



The nerve centre of a new ballroom dancing radio show in America is Ben Starr's "cupboard" in Five Dock.

Picture: JAMES HORAN

Ballroom Starr is a hit on US radio

MARIE SANSOM

MORE than a million Americans tune in every Saturday night to listen to live ballroom music without suspecting the source is one man and a microphone in a room the size of a cupboard in Five Dock.

Ben Starr hosts *Ballroom Glitz*, a radio show that weaves ballroom music with Hollywood reports, magic movie moments, dance tips and interviews with the legends of yesteryear.

The tiny studio has limited sound-proofing and exposed glass to produce vibrations and echoes for a "live" sound.

"Listeners are amazed at how the show sounds like it's coming live from a ballroom dance floor," Starr said.

"Little do they know it's actually the office in the back garden."

Starr spent years dancing competitively and working in radio stations, but a year ago he was on the verge of throwing it all in.

He decided to take a gamble and pitch the

show to American networks in person, but despite the resurgence of ballroom dancing in America, networks were interested only in the under-40s market and rejected it.

Finally Kerry Fink, head of US satellite network *Music of Our Lives*, was willing to give Starr a break.

"I can't believe you're 32 and you want to work on my network. What's your motivation?" Fink had asked.

Starr said he wanted to sock it to all the rich executives who had turned him down.

"Kid, I'm gonna give you Saturday nights, 1.25 million listeners and 150 stations. I'm the last of the big gun destroyers," Fink said.

So what's the appeal?

"It isn't old and everything goes through a cycle and this is just another cycle," Starr said. "This is what you call a comeback."

Now in its 14th week the show is gaining momentum, and Starr has his sights set on doing an Australian show. Perhaps if he wishes upon Dean Martin's star . . .