in a similar vein. She is the eurodream in that she was born in Georgia but is famous in Greece in Cyprus and the song was written by some Swedes. Her costume... When I think, it's for standing up, I don't think it's a sitting down outfit. -- Well, again, the “Expo Tel Aviv” on their feet for Tamta. I hope she stays on her feet. Could end up with a trip to the A&E. Nurse, the tweezers...

This poor creature is Mikolas Josef. I mean, they've dressed him up as a toilet roll? holder and told him it's a Portuguese tradition. They're just laughing at... He seems happy enough. The song is called "Lie To Me", okay - I think you're gonna win! -- Wow! Incredible to think he injured himself, he was in hospital nearly for a week and now he's doing that! ...I think that'll do a lot better. Really good staging, and a sort of, y'know, fun Justin Timberlake feel to the whole thing. It's good!

They have never appeared in the grand final before... There's quite a few of these numbers tonight, just a woman, standing along, belting out a massive Eurovision anthem... -- Gabriela for the Czech Republic. She did a great job, but of course, famously no one, nobody has ever won performing in the second position.

She's the second Australian who'll be performing tonight. Obviously Isaiah is representing Australia, but Anja was born and raised there. Moved to Denmark, suspiciously recently! -- We know where you are. We'll be in touch, thank you Anja.

...And it is by far the bookie's favourite and up until recently, the fan's favourite as well... Since the semifinals it's been selling like hot cakes and it's in a lot of download charts all across Europe. And you'll hear, it gets a huge roar here from the neighbouring Swedish fans. Denmark last won in 2000 with the Olsen Brothers... It's a cute song, but I don't think it's a standout song. -- Have we heard tonight's winner? Song 18 for Denmark, great place in the running order, very catchy song, I'm sure it'll do well. If it wins, I can't say we have a runaway winner.

Expect 11000 people to be cheering as loudly as they can for this man - Basim is his name. And he's representing the host nation of Denmark. The song is called "Cliché Love Song" and it's actually rather good. It's a jolly, happy pop song, sort of in the... The vein of Bruno Mars... Of course, the Danes don't want to win, but this song could do it. The commentary box will be rockin'! -- Listen to that roar! ...If that was to win, it wouldn't be the worst thing in the world. Although I think they may be marked down for white socks... That's my fear.

These are some real life Vikings if Vikings wore eyeliner and had access to unlimited hair conditioning. -- That was a terrific performance!

This is Leonora, she's representing Denmark. This, I think, it's an adorable song - Love is Forever. But the staging... It's as if... Whoever designed the set, got inches and feet mixed up and is now too embarrassed or frightened to admit it. So she's been left with a chair that's about 10ft tall and bless her, she's got to sing climbing up a ladder. You can tell she's not enjoying it at all. But, it is a very pretty little ditty. It might do well tonight. -- Such a sweet song! Leonora there representing Denmark with her friends. I wonder if they'll stay in touch after tonight. Will that WhatsApp group be deleted by midnight?

Spain - another of the bookies favourites. The crowd love this woman. Her name is Chanel performing a song called "SloMo". Her mother named her after Coco Chanel. This song was originally written for Jennifer Lopez, she passed Chanel, she's not proud - I'll have that, thank you very much! And there she is at the GF. When you see her, you'll think - that woman couldn't be wearing less and yet by the end of the number, she is! I think it's what you call sexy... (giggle). Song 10, listen to that crowd - they love it! -- Listen to that crowd! Put down the phone, granddad - the voting lines aren't open yet. I have to say, Chanel is an amazing performer. The dancing was OFF. THE. HOOK. The crowd here, they'd give her the trophy now, if they could.

Spain haven't won for 53 years, so they are due ago and that might be the woman to bring it home for them. Find out later!

...I think this song could surprise us tonight. Last year, for Spain, Ruth Lorenzo came 10th and I suspect, this'll do even better... And if people do flip through glossy magazine, they might recognize Edurne, because she's been dating the Manchester United goalie for the last few years. Again, it's proper Euro-fare, a dancer with no shirt on. And defying, defying the lessons of Madonna-gate, she has a cloak... Removed. Exciting stuff. -- Well, if cheering was voted, she'd be at the top of the leaderboard!

Does she look familiar? Her name's Ruth Lorenzo and she managed to come 5th in the "X Factor" in 2008. Since then, she's been hanging around Spain, she wrote some songs for Dannie Minogue's album, so I imagine she's been fortunate at that, possibly, bought a couple of houses, she's probably invested in property. This song is called "Dancing In The Rain", she wrote it and she sings the life out of it. I think the lighting people have done a great job tonight, but I think they've slightly overdone the rain. Can't really produce it to dancing or for singing - it's more like Morsel Krow at the beginning of "Noone". Song 19, sing up, Ruth. -- Well, in fairness to Ruth Lorenzo, that is Spain's strongest entry for quite a few years. And the crowd here in Copenhagen certainly enjoyed it.

His name is Miki and the song is La Venda. And it's a really good pop song, it's a shame in a way that he's in this position, cuz' he's following Australia and Switzerland, so it might get a bit lost. Spain have thrown everything, including the kitchen sink, at this. They've built him a house. -- Well, that's how you end a show!

...It's a kind of relaxed siesta... Cute song. Giving sort of a Californian beach feel, which doesn't quite seem to fit. -- Ohhh... Some dodgy notes in there. I wonder if there's something going on technically, or maybe he's just not great. If you've got a lover and she's a music fan, yeah... May be single now...

In rehearsals, in front of the crowds it's gone very well, it's a really upbeat, fun pop song - but I think it may struggle here, just being overshadowed by Russia. Also, don't worry for Barei, she does a nasty fall in the middle of this, but it's intentional. Unless it's not. -- Wow! Well, if it was down to the crowd in here tonight, that might be the winner! They loved it! She tore the roof off this place!

...This is Blanca Paloma, "Eaea" is the song! Blanca Paloma representing Spain! They haven't won since 1969 so they're desperate for a win. But they did come so close last year with Chanel. That was song no. 8.

...This is Spain. The artist... Oh, hello, dogs! I was distracted, sorry. Blas Canto is his name and this features the largest prop ever in Eurovision history. It's a 6 meter across-Moon. Enjoy it. We love you too! Very emotional. Blas Canto representing Spain with a very big Moon.

I should tell you she's singing for two, ladies and gentlemen. She's 5 months pregnant. Well, this begins in black & white, your telly hasn't gone nuts. -- Thank you! Something charmingly retro about that, the styling, the song, the staging... It could've been representing Luxembourg in 1978.

Our final song of the evening, song 25 - Estonia and it's a gooden! They've saved something great for the end. The song is called "Hope" but the artist is called Stefan. And this guy can do it. Stick with it, it's a bit of a slow start, but once he's on the move, he really works the crowd, works the arena - just him and his guitar, but he does a great job and it's gonna be a great way to close out. Which, what I hope you'll agree, has been a great run of 25 songs... Okay, last song of the evening - "Hope"! We've got some at the moment, let's hope it lasts. -- Wow, Stefan there! His enjoyment was so infectious, it has spread around the entire arena.

Why, that's the Blackpool Tower! I recognize it, and it brings us to Estonia and... The television tower. That's what that is! Yeah! The young lady who's on top of it is called Alika... Alika and she is just 20 years old... And again, for a 20-year-old, a beautiful voice – such poise and confidence on stage! For some... Unknown reason, she's brought a self-playing piano with her. Oh... All the way from Estonia! I know that 'cause it says "Estonia" on it. Song 12. What a talented young woman! Alika is her name, representing Estonia! By the way, if anyone in the Buckingham area would like an almost new self-playing piano, see at the back of the arena – it'll look nice!

And now, ladies and gentlemen, it's time for opera. This is Elina Nechayeva and she's performing "La Forza". Her voice is something to be reckoned with, it really is impressive. Equally impressive is her outfit. It's really the dress of the evening. If you're looking at it and thinking "oh, I'd like one of them", 65k Euros. -- That might do very well! It's certainly memorable, Elina, La Forza. Do you think her wedding dress is going to be a real disappointment after that, isn't it?

