



I'm in the mood *for* dancing

We've all seen the way small children instinctively move to music with no inhibitions about strutting their stuff in public. Sadly, as time goes on, they become more conscious of themselves and in many cases stop dancing altogether unless they are surrounded by others throwing the same shapes – and even then, the ability to really get lost in the music, is a pale shadow of its early childhood glory.

But dancing is something we should all continue to do throughout our lives as it motivates, energises and helps both body and mind to work out and unwind.

I have always loved to dance (albeit not very well) but as an adult, despite itching to get on the dancefloor, am usually too conscious of the potential for drawing unwanted attention on myself to make a move – unless the world and its mother is dancing around me.

However in the past year, I threw caution to the wind and signed up for not one but two dance classes. The first taught by a Brazilian native who is (bizarrely) doing a course in Spanish Gypsy Dance in Ireland.

“Dance is one of the greatest celebrations of the human spirit”

Watching her move was literally like poetry in motion and although our motley crew of 12 (male and female) was very far from perfect in our attempt to emulate our teacher, each week, the extra steps we learned combined with the sheer hilarity of watching ourselves shimmy and shake to the soulful Latino music was therapy in itself.

When the course had finished, some of us were keen to keep up our fancy footwork and in the absence of another teacher willing to take on group with the co-ordination of herd of elephants, we decided to sign up for a course of classic moves including Jive, Foxtrot

and Waltz under the watchful eye of the aptly named Padraig the Dancer.

This hugely popular class is taught on a drop-in basis where eager participants can learn the basics to all the most popular dances. Padraig's clear, concise instructions meant even the most ungainly dancers were soon gliding around the floor with apparent ease and agility – all beaming from ear to ear when they managed to master the footwork.

But while our group is likely to remain a somewhat inelegant bunch of amateurs, there are many others around the country for whom dance is not just a means of whiling away a wet Friday evening.

Loretta Yurick – co-director of Dance Theatre Ireland – says dance is something which everyone can and should enjoy on a regular basis.

“There are so many misconceptions about dance: that it is for a privileged few, that you have to have started from the cradle or have natural rhythm, but this is all untrue,” she says. “Dance is one of greatest celebrations of the human spirit which has existed since the

Bill & Gillian



Mary Doyle

socially active.

"Participating in dance was a great way to rekindle the joy and energy which I had when I was younger," he says.

"Aches and pains disappeared, depression vanished and, often, I am filled with a feeling of pure joy. Dancing with other people in the class adds another dimension as the joy is contagious and increases ones feeling of happiness and fun.

"No-one should be the slightest bit worried about going to Senior Dance classes. Unlike ballroom dancing, there are no strict steps to be followed. People just do the best they can and can sit and watch others when they get tired. But there are usually more women than men, which is a pity because every man wants to release the John Travolta inside him and this would be his chance."

Mary Doyle also loves to dance. The 60-year-old is a retired teacher and after a cancer diagnosis in 2013 which caused her to cut down her participation in active sports, she decided to take to the dancefloor instead.

"I had always been a keen participant in tennis, hillwalking, sailing and cycling," she says. "But I underwent very aggressive treatment for oesophageal cancer in 2013 and surgery in my abdomen severed a lot of nerves. So I took up the Well Dance class as I needed to improve my upper abdominal strength and gain confidence as my former activities were gone.

"These classes transformed my life - a sense of mental and physical liberation was restored and it made me feel alive again after a long recovery spell from the surgery. The sense of enjoyment and social engagement soon became evident from the start and I looked forward to the weekly classes.

"I think anyone who would like to join a dance class but is lacking in confidence, should have no fear, as this will be knocked on the head as the term progresses.

"The instructors make you feel comfortable in your own space and you lose consciousness of those around you.

"They make you feel at ease and everyone has a smile on their face. I believe that you don't stop dancing because you grow old - you grow old because you stop dancing."

Although I'm not likely to be the next Ginger Rogers, with those wise words in mind, I will continue to strut my stuff through various forms of dance and who knows, perhaps one day I might even master the Tango - ahem. **WW**

For more information on the new dance term (starting January 22) visit www.dancetheatreireland.com or call 01 280 3455

www.jiveireland.com

beginning of time, it is for everyone."

One of the many courses run by Dance Theatre Ireland is Well Dance for Seniors; a programme which is aimed at encouraging older people to get involved with the medium to help improve their physical and mental well-being.

"With age, people lose muscle mass and fitness, which affects balance, coordination and mobility," says Yurick.

"With less exertion, breathing remains shallow and this affects the body and mind at a cellular level, essentially eroding vitality.

"But there is a large body of research which indicates that dance is one of the most affective activities at promoting sustained health and well-being in older people and reducing the affect and onset of age-related illnesses. Social connectivity, cognitive and physical exercise are key factors to ageing well and dance ticks them all."

Bill Roe is just one of the 500 participants in the Well Dance programme. Aged 74, the widower, who is originally from Wexford, took up dancing after his weekly workouts at the gym caused injury.

"I have always loved to move to music and any sort of dance will do," he says. "I helped my friend, choreographer Diane Richardson, to run her rhythm tap classes for about 20 years and I also love disco because the rhythm is so strong and I can improvise the movements. About three years ago I became aware that there is such a thing as 'senior dance'. It seemed perfect for me because there aren't many places where older people can go to dance (other than ballroom dancing) and here was an opportunity to strut my stuff.

"There aren't many places where older people can go to dance"

"I had been going to the gym several times a week but there was very little social interaction so after injuring myself, I left and decided to join a dance class in Dun Laoghaire instead which was a marvellous alternative.

"It is a very pleasant way to keep fit - the movements are designed to stretch, improve balance, breathing efficiency and memory by having to memorise sequences of dance steps."

Bill, who retired from his accountancy role in 2005, encourages everyone to take up dancing as a means of keeping fit and staying