

BIG WEEKEND AHEAD



EXERCISE: Loretta Yurick leads seniors at dance class

Senior citizens are dancing their way to a fitter lifestyle

'Lovely' a Ward

RIVAL JOHNNY TIPS RONAN TO EDGE DWTS

■ Laura COLGAN

DANCE fever is spreading across Ireland — and young-at-heart senior citizens are now putting on their dancing shoes to twirl, whirl and dance their way to fitness.

Hundreds of older people are shunning bingo and bridge in favour of Well Dance for Seniors — a class devised for older people, drawing in hundreds of pensioners each week.

The class, created by Dance Theatre of Ireland's (DTI) artistic directors Robert Connor and Loretta Yurick, consists of a warm-up, improvisation, rehearsed routines, partner work and a cool-down.

The Star visited a class at DTI's Centre for Dance in Dun Laoghaire last Tuesday to find around 40 senior citizens clapping their hands, tapping their feet and shaking their hips to tunes such as Elvis's All Shook Up and The Pointer Sisters's Jump For My Love.

Turnout

Patricia Connolly, who started taking the classes after her husband died, said the big turnout proves older people don't deserve to be written off.

She said: "We want to get out there and rock. The music is great and it's a big part of it. "I started for the exercise. I never danced before but I've really gotten into it."

"The classes are social. As it goes on, you certainly settle in. I definitely feel better in myself. I find that not only dancing, knowing your left from your right and keeping your rhythm is good."

And Annie Holbrook Goetz, from Monkstown, Dublin, said dance is a great outlet for older people. She said: "You become invisible as you get older so this is a wonderful idea."

"It really is exercise and keeps you fit. It's good for your head. You leave everything at the door... You take the class at your own pace. You're not forced to do anything."

"You do what you can and sit down if you like. There's no



VIBRANT: Attendees at the Well Dance for Seniors, (below) Robert Connor and *The Star's* Laura Colgan (right) take part in a routine



punishment for sitting down. You can join back in when you have your breath back. It's a priority."

Bill Roe, who was one of only two men in the class, said he'd like to see more male participants each week, particularly after seeing rugby star Peter Stringer strut his stuff on RTE's *Dancing With The Stars*.

He said: "We really would like more men to be dancing. Peter Stringer, after seeing him in *Dancing with the Stars*, will hopefully encourage more men to dance."

"If someone like him can do it, any man can do it. I've got over feeling isolated."

"I'm used to it now but it would be nice to see more men in the classes."

And Bill, from Ranelagh, said the classes are a great alternative to gym workouts: "Once you get to a certain age, the gym isn't for most people. "There is no social life to it."

Everyone has things in their ears and isn't paying attention to anything around them. It's just a lonely workout."

"Here, it's fun and it is aerobic exercise. This is ideal for the older person."

Some participants are also part of Vintage Youth, an ensemble that performs in front of a theatre audience.

Thrilling

Bill, who performed at the DLR Lexicon alongside his classmates, said it was a thrilling experience: "I was so nervous at first but once I was out there, it was a thrill. I'd do it again in a heartbeat."

The Well Dance for Seniors programme is the first of its kind in Ireland and has even been studied by the School of Occupational Therapy at Trinity College Dublin.

More than 800 people have taken part to date and it is extending across Dublin.

TALENT: Johnny Ward and his pro dance partner Emily Barker in the semi-final



HEARTBROKEN: Johnny with his late dad John, also (inset) above