Ah now, this is more like it... Victor Crone, originally from Sweden, is representing Estonia with the song Storm. And he's just an engaging performer with a guitar. And a jolly tune. Few. -- Thank you!

This is quite a controversial song... Beh, not really, but... She wrote the song, it says here: "as a hint for her long term boyfriend to propose to her". Yeah, as hints go, that's not very subtle, is it? And more appalling, still, he hasn't actually proposed yet. At the end of the song there are two girls kissing. And if two girls kissing offends you, then you need to grow up. -- That could do very well for Finland. That car engine you hear? Yeah, that's Krista's boyfriend's taxi. And he's getting in it and driving till it runs out of petrol. Krista's laughing - Universal have signed her up and they want to launch her internationally, as a pop star. Good luck to her!

Now, if you wondered how loud 7000 people in the arena could be, you're about to find out. Because it is the turn of Finland. And when I tell you the crowds love this – I'm understating it. It's just insane how much people adore this song. His name is Kaarija and he's hoping to do what Lordi did in 2006 – bring Eurovision back to Finland. The song is called "Cha Cha Cha"... And if you have a nightmare tonight, that you've been attacked by a dancing Brussel sprout, it could be this man's fault! Loves a sauna and brought a sauna with him – I'm not making that up, it's in Albert dock, I promise you. As I mentioned earlier, performances tonight, some of them will include flashing images and strobe effects and this is one of them. Enjoy – it is somethin' else. Finland, song 13, lucky for some-- Wowza! Listen to that crowd! They love it, the staging as catchy as the song – does get a feeling "Strictly Come Dancing" is a very different ??? in Finland. Enormously the curl on ??? lip as she watched that... His name's Kaarija and I think we'll be seeing more of him later on when the scores are coming in. That was song 13.

Now, you might well recognize this young lady, Saara Aalto. She was in the "X Factor" finals a couple of years ago and now she's representing Finland with a really good pop song called "Monsters", I think she ?messed up because she's following Jessica Mauboy, which is arguably maybe a better song, I'm not sure. The staging is by Brian Friedman of "X Factor" ?? and it's very him, quite, quite dizzy, let's say. You'll be relieved to know it doesn't involve ???, as far as we know. -- Only the kitchen sink left to hold. That is a really catchy song and I think it would've done better that it not been following Australia.

...Their performer, there she is, is so popular backstage – everyone adores her! Her names' La Zarra. And she's French-Canadian, but now lives in Paris. And the song is called "Evidemment" and it is great! It really channels into the success of Barbara Pravi in 2021 with "Voilà", a real chanteuse number here. The staging is fabulous and finally – a woman who appears to be taller

than Hannah Waddingham, song no. 6! -- France are gonna have a good night, I think! It'll certainly do well with the juries and if this arena is anything to go by, it will also do well in the popular vote. The name is La Zarra!

...You've got to feel for France, they haven't won since 1977. I mean, we thought we're doing that, they've got 20 years on us! But tonight could change that. This is one of the bookie's favourites. Her name is Barbara Pravi, and the song is "Voilà". And it's a song in the real tradition of French "café chanson", like Édith Piaf, Jacques Brel, Yves Montand. It's a big, rousing French ballad, and she performs it wonderfully – really simple staging, just a singer, a mic and spotlight. If the wind blows fair, she could do it for France tonight. Wow! That's how you win Eurovision, our commentary booth is rocking. The crowd were stomping and cheering so loudly to that. That controlled media, I love that so much. If it doesn't win, it must be top 5.

France last won 36 years ago and it is a fans favourite, this song, but, I think going first it will be left behind in the voting. As Englebert learnt to his cost last year... There's a whiff of Courtney Love about her... Courtney Amour, as they say in France. -- Well, you can't say she didn't try! Amandine Bour... from France. Credible performer, credible song, but could get forgotten.

It was doing well with bookies, but performing last is always going to be difficult. Terrific graphics though, mind you, if you're looking at the graphics, some of these are terribly wrong... But they are good. -- Well, great finish for the show! The crowd really liked that, they wanted a party.

...It was an early bookie's favourite, it's now slightly slipped down, Russia and Australia are ahead of him now. But he's a very engaging, charismatic performer. And, I think, one of the catchiest songs in the competition. It's a really lovely song and he does a great job with it. And again, don't worry about him because... He is, in fact, a trained dentist. "J'ai Cherché", one of my favourites. -- Lots of love, here in the "Globen", for Amir with "J'ai Cherché", but, that may not translate into votes. Not everyone's Euro-diehard like the people in the "Globen" tonight.

The producers put together the running order and given that no song performing in the second place has ever won, I'm guessing they didn't think much of this. Feel sorry for France! (Don't forget)...Sad thing, I fear, we will... Hopefully, she'll do better than last year, when France did, in fact, come last with Twin Twin and "Moustache". The staging of this, quite bleak. And there's some drummers who look like they've escaped. -- Well, the crowd in here liking that!

Nina writes and performs the song, it's called "Warrior". She is fearless... The outfit she's chosen tonight does involve a bit of roadkill, I fear, some Georgian crows were harmed in the making of this outfit. Song 23, did they die in vain? -- Well, there she goes! ...I think the man on the smoke machine may've nodded off at the beginning of that performance...

...And I really like this song. It's Germany, Michael Schulte - You Let Me Walk Alone. And It's another song with real heart in it. He's described as Germany's answer to Ed Sheeran and you can see it, when he performs. And the song was inspired by the loss of his father and it really is lovely... Right now, sit back and enjoy the beautifully staged German entry. -- Very popular here in the arena. I think that could do very well for Germany indeed. Again, reducing people in the audience to tears, and for good reason. Sometimes, the tears are less good.

...And now look at her, she's skiing in a wind tunnel! Oh, she's made off. Mind you, that's probably more comfortable than wearing a black catsuit in front of an audience of 200million people. -- ...It was an early favourite, and it might still do well tonight!

Now, forgive me, ladies and gentlemen. Maybe I'm just old and grumpy, but there isn't a single thing about this woman that doesn't annoy me. They obviously had a very lengthy meeting about costume and set design. And they liked every single idea they had. I'm sure there are people at home who love this, there's lasers coming from trees, there's a moon... She's got things on her head. (laugh) If you like this... Enjoy. -- There's Jaimee-Lee, making Bjork seem great.

...She splits her time between Berlin and London, so if you think you know her, maybe you've seen her in the street waiting for the bus or something...

...Well, this is Marmite, if everyone hated Marmite. Jendrik is his name and he's performing, ironically, "I Don't Feel Hate". Oh, some people will love this. Some people will love it. For me it's a bit like a children's television educational song, y'know, about, don't play with matches or don't eat soap... -- Always full of energy, he doesn't feel hate. At least you'll never have to do it again. That Styrofoam hand is gonna be in the car park, in a puddle, in about an hour.

Germany, Malik Harris is his name and he's performing a song called "Rockstars"... Malik was a contestant in "I'm a Celebrity...", so this shouldn't be too hard for him. -- I know it looks like the rest of the band must've got stuck in traffic, but no, it's just Malik Harris, it's all there ever was.

...Maria is from coast, neighbour and ally to Greece, Cyprus. So those 12 points are really in the bag tonight. Those are stored, those are great. It's a slow build, this song, sort of harks back to Eurovision songs of the past... -- There she goes!

...Stefania and "Last Dance". She's the youngest performer in the competition, just turned 18. To the clever use of state-of-the-art technology, i.e., off of the 70's, she appears to be dancing with laundry, it's so clever! I love the love for Greece here in the hall! To be honest, in the hall, it was kind of more fun watching the dancers jumping around in the green... In the little green leotards.

