

Let's Dance !

Dance is for everyone.

It really is.

Young, old, slim or curvy - it is *the* definitive democratic pastime.

Dance has broken down so many social and relationship barriers, it should be taught as a module at every Social Politics's and Anthropology course in Britain's Universities.

I'm **Irene Estry**, fitness, health and well-being consultant for ITV Granada here in Manchester, one of the UK's most vibrant cities and acknowledged centre for dance in all its rich and varied forms.

Dance is a key part of wellbeing, particularly as one gets older. We look for excuses to forego the more strenuous activities of youth, but fortunately - dance needn't be one of them. Dance has a way of sneaking up on you and making you healthier while you're not looking. It doesn't matter if its line dancing at a bowling club 'do', Zumba classes at the leisure centre or practising your Salsa and Tango at dance class.

It's all good for the body, and surprisingly good for the soul. Keeping in time with your dance mates is a rewarding experience, it has been likened to choirs in close harmony and musicians in 'tight' concert - it's a shared feeling of camaraderie and accomplishment. When there are just two of you, it can be like professional artistry - which is great, but when there is the spark, the romance, it can be oh so much more still.

Most of us have been there, whether it's in the tight embrace of lovers moving to Perry Como, Harry Connick Jnr, Simply Red or the exuberance of teens and twenty-somethings cavorting a Jitterbug, Twist, Pogo or Rave. We enjoyed it. It was sociable, romantic and often sexy.

OK maybe not the Pogo so much, but if you are looking for sexiness look no further than the Tango and Salsa, X Certificate both, but in *such* a nice way.

The point is, they all have that inherent value of diverting your attention away from the fact that while you are getting on the good foot, cutting a rug or shaking your booty, your booty forgets its being thoroughly exercised. And so you keep doing it, because it fun, sexy, invigorating and often exhilarating - exhilarating because its often fun sexy and invigorating! You see? Where else can you get all that in one form of exercise?

You get to dress up too. Tux and gowns, sequins and tassels - and if you're really adventurous, body hugging red satin for her, blouson and black britches for him - Buenos Aires Cafe style for some close formation Argentine Nuevo to the Gotan Project.

Ok, so maybe that really *is* for the adventurous but what's to stop you trying the simpler elements of the dance? the basic requirements are, an open embrace, fluid movement and swapping the lead, (more of that X Rating). You could do it in jeans and tee shirts if you're lost in the moment, the lack of elaborate Argentinian attire could be forgiven because if it feels good, you can feel burlesque even without the well drawn lipgloss, arched eyebrow, and single curl accenting the forehead.

Getting older needn't be a drag factor either. In fact it has its advantages. Once you're over thirty five you are considered past it by the bright young things anyway and the older you get, it can become such a relief not to have to pander to the whims of trendiness. Being fashionably stylish is much more fun and it endures. A man in a well cut dark suit is an iconic image. So too, is the black dress, stockings and killer heels. It can work if you're thirty five or sixty five. And imagine that



combination in dance, not hard to is it? Its always an attractive image. More so if the couple are romantically attached, be that as married veterans of twenty five years or lovers just met on a cruise. In my book, **Lady Lipgloss, The Mature Womans Manual** - I devote a chapter to the healthy benefits of dance, I'm lucky to have a friend in the business who demonstrates not only great physical skill but who also promotes the concept of enjoyment.

That's the psychological bonus, whatever level of skill you possess, the primary objective is enjoyment, be that as fulfilling contentment in your partner on the floor or the kind of joie de vivre displayed by the groom in Four Weddings and a Funeral - remember the reception dance? He wasn't good, but he was happy.

Keeping fit and healthy has to be an enjoyable part of modern living, not taken to excess and not to be dreaded, dance can be a low impact way of keeping supple, unlike other forms of exercise it doesn't have to be intimidating either, I mean - when somebody invites you to dance, they're inviting you to have a good time, not lift weights or run a marathon, but you can get a work out anyway without knowing it - how cool is that?

It's great for all parts of the physique and it can be wonderful for breathing. For some, dance has been with them forever, for others discovering dance can be life changing.

People still fall in love dancing, I'd call that life changing.



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