I must say I really like this song, 17 for Greece... And it's a beautiful ballad and it's some of the best staging, I think, you'll see tonight. I just worry it's in a batch of these ballads here and people may forget about it when it comes to voting. But it deserves to do very, very well, she's a great performer. -- I so hope she gets some votes tonight - she really deserves them. It was like an excerpt from a musical or something, I really enjoyed that, very much indeed.

...It's a great big, well, sort of disco ballad. It's got lots of things that eurofans will enjoy. A beautiful singer, stonking disco beat and two half-naked men splashing around in a paddling pool. -- Oh, poor thing. I think nerves may have got to her. She's certainly performed it better than that in rehearsal. But still, it's a big ol' stomping dance number and the crowd here seem to like it, so maybe it won't affect her votes.

Katherine Duska performing "Better Love". Originally born in Canada, she now lives in Athens. And she has a really credible pop performance, she's sort of in the vein of Florence and The Machine, that kind of thing. She's got a very distinctive voice, you may or may not enjoy it. But it is a powerful song and quite eccentric staging. When you see that two dancers have sword then another dancer has a giant balloon - you think you know how that story ends. You could be wrong. -- Have I been in the Eurobubble too long? I enjoyed that!

...Now, her name was unpronounceable, so she decided to go with her nickname... Which is Boggie. Yep. Could've chosen out of anything - Trixie Belle, Flu-Flu... Anything! She went with Boggie... It's a very sweet song, but if you are allergic to man-made fibres, walk away now. -- You still there? It's over. It really is over.

I listened to the CD quite a lot before I came away and this song really stuck to my head. It's very simple, little ditty, called "Kedvesem", which is Hungarian for Darling or Sweetheart.... I like this a lot! It'll probably come 26th. -- Bye, Alex! That's his name... Representing Hungary.

And some very good songs between now and her and this is one of them. His name is András Kállay-Saunders, and it's called "Running". He was actually born and grew up in New York, his mother was an Hungarian model and his father was an American soul singer who worked with... I've now forgotten his name (laughter)... Oh, that guy did "Oh, What a Perfect Day"... Oh... Louwry! He worked with him... I think you'll like this. -- ...I wouldn't have had ??? as a man who would ??? cardigan with a belt. He wore it well!

...By the way, don't worry, he hasn't brought his mother's ashes on stage with him. It is, in fact, a mini milk churn, which, who knew, could double as a musical instrument. Well, I say musical... Oh, by the way, there hasn't been a stage invasion, the woman is a fully trained dancer, she's meant to be there. -- Aw, the dancer trying to hide there and who could blame her.

That's Freddie! He's from Hungary and he's performing a song called "Pioneer". Now, you mustn't worry about Freddie, ladies and gentlemen, if he doesn't do well tonight, he's always got that hotel management degree. Feeling he may be using it. The staging of this song is extraordinary. On one side of the stage you've got a Tibetan monk drumming, who knows why, and then on the other side you got three backing singers, who, on the CV must've said they're also backing dancers. They lied. -- Does it feel Freddie would've done better if he dumped the drummer and the dad dancing at the back?

If it was a singing competition, this next man would do very well indeed... This is the first time in 15 years the song has been sung in Icelandic. I think you'd agree, it's not really the language of love, more like the language of gutting fish. But a great performance, this guy has a beautiful voice. -- A really beautiful voice there, representing Iceland.

Very good news for the Irish economy, I can reveal, they have discovered oil there! Sadly, it's baby oil. In further bad news - they've used all of it on Ryan's dancers... And it's incredible, he comes out, not a trace of nerves. And really sells this song, it's already charted here in Sweden and I think it sold in another place after the semifinals, so this might do really well for Ireland. Good luck, Ryan! -- Good boy, Ryan Dolan, representing Ireland! And there might be some nervous people in Ireland tonight, 'cause that could win! Huge kudos to Ireland for the production and staging of that, really really good.

And now Ireland sort of feel like they've won already because this the first time they've been in the final for 5 years. The performer is Ryan O'Shaughnessy and a beautiful, simple ballad called "Together". And now, Ryan looks young, but on stage he's so confident and charismatic and it's because he's been performing for years, people in Ireland know him from soap opera Fair City and UK viewers might recognize him from Britain's Got Talent. The staging is the star here,

really is lovely. And when the dancers come over the bridge, it's a kind of nod to the Ha'penny Bridge in Dublin. I hope you enjoy this. -- Anyone has a tear in their eyes? Just this old fool? I just think that's so lovely, it's great that Eurovision can still provide moments like that - just really serene, sincere, beautiful thing. And what a lovely job, I mean, contemporary dance... You can often go wrong at Eurovision, but that was really really lovely. That's a dark horse tonight, that could do very very well for Ireland. Could it be their 8th win?

"More than half of the acts competing tonight were due to compete in last year's cancelled contest. Including this next act, Eden, but all of these returners had to submit new songs. Eden's representing Israel, she's just 20 years old, her song is called "Set Me Free". These "postcards" tell you about the performer - she's trained as a ballerina, now she's a singer. By the way, if you do have a lockdown puppy and you're trying to train it, I should warn you that she's going to attempt the highest note ever performed at Eurovision, it's a B6. Good luck, Eden! -- My nose is bleeding, so I think she achieved it. Well done her, B6!"

It's one of the better ballads in the show tonight. And it's very popular with the Eurovision fans. He comes with a mighty hoop - sometimes this hoop lights up, sometimes it doesn't. It's temperamental like that. Let's see how it is tonight. -- Well, that was tense. That many indoor fireworks and that amount of hairspray - never a good idea! But he's hooping/hooped it up, that's the main thing.

Now this next performer does stand out. Her name is Noa Kirel and she's representing Israel with her big pop song - "Unicorn". She's a proper pop princess. Only 22 y.o, already one of Israel's biggest stars. Look at her! So beautiful, and she can sing, and oh, can she dance. At the end, there's a cry of "do you wanna see me dance - do you wanna see me dance?!" if this audience said "no", trust me, she's still dancin' - it's happening, she'll not be stopped! They called it a dance break, but she never sings again! The song stops and she just doesn't make dance, so that's the end of it! But it's all super impressive and very very catchy indeed. The song, as I say, is "Unicorn", her name is Noa Kirel and she is a star!

This is a big night for Imri, he was a backing singer only last year and tonight he's front and centre. It's actually a really fun, upbeat song and he's a very engaging, charismatic performer. But I fear, that performing first - he may get lost.

And this really gets the party started... Now, I don't know what they feed them in Tel Aviv, but this kid is only 16, looks about 35. The song is "Golden Boy" and it really is fun... Stick with this, it gets great, really fun. -- Cute till the last drop! I tell you, if that doesn't put a smile on your face - you are dead inside! The commentary box was rocking!

Ok, onto our firm Eurovision fan favourite. This is Netta representing Israel with the song "Toy". When she released the song and the video, the fans immediately took it to their hearts. The YouTube hits, it's like, 15mil or something already. And the crowd in the stadium, every time I've been here for dress rehearsals, when the audience is ?? in, they just go nuts. Up from their seats, dancing, it is a powerhouse fun performance. This could be our winner. -- See what I mean? The arena is alive! The people went nuts for that here! Netta representing Israel. And she can really do it, I mean, I think she slightly got ?displaced as a novelty song, but she's got a fantastic voice as well. And that chorus just sets the place alight. Fantastic. That'll could be no.1. I think it's that or Australia, well we never know.

And it'll get a huge reaction here. Kobi Marimi representing Israel. And, of course, they sent him to do his postcard in Jerusalem. The song is "Home" and he's got a terrific voice! And he performs with real sincerity. You can tell, it's a very special moment for him. This is gonna be quite a moment for Kobi Marimi representing Israel, listen to that crowd. -- Well, Eurovision always brings a surprise and that really was one - what a moment! So moving... To hear 8thousand people singing along to their own home grown there, Kobi. I got a little tear in my eye, Kobi, don't be embarrassed! Just lovely, that that man has been introduced to an audience of 200 million people tonight and his home crowd cheering him on his way, really really special.

Italy's been represented by Francesca Michielin and the song is "NDOS". The song has already been a big hit in Italy, peaking at number1 and being certified gold , and it is a very good song. But the song, well, it's incomprehensible. It's something to do with the Tree of Life and a seed, and no separation between these... I did read the press release, but I didn't understand. -- Is it ?agone? to see a potato? I don't know, I just don't know... Grazie.

...And he's one of the biggest pop stars in Italy at the moment. And this song, "L'essentielle", "The Essential", it debuted at no1, stayed there for 8 weeks, was already at multiplatinum. So I think, the interest in Italy this year will be much greater than normal. It's a nice song and he sings it nicely, just very dull staging... He just stands in a suit, didn't use, you know, there's a big lighting rig, he could've done something... It's very very plain. -- Well, I take some of it back, that was much better than it was in rehearsal. But maybe I'm just old and grumpy, but should you appear in Eurovision with bedhead? ...Mind you, 14,5mil hits on Youtube for that song, and if just half of those turn into votes, he's gonna do well.

...And it was a ?shoe-in?, it was absolutely the bookie's favourite, it was going to win, no doubt about it. Because it'll be the big radio hit all across Europe and... Tens of millions of youtube hits on the music video. And it is a great, catchy song! However, they've made the decision to

include this... A gorilla! Inside that gorilla is Italy's leading choreographer. Had to tell you... It is catchy! -- Well, there it is. Will it be a winner? It might well be. If you're gonna get someone and get him dressed as a gorilla, at least get a decent outfit! Looked like a couple of old carseat covers sewn together. But the crowd loving it, and they all knew the words, they all knew the dance, cause that song has been played all over Europe.

It is on to another of the Big Five and also a really popular song that is probably going to do very well tonight. It too has been streamed almost 50 million times. This man is Marco Mengoni, representing Italy. I know, he's Italian, who knew? The song is called "Due Vite" and in Italy he is an enormous stars... His albums... Star. His albums have gone 71 times platinum and he was the most listened to artist on Italian radio in 2022. He can really sing, he's fabulously charismatic on stage, this will do well. In terms of staging – well he's dressed a bit like... I don't know. The wife of the mare at the dinner dance? And for some reason, at the back, there's a children's soft play area. Despite all of that, I expect great things from song 11 – Italy. Whatever the secret of ??? in Eurovision is, Italy seem to have it. They've done so well since they rejoined in 2011 and Marco Mengoni there, is, I think, going to have a very good night. Certainly with the jury vote. What a charismatic performer! Beautiful vocal, great song and the people in this arena really lapping it up!

Not an immarvours singer but look, what a fine cook! Seriously, this is their postcard? ... It looks like they've been rooting through Donatella Versace's old dressing up box. I wonder if it'll do any good. -- It's over! Relax everybody! Yes, mille grazie, arrivederci...

Now song 22 will definitely do well. This is Mahmood performing Soldi and if you're wondering why the crowd are going mad for it, it's because it has been a huge hit, again. The song's been streamed more than 25mil times and the video has been streamed 85 mil., 85 mil.! times. Which begs the question - why did they give him the docks? We know there's prettier places! Listen out for the clapping for this - it's really good fun. -- Mahmood! They loved that here in the hall - I remember it has been a huge, huge hit so that is bound to translate into votes across Europe, expect that to do well.

...It is another entrant who has been in Eurovision before. 2015 – she competed in Vienna, she didn't win, so she is back to try again, Monika Linkytė. And the song is "Stay". She has a beautiful vocal, it's a perfect, nice song but it seems to me in need of that extra something to stand out on this very very strong evening. Song 22 – it's a good position for Lithuania. There goes Monika representing Lithuania! You see what I mean – It's GOOD, but just don't think it stands out on this evening – very simple staging, but y'know, it's a lovely song, great vocal.

And I think it's really lovely. Her name is Ieva and the song is called "When We're Old" and it's one of a number of genuinely beautiful ballads being performed on the stage here tonight. Again, this is very simply staged, it's just the woman singing a song and... See what you think. -- Aww, it's bring your husband to work day. That is her real husband, Marius. I don't know about you, I really liked that. I think that it's beautiful, sweet, very pared-back But it may be forgotten when it comes to voting, being so early in the competition.

Does this face look familiar? His name is Donny Montell, and in 2012 he came 14th in the Eurovision Song Contest. Was ?back in black? with a song that's called "Love is Blind". He wore a blindfold, do you see? This year he's singing a song called "I've Been Waiting For This Night". He actually is a really good performer and it's a very catchy pop song. And, bless him, he's brought all the way from Lithuania, a mini trampoline. See if you can spot it. It gets minimal use. -- ...Whatever happens, he's got some new sneakers out of the competition.

...The performer is called Monika Liu and the song is "Sentimentai". I think a lot of people were slightly nonplussed this made it through the 1st semi-final. It is very retro, the song, the performance, the staging. It all harks back to Eurovision Song Contest, I don't know, 1974? Monika describes this song as spooky disco. And it would be a spooky disco, because I think the disco would be empty... See what you think. -- Well, that was song 14 for Lithuania!

And no one's won singing second, either. I don't think that'll change tonight... Andrius was previously in a band called "Hetero". Seriously? He spent a year in Ireland writing solo material and his favourite part of his body are his arms. The stylist should be sacked, honestly, you dress better to come and see the contest.

He began his career as a street musician in Riga. And look at him now. He's currently training as a vocal coach and he's hoping to open an alternative music school. Whatever that might be. It's a really catchy song once it gets going, but the verse... Does seem a bit endless. -- Wow! The people of Latvia can't complain that Justs haven't given it all. If effort means points, he's getting a lot of them, put everything into that.

Up next is a kind of modern take on a ballad, it's sort of Sia, Sia-lite? ...And it must be one of the worst song titles ever. It's called "Love Injected". Grim... And to add to the fun, she's decided to... Well, she's dressed up ?? as a toilet brush, to be honest. -- Well now, she's won over the crowd here in the "Vienna Stadthalle", they're liking her!

Tamara Todevska is performing her own song called "Proud". And it's interesting, in a sea of pop and gimmicky staging, sincerity does shine through. And this is a really passionate, lovely

performance, beautiful vocal, really terrific. And certainly, if the rehearsals are anything to go by, the audience really respond. -- Powerful song, it seems like a real moment, here in Tel Aviv Expo. And a lovely picture of the singer with her daughter in the end.

They failed to qualify this year, but now they're back! And this is another artist who's already been in the contest - 2002 with "7th Wonder", she came 2nd! She was only 12 points away from winning the competition... I can tell you, and this isn't a secret, I didn't overhear it in a lift or anything, she is 5 months... I don't know how many months pregnant she is, I don't know, that's a lie - I DON'T KNOW. I DON'T KNOW THAT. But she is pregnant and it's a little boy... Maternity wear's different in Malta. -- Wow! Just checking the bum... And that her water didn't actually break through that song. Those weren't the waters she was walking on. Not sure if that was the father lurking... But they're gone now.

He's a doctor! So if you're experiencing medical emergency in Malta tonight, sorry, they're one down. The song is called "Tomorrow" and it's a very sweet song, I like it a lot. But the staging, I think, will let it down a bit. -- A very cute song but maybe not right for Eurovision. You think they brought that park bench all the way from Malta? Sorry lugging it home.

Next up, a performer that is tipped to do very well. Destiny is her name and she's representing Malta. The song is "Je Me Casse" which means "I'm out of here". Destiny is no stranger to Eurovision, she won Junior Eurovision at the age of 13. Now just 5 years later she's back for the grand final and she means business. Lots of countries want to do well, Malta want to win and if anyone can do it, it's Destiny. It's really simple staging, but just a teen, she turns this arena into, y'know, her front room. It's a really powerful, fun performance. Enjoy Destiny. Listen to that crowd! If the "Ahoy" stadium could crown a winner right now, they would. Destiny representing Malta – a fantastic reaction to a great performance. Extraordinary – she's only 18 years of age.

...She's just 18 years old, so you can only imagine the nerves being the opening act tonight... - - That's it, we have begun! Michela representing Malta, I'm so pleased for her. She had some slightly iffy rehearsals, that's one of her better performances, so she'll be thrilled with that, I'm happy for her. Just 18 - what a tough job to come out here and kick off this competition.

Ooh, hello. That's Knez. He's from Montenegro, don't you know. Now he's been going for years. It says here, "career spanning over 2 decades". Yeah, like, 3 decades... Possibly 4. He... Had at least 10 studio albums and his latest album is out this summer... The song is "Adio", which means "goodbye". Adio! So, now I know what to say to him later, when I see him. By the way, if you were thinking of going to Montenegro to get some botox done, I wouldn't. Apparently,

there's a real shortage, they've had a run on it, I'm not sure why, what it's all about... This is song 16, brace yourselves. -- Well, song 16, Knez there, looking thrilled about the performance. Or upset. Or angry. He's full of emotion, that's the main thing.

Very pretty lady called Aliona Moon... She loves horses, Aliona, as you can see... She was the backing singer for Moldovan Eurovision entry last year, that was Pasha... And Pasha's written this song and she's going to be accompanying her on the piano. Lithuania weren't about the costume, this performance is all about the frock. Keep your eyes peeled. -- Aliona Moon. There she is with her hair. Who knew Donald Trump is a style icon in Moldova?

...The performer is called Pasha Parfeni. And he's 36 and he's one of several performers tonight who've been in Eurovision before. In fact, he was competing in 2012 when Loreen won. So they're competing again tonight. He's surrounded by various musicians and backing singers, including Sergio, who is playing in traditional Moldovan flute, which... You know, good crossword answer here – it's a kaval, there you go, try that in your wordle. If there isn't a human sacrifice by the end of this, I'll be very disappointed... -- Pasha Parfeni for Moldova. As I speak, the white? witches of Southport are gathering in the car park for a barbeque. Exciting times!

...The artist is Natalia Gordienko, the song is "Sugar" and it's another big/beat pop number. In a little "Eurovision" game I like to play, "Spot the Unlikely Backing Dancer", one of Natalia's looks like Michael McIntyre lost a bet. I'm not quite sure how he's one of the four best backing dancers in Moldova, but he is! This song also contains the longest note ever heard in "Eurovision". Enjoy!

The song is called "MOJ SVIJET". Heh, that's what it's called... Now, more of our circus skills come to pair here. We have a nice lady rollerblading. Which sounds lame, and indeed is, but... They do a really clever thing with the lighting on the floor which transforms it into something quite cool and beautiful. -- ???, yes it is! There he goes!

The song rails against modern life and how frenetic it is. And to prove his point, in the middle of the song, he didn't just slow down - he stops, for ten seconds. It's quite lengthy. He's apparently put 1000 euros on himself to win, so, I hope he doesn't need that money for tattoo laser removal later in life, because... I think he's lost them. It's quite a nice song though, sort of a country, western feel. See what you think. -- Thank you very much... Anyone else find this guitarist marginally creepy?

If you think the Britain has a bad time at Eurovision, spare a thought for The Netherlands. It's almost 10 years since they qualified for the grand final. But this year, they did it, with Anouk

and a song called “Birds”. The song has already been no.1 hit in Netherlands. The writer of the song, Tove Johannson, said it's "too good to win Eurovision"... Hm, smell him? If you don't like Lana Del Rey, you're going to loathe Anouk. -- In an evening of lots of high-energy pop that stands out and might - might translate into a lot of votes.

On now, to something completely different. Song 11 from Netherlands, they're represented by a young woman, just 21, she's called S10 or "Steen" performing a beautiful song called "De Diepte", "The Depth". it's almost like I speak Dutch. It's very quiet, completely sincere and beautifully performed by this young woman, "Steen". But will she get lost in the noise? We'll see, song 11 - Netherlands! -- Just 21 years old, commanding that enormous stage all by herself with that beautiful ballad. Good job, "Steen"! Crowd - very keen!

This is The Netherlands, Waylon. He was part of the Common Linnets in 2014 and now he's solo. It's another country song, but with a rock feel, with some proking, mhm, you heard me! - - I quite liked that! Waylon for The Netherlands and he's such a cool dude. You feel like you're not at the Eurovision, you sort of stepped away and onto a Waylon gig for 3 minutes.

What a fantastic moment for this man. Jeangu Macrooy representing The Netherlands – he has waited 2 years for this moment. The song is “Birth Of A New Age”. I should say the running order position for the host country is randomly selected, this spot was drawn for them over a year ago, in March 2020. But now, May 21, he finally gets to walk out on the stage and feel the love of that home crowd. What a special night for him. Song 23 – ...Listen to that love for Jeangu Macrooy, representing the home crowd of The Netherlands.

This, right now, is the bookie's favourite. And remember, a lot of these songs have been hits across Europe. This has been on Spotify, about 12 mil. streams, probably more by now. And it's been a big hit across Europe. It's called “Arcade” and the performer there in the middle of the group on top of the mountain is Duncan Laurence. It's... A sort of ballad in the style of Coldplay, it's just him and a piano. It's very simple staging, you could tell that by the fact he's being upstaged by a lightbulb. Don't expect too much from the lightbulb. It promises more than it delivers. This is gonna do well tonight. -- Duncan Laurence for the Netherlands. Remember, that song is already known and loved all across Europe, and if the bookies are correct, that is tonight's winner. I have a funny feeling something else is going to pip it at the post.

There'll be a big cheer for this lady, Margaret Berger... It's an unusual song, it's not the pop we've come to expect from Norway...

Well, a familiar Eurovision face here - Alexander Rybak! You recall, in 2009, he won with Fairytale... He's come back with a song called "That's What You Call A Song". Now, ironically, the song isn't that great. But his performance, I have to say, is really charismatic. He's just a great entertainer. He commands the stage, he's very likeable and people are predicting he might match Johnny Logan as only the second person to win the competition twice as a performer. Let's see what you think. -- Went down well in the "Lisbon Arena"... But he is, of course, originating from Belarus, which may help him when it comes to the voting. And weirdly, he shares a birthday with Johnny Logan. Could it be written in the stars?

...I think it's a great position for them, song 20 is a really good position for Alessandra. She's got an Italian dad and a Norwegian mom, she grew up in Italy, but moved to Norway two years ago, once she got out of school. She is such a great performer! She's a little powerhouse! The crowd love her! This song, if I say it's catchy, honestly, it's going to be in your head till you die... And I should warn you, there is an extremely high note in it. The sort of thing that could affect hearing aids and pets. So... Beware! -- Alessandra – I love her! She's got a pair of tights and a ?towstrap on her head?, she's happy! That is top 5 and a great position in the running order... They're loving it.

And up next is another really good song, the artist is "Tix" and the song is "Fallen Angel", representing Norway. You sort of have to shut your eyes to enjoy this song. It's the staging, I feel, made me ????. It's like a very short meeting: "The song mentions angels and demons? Why doesn't someone... Should we have lunch? We're done here". He's very popular in Norway, "Tix", he's at 4 number 1 singles and is the most streamed artist in Norway in 2020. He has Tourette's and OCD and is very open about his mental health issues. And you see when he reveals his glasses, you see that he does actually have facial tics, hence his name – "Tix". That is a terrific pop ballad – "Tix" representing Norway, song 22 in tonight's Eurovision grand final.

Now this man is Carl Epsen. And when he's not doing this, he's a salesman selling doors and windows. Not in a Craig Doyle way, he actually makes them. As he's doing here. He has no experience as a singer, and yet his cousin thought he's a lovely voice, so she wrote this song for... It's... It's certainly an unusual voice. He does look... A bit preoccupied throughout the performance. he looks like he's thinking: 'did i leave the gas on?' Should I phone the rep and check the immersion? -- Bless Carl, I think he's delighted that's over. As are we.

There's a few pop princesses in the show tonight, including our own Mae Muller, who will be performing later in the show – she is a blast! ...There's also Noa from Israel and this lady – Blanka, as in, Uma Paloma? And this song is "Solo"! If you enjoyed last year's entry by Chanel

representing Spain, "SloMo", then I guarantee you – you're gonna like this, quite similar. There's Blanka, she loves DJ'ing, she's terribly good at it! By the way, I should say all the staging is done by the specific delegations. I.e., when you're confused that this isn't 1982, it's Spain's choice! Oh no, it's Poland's choice! That's what it is, but easy mistake to make. Song four! -- Undeniably catchy! But for my money there are bigger, better earworms later on in the show.

Next up, it's another man, Ochman representing Poland with his song "River". He's a good vocalist. He has, I mean this as a compliment, real Gary Barlow energy, I would say. I'm guessing Ochman didn't choose these dancers. He's sort of real estate-chic, I don't think he wanted these people. -- See, I told you, gentleman of pop! That's our Ochman.

Last year, Poland sent us those milkmaids? Churning butter? Remember them? Well they've gone in a very different direction this year... Now Monika's own personal story is extraordinary. She was part of a very successful Polish pop group, they sold millions of records, they've won lots of awards, and then in 2007 Monika, along with the other band members, were involved in a very serious car accident. Monika was left partially paralyzed and she's being in a wheelchair since. But undeterred, she decided to forge ahead with a solo career. So, for her, tonight, appearing on stage, representing her country must be a very sweet personal victory indeed. -- ...Lots of big ballads tonight, you will have noticed that. -- Enjoy that smile, it's the last one you'll see from him. He doesn't seem to enjoy performing very much. -- Now, even if you loved that, you have to agree that socks, a belt and some hair conditioner might've improved it.

Onto the dreaded, second position. No one has ever won in this position. Can Kasia Mos change this? ...Kasia has a dog shelter and was also a pussycat doll in a burlesque show in Poland... And in fact, her brother will be fiddling with her on the stage tonight. -- ...She looks exhausted!

Up next it's the host nation - Portugal! Claudia Pascoal performing "O Jardim", a lady will join her at one point - that's the songwriter Isaura, it's good to see who's responsible... Song 8... They know her - they love her! -- Not sure how much Claudia enjoyed that... But the Portuguese crowd loving it!

Off to Portugal next. As I said a lot of the heavy metal songs have been weeded out of the competition, there's only one left, we'll hear that very shortly. But there are these, sort of harmonized, introspective ballads, and this is the first of them. From Portugal it's Maro with "saudade, saudade". It's very simply staged, it's very Portuguese, I would say. But it is a beautiful moment - see what you think. -- ...Really beautiful in the moment, you just worry that

after 25 songs and all the people, it may not be remembered. There's a few more ballads like that throughout the competition, and they may cancel each other out.

And it really is Marmite, it not everyone's cup of tea, but the people who like it absolutely love it. In a night of bells and whistles, gizmos and gimmicks this is something completely different. It's very simple, it's a sort of nostalgic tune, a bit like of "La La Land". And he appears to be completely unfazed, it's just a boy in his bedroom singing a song, written by his sister. -- Big reaction here! Is it endearing? Is it charming? Is it annoying? I... I veer between the two. He's a lovely voice, Salvador Sobral, he's had a lot of health problems, but he could be tonight's champion.

This is Portugal! Her name is Mimicat and the song is "Ai Coracao"! She's performing in second place and as regular viewers of Eurovision will know, what has no one done performing second? Win. And it's a shame, cause I really like Mimicat, she's a fantastic performer, really engaging. It's sort of burlesque, cabaret, song no. 2 -- Mimicat for Portugal! It takes a special sort of talent for a solo performer to connect with the whole arena like this and Mimicat has it, just terrific!

Oh, what a treat we have for you... I don't want to spoil it for you, but it's a special thing. It's very very Eurovision. Small children and pets should probably move from the room as we embrace song 14. -- Wow. Cezar there, proving that just because you can do something, doesn't mean you should. And what were those dancers doing? They looked like they were changing a giant duvet cover.

Off next to Romania, the artist is Wrs, his actual surname is Ursu, which means bear in Romanian. Oddly, one of two bears in the competition tonight, as well as some wolves from Norway. This song sailed through the 2nd semi-final and they really ... top loaded the show with these big, up-tempo crowd pleasers, so it's a great start of the competition. The song is called "Llamame" and it is pretty irresistible. I should warn you that this is the first example of the show tonight, of the great Italian shirt shortage of 2022. -- The one good shirt and they've ripped that! It is terrific, but of course, it's in the dreaded no.2 slot - a position from which no song has ever won the competition... And I'm not sure that will. It'll do well, but I don't think that it'll win.

And it really is a very optimistic anthem, it's perfect for Eurovision. And Russia normally do well, they've only won once in 2008 with Dima but last year, the grannies, remember them? They came second. Possibly too early in the running order for a victory, but I'm sure this'll do

well. -- You know, I never ??grow old Ambrosia from Gunilla?? frock, and I was right! Good song, though! I predict any points.

...Russia represented by Manizha and the song is “Russian Woman”. She’s been really popular at the semi-finals and a really engaging performer. She has called controversy at home with this entry, she has a very liberal message of tolerance and visibility about Russian women, but she sort of smuggled it in using traditional Russian sounds and iconography. Great, great staging, I think you’ll like this. I love moments like that in Eurovision. The silliness of the mad dress, the crazy flames and then that wall of portraits of Russian women. Suddenly really moving. Manizha for Russia.

Next up is another of the bookie's favourites. And not to stir up any conspiracy theories, but their placing in the running order is pretty much ideal... Now, Russia are doing everything they can to avoid the boos. One, we've been told in the hall to please refrain from booing them. But also, the song - they're all dressed in white, it's about unconditional love and tolerance, and she does a lovely job, she really wins over the crowd, and this may well be our winner tonight. -- Now that cheering is genuine. They liked that song and they like her... And that is going to do well.

Now it's time for the actual bookie's favourite... And Sergey's been on a real charm offensive to get rid of some of the negative reaction which often happens for Russia in the hall. He's spoken out against the homophobic laws in Russia, he's talked about Ukraine, and that's not enough - he has a bakery, making cakes for dogs called” Pudel-Strudel”. The staging, it starts where you think "Oh, this is just Mans Zelmerlow's staging from last year", but then he takes it up a notch. It really is something. The song is fine, but it really is the staging, it's extraordinary. -- Kitchen sink, please! They read through everything of that. He deserves points just for singing while climbing a wall. The wall's at a slight angle and is covered with rubber, that's how he's able to kind of dig his feet in and climb up like that. It's really really clever and that may, well, be our winner tonight.

Song no.5 is a real contender, it's Russia. And Russia is represented by Sergey Lazarev with his song *Scream*. And his credentials are impressive, in 2016 he came third with “You Are The Only One” and that was the year when they introduced the new voting system, so that we know that Sergey, he topped the public vote. And, I'd imagine, he's going to do very well tonight. As always, Russia have really gone to town on the production of this. It's very technical, but it is impressive. -- Wow! He's got such a great voice. Such a good performer, when you feel like he

sort of juiced the heart out of it - but they loved it in the stadium! The days of booing Russia seem to be behind us.

Now this woman's parents ????. They sent her to study the flute, she became a classical flutist, and yet she still ended up representing her country at Eurovision. I don't know how much flutes cost in Slovenia, but she never, never takes it out of her sight - leaves it out of her sight. It's with her at all times. Was a bit of a surprise when they got through in the semifinals, so I'm not sure it'll fare very well tonight.

She's the first of the people sporting pink hair tonight. Her song is called "Hvala, Ne!" Which means "Thanks, no thanks". It's like if she read my mind. -- I really think we should stop the music - she didn't do that for longer.

Serhat representing San Marino! I'm not saying they didn't think he'd get to the final, but they did the postcard in a solar thermal plant... The song is called "Say Na Na Na". In real life, Serhat is a dentist... So, he never provides pleasure. This song, he claims, took 5 minutes to write. Which, easy to presume, he spent the other 4 minutes shaving his head. This will do completely well, it is catchy! -- It's the dancers I feel sorry for! Will be rocking and crying in the backstage later. I'll remind you that 15 songs didn't make it through the semi-finals, THAT did. Be grateful.

Right now, it's Valentina Monetta, and she, no matter what happens tonight, is already a winner. She's come for the last three years, representing San Marino in the semi-finals, has failed to get through, but this year, miraculously, and I mean that, she's made it into the grand final. San Marino are a tiny country, only 31-32000 people, so they've come together, bought her some rousse curtains and... We wish her luck. -- Maybe, I'll never hear that song again, and I'm happy. It's incredible, they came in, looked at that stage and thought: what it needs is a bit of old wedding marquee.

...and it takes a serious theme of domestic abuse and violence. And there is a... strange backing dancer, it's more like lurking than choreography, but he is meant to be there. -- Big Eurovision ballad, crowd seem to like it.

Well now, this is the dark horse of the competition... It is one of those songs that's taken on a life of its own and has become such a favourite here in Vienna. All week long people have been singing it, everywhere she goes she attracts huge crowds, Bojana really is this year's Conchita... This is a really classic Eurovision song, with staging ?let loose? eyes-wide shots, and then a little... Little into Bucks Fizz, I'd say. -- Oh, come on! That was worth the price of admission!

An instant Eurovision classic! They love her here in the hall! Fingers crossed, she does very well in the voting tonight.

The performer is called Konstrakta and the song is “In Corpore Sano”. How do I describe this? It's sort of like, performance art? Experimental theatre with an Eurovision song latched onto it. I'm told it's actually about the difficulties with private health insurance in Serbia. That's what I'm told, and I'm telling you. If you think there's some more Serbian words sound like Meghan Markle when they're run together, no, Meghan Markle features. Some people LOVE this. I like the clapping. -- Turns out, handwashing is still a thing! ...People in the crowd shaking their head, I don't think that's the reaction you want, is it?

Nevena Bozovic is the singer and the song is “Kruna”, which means Crown. Now, I don't know who she annoyed to end up dancing in a ditch and a cherry orchard, but God love her, she's doing it! My suggestion of a wind farm really set that off. By the way, don't be too mortified for her, I don't think she's got a dress caught in her knickers - it's fashion! -- Thank you very much!

Song no.5 is not one of those songs. It's Serbia, the song is called “Samo Mi Se Spava” and the performer is a young man called Luke Black, 30 years old... And there he is! Out standing in his own field. If you didn't recognize that face, you might! He currently resides in London, he used to manage a restaurant. Perhaps you said something back. Alright! I'm told he's a huge fan of horror, science fiction films, anime and video games, and that explains tonight's staging. I'm glad they think so! How to describe it... He begins in a giant... Is it a soap dish? I don't know and after that, well... It's anyone's guess what's going on. Serbia, song no.5, answers on the postcard please. -- Was it something they ate? ??? Luke, don't tease us with signs that say “THIS ENDS NOW”, when in fact it doesn't! That was song 5 for Serbia, I'm sure there are people out there loving that!

Quite a catchy chorus but odd staging, I feel. -- A huge response here in the hall for the homeboy! Roben Stjernberg from Sweden. I can tell you, in rehearsal he wears his hair down and it looks so like Claire Balding, it was extraordinary.

...And what a fitting song to do it to, because this is the clear bookie's favourite – Loreen, the returning champion. She won with her big pop anthem “Euphoria” in 2012 and now she's back with “Tattoo”. It, I don't know if streaming figures mean anything when it comes to votes, but this has been streamed an excessive 55 million times. It's gotta mean something. It is a great song, she performs it so well. She is such a star, there's no sense of her being a contestant, she's just at a Loreen concert. The staging is also special – stick with it! When it starts, it's a bit of a

bacon on a slab, but then it opens up into something cinematic and epic. Sit back and enjoy, song 9. -- That's how you do it! Another Eurovision masterclass from Sweden. She is the one to beat – Loreen and "Tattoo". Certainly, she's gonna do very well with the jury vote, let's see how the public react to it tonight.

And she is the bookie's favourite. It's 40 years, of course, since ABBA triumphed in Brighton, so it would be rather fitting if Sweden were to win tonight and they could host the diamond jubilee next year... And it is really terrific. She's a big star in Sweden, and yet she's attempted to represent her country 7 times - finally, she's made it, and to punish her they've made her blow up some lilos... Beautiful staging, a very catchy song, this may well take the crown tonight. -- They're loving it in the hall, singing along, they all know it! It's been a big hit. If that does win tonight, I don't think anyone would argue - it is a great song and well performed.

Well, song 20 is Sweden - they are the modern masters of ESC. They won twice in the last ten years - 2012 with Loreen, 2015 with Mans Zelmerlow. Tonight, it's the turn of Cornelia Jakobs with a song called "Hold Me Closer"... This is another of the bookie's favourites - the crowd seem to love it, they sing along, they know it. It might well be their third winner. Taking it up to no. 7. -- They know how to do it! Sweden there, Cornelia Jakobs is her name, the song is "Hold Me Closer" and that will be at the top of the leaderboard somewhere tonight.

Sweden always put on a terrific show and the staging this year is no exception... This is a big moment for him, his mother tried and failed 5 times to represent Sweden, but he's done it! Benjamin's also the nephew of former Swedish Eurovision winner, Charlotte Nielsen! Again, it's quite Justin Timberlake, see what you think. -- I think you describe those trousers as unforgiving.

This is the bookie's favourite... I'd say it is one of the cleverest bits of staging that I've seen at Eurovision. It's very simple, it's all just done with front projection, but it is so clever and imaginative and truly affective. Good looking guy, big pop song with touches of electro folk, this might be our winner. This could be our winner! -- Already a huge hit across Europe, that, if not the winner - certainly top 3.

Well, it's our penultimate song, ladies and gentlemen! Sweden! Tusse is representing Sweden with the song called "Voices" and he caused a huge upset this year. Last year "The Mamas" were selected to represent Sweden, then, the competition was cancelled. Sweden went ahead and held their "Melodifestivalen", their national selection programme, again. "The Mamas" entered thinking: "Oh well, we'll win it again". No, they didn't, this man won by a landslide. Sweden are so good at this now, this is... Classic Eurovision. The staging, a little

underwhelming compared to what they normally do, but still good. Tusse representing Sweden, there were some concerns about his voice, but he sounded fine to me tonight. I think in another year that would do very well, but this is a strong field.

This young man couldn't be more different from Blanche. Yes, he's quite a confident performer... It's a sort of sub-Bruno Mars affair, but Sweden really have this down to a t now, this is such a sleek performance. They've thrown everything at it. For no discernible reason they start backstage, when they get on stage there's treadmills, there's lights... Yeah, this'll do well, I'm sure. And, being song 24, I'm sure, will help them. -- They know what they're doing! They can put these things together.

-- Young Frans there, he's only 17 years old, been hanging out with Joe & Jake all week, they get on really well. And that song, I have to say, is the one that's been stuck in my head all day. Will we be coming back to Sweden next year? Who knows.

...I think he'd (Sir Terry Wogan) be pleased to be associated with song 9 this year, because they are one of the bookie's favourites - John Lundvik is the performer and he's also one of the cowriters of our song, so we wish him well! Too Late for Love, it is another smash hit for Sweden. -- Huge reaction here in the hall! The atmosphere is ??? but that really got people up and dancing!

He studied the violin since he was 6. He's also a business lawyer, very keen on cycling, he's all sorts of shades of fun. And look, he can do this! This song, I should warn you, features whistling. Though, fearing a dry mouth, you'd think his lips are ????. -- Listening to the end there... Thank you.

We're heading off to Switzerland with our second bear of the evening - Marius Bear! And he's got a ballad - "Boys do Cry". Now you gotta feel for Switzerland... They first entered in 1956, they won in 1988 with largely unknown at the time Celine Dion, since then... Not much, except for last year when Gjon's Tears came third, it won the jury vote, came top of that and then the popular vote - not so much. So they're hoping for big things from Marius Bear. It is a pretty song, but will it stay in the memory? We're not sure. -- He's such a nice guy, he's staying in our hotel. I don't want to jinx it for Marius, but James Newman did wear a very similar leather jacket last year. Hope it goes better for Marius.

...So it was the producers who decided – you wanted a big ballad up next! Yes, it's song three, Switzerland. He's just twenty-one years old, Remo Forrer is his name and the song is "Watergun". Switzerland haven't won since 1988 with Celine Dion and this is rather lovely, the

standout thing is his voice. Certainly in the arena, it has such tone and depth, I hope it comes across on television. Tonight's performances will contain flashing images and strobe effects and this is one of them, song no. 3 for Switzerland. -- Aww, youngly Remo Forrer there. Did his mother tell him he'd grow into that suit? All too soon, it was time for Eurovision. A gorgeous vocal, and so young! I mean, all these people with confidence coming out at that age and command that stage!

Now if you didn't wear? bad luck, Switzerland, they won the very first Eurovision Song Contest back in 1956, won again in 1988 with Celine Dion, but for the last 16 years they've failed to qualify for the final 11 times. Now, this man is called Gjon's Tears and the song is "Tout L'univers" and he could change the fate for Switzerland. He's a very popular performer. What I like about him, in the evening, when people are trying to be Shakira or Bruno Mars, he's just himself. He's found his favourite things in the dressing-up box, they've put him in front of a giant hashtag and he's singing his lovely song. I like this. Gjon's Tears representing Switzerland. And, y'know, in a night of lots of big bangers and a big divide between the jury vote and the audience vote, that could sneak up the middle and take the crown for Switzerland.

Already there's a reaction in the crowd - this has been like a sleeper hit of the competition, suddenly... people discovered it in the semi-finals and now it has shot up the board with the bookies, and I think it's second favourite or third favourite to win. His name is Luca Hanni and the song is She Got Me, and it's terrific! It really is. It's a catchy, catchy pop song... Can Luca do it? Let's see. -- That boy is a popstar! By far, one of the biggest reactions in the hall. ...A great position for him to be in - song 24, not at the end, but he is memorable... That might do it, I wonder!

...If you are drinking, wanna charge your glass now and raise a toast to Bonnie Tyler. Doing a really tough job, she's worked so hard all week here and I know we know she's famous, but the reaction to her here at Malmo has been extraordinary. And really lovely the way all the other acts wanna meet her, have their photograph taken with her, they are genuine fans of hers.... Come on Bonnie, we believe in you! -- Aww, we couldn't have asked for more! Bonnie looked like she really enjoyed herself there, fantastic job! And really well staged!

...She has been doing wonderful work all week. After every performance, every rehearsal, the bookie's odds have been cut again and again. It's very popular with the fans in the hall and the staging is stunning. I think you'll be very pleased with it. Hopefully, there'll be dancing in the streets of Penttyrch, a little village on the sides of Cardiff in Wales where Lucy is from... Good luck, Lucy Jones! -- Flawless! Surely one of the best vocals of the night and an amazing ovation,

not just from the brits but from everyone in the stadium tonight! Listen to that! That has to be one of our strongest entries in the last few years and. Hopefully! Hopefully! That is reflected in the votes later on. What a terrific performance! Really emotional, soaring, and as I say - beautifully staged, I thought it looked stunning.

And I'm here to tell you, people like it! This could be our year, fingers crossed for Molly! -- Listen to that! These are real people cheering our entry! Molly should be so proud of herself, she wrote that song along with Anders Hansen, brilliantly staged, very, very well performed. Ohh...

"As I was saying, song number 9 – when we raise our glasses to the memory of Sir Terry Wogan who was and always will be the voice of Eurovision. But of course, this year's song 9 gives us another reason to raise a glass – to wish James Newman well. He is representing the United Kingdom with his own song, “Embers”! James is a multi-platinum selling, Brit-award winning and Grammy nominated songwriter, but tonight he's foraying into performance, performing his own song. He's been so popular backstage, he's so totally himself, he's unguarded and genuine and such a happy guy... Good luck, James!

James Newman, everybody! Aw, we realized a little boogie up here with the French commentator! ...Oh, James... Lots of love in the hall, hopefully, that does translate to some votes later on. You do deserve them, James, just know that, know that! We can't promise you, but you deserve them!"

Big cheer in the house - it's a good sign! ...The man of the hour, will he be our Eurovision Song Contest saviour? Let's hope so. He's got 12mil followers and nearly 100mil likes, he's the most followed UK artist on TikTok and the nicest man imaginable! It is as if they went into a laboratory and tried to create a ESC hopeful. He is fantastic! Such a positive, warm, lovely man! ...Oh, come on, Sam, we are rooting for you! I hope you enjoy this UK - it is special! -- Listen to that crowd! Come on, Sam Ryder! What an outstanding performance! A sea of Union Jacks there. Ah, you can't ask for more from that - what a powerhouse performance, just terrific!

SuRie's done a great job this week and as I say, she was wonderful last night in the dress rehearsal that was voted for by the juries across Europe. So, that should put us in good stead. Right, this is is, good luck to SuRie and Storm! -- Wow! The utmost respect to SuRie! And a suitably euphoric response from the crowd here in the arena. I mean, she was doing a brilliant job anyway...

And the pride of Hartlepool, there he is, just 21 years old - young Michael Rice. He has been a terrific performer this year. Passionate about Eurovision and look, they took him to Heifa, one of the prettiest postcards I think! And lots of dancers! I can't imagine how he's feeling backstage, he's been so sweet all week and all the other delegations have grown so fond of him - he's made great friends. And I know his mam and nan are somewhere in the auditorium tonight. And he wants me, Michael asked me to give a special shoutout to that sold out crowd in Hartlepool town hall. Michael, we wish you well. Fingers crossed, ladies and gentlemen! -- Terrific, Terrific performance. Ball park - knocked it out of!

So this is predicted to do very well. In one of the oddest bits of Eurovision staging, I would say, ever, they've tracked down a man, who, ironically is called Igor, who is 7ft8in tall, size 24 feet, who's been busy on Facebook moaning about how much he's hating the competition. And they wear feathers on his head, how cruel. -- Graavityyy! Representing Ukraine, very pretty lady, Zlata Ognevich. And boy, could she sing!

That man is Melovin and he is performing "Under The Ladder". The staging of this is an instant Eurovision classic. It really sets out our stall for this evening. Yes, he's got one contact lens in, I think he likes looking like an Australian sheepdog. -- You asked for Eurovision, you got Eurovision! That had it all - a giant piano with a built in coffin, burning staircase, badly performed interpretive dance - the bar has been set very high, ladies and gentlemen.

Its called 1944 and refers to her grandmother whos' deported from Crimea in the 40s at the hands of Stalin. Obviously, this has caused some controversy, but Jamala and Ukraine have denied that it's anything to do with Russia at the moment. Song 21, for the Ukraine, a really sincere, heartfelt performance here. -- That's a moment of real emotion, you can see the crowd reacted to it, I don't know how it came across on television, but here in the hall, people really appreciated it.

Now there's a lot of, sort of, circus acts in tonight's show. We start straight away with a hamster wheel, a man in a hamster wheel. It does make you very tense, watching this, because she's a lady in a long, flowing gown, with a wind machine and a fast-moving hamster wheel. Good luck. -- And so we're off, a poor man! He must be hoping she doesn't win, so he doesn't have to do that again.