

## I bet you look good on the dancefloor

I'm a big knee sort of girl although I am also known for my twirls. When the music takes me – 9pm weekdays in our Laundry Room – everyone is invited. There is nothing better to end the day than a nostalgic boogie and those who have been doing their homework will know that the music never stops in our Laundry Room. I enter our hub and I'm off.

You may idly be wondering why it is always 9pm weekdays and I will tell you – it's the time I always warm my milk. Very rock 'n roll. I'm joined by Mischa and Truly Scrumptious and we all bounce about.

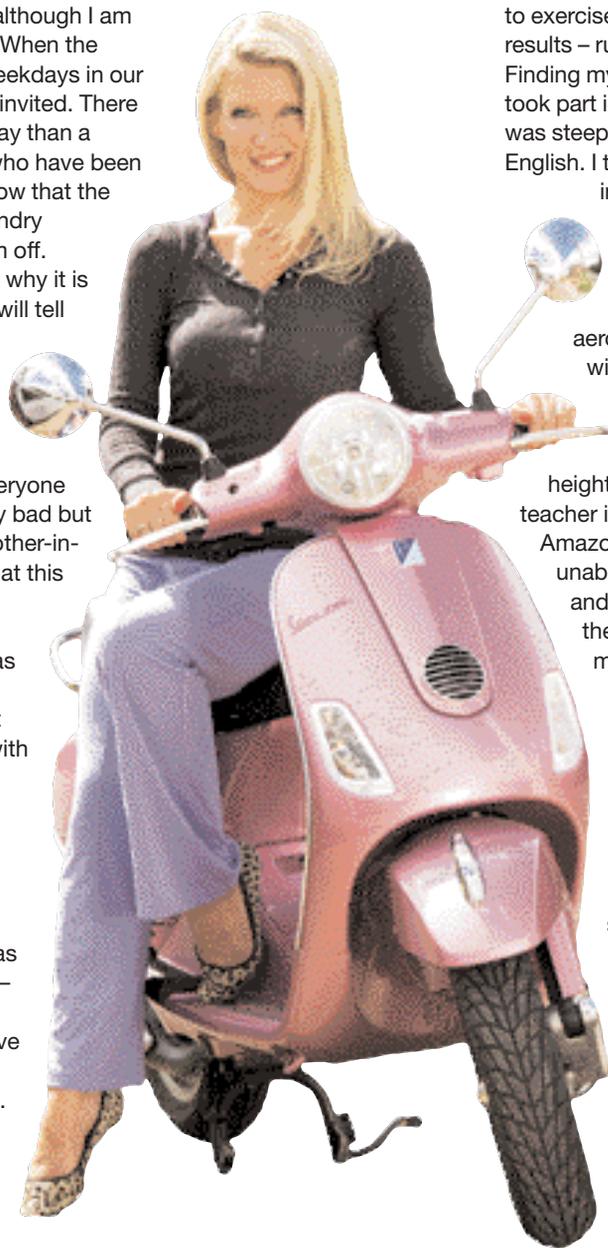
Dancing is so personal. Everyone has a style – some regrettably bad but others worthy of note. My brother-in-law Nick deserves a mention at this point. His style is pure Fred Astaire. The first time I witnessed the spectacle, I was in awe. The energy he uses means he promptly fades but while it lasts a crowd forms with cheers of 'more, more'.

In another life I would have been a dancer. My body may have started creaking earlier than most but it would have been a small price to pay. Perhaps in a previous life I was a dancer. I have dancer's feet – a very high instep. When strangers see my feet they have asked if I have been a dancer. To my shame I have said 'yes'. Does the Pagoda count?

Uninhibited freestyle dance is the best. My first boyfriend would drop to the floor outside what is now House of Fraser and breakdance with his crew. Seriously. He had the girls quite literally at his feet.

Remember Prince Harry back in March in Jamaica, dancing to a version of Bob Marley's reggae classic One Love to squeals of delight while swaying to the beat? Boys observe – you will become a magnet. Or are you too buttoned up? Yes, perhaps you are. Loosen that top one and possibly the next.

Formal dancing and I didn't happen easily. Encouraged to show willing in a health environment I found it desperately frustrating. I could think of many other ways



to exercise with, in my opinion, instant results – running in a straight line being one. Finding myself overseas in need of exercise I took part in group dance. My learning curve was steep – my teacher didn't speak English. I tuned in and focused and it all fell into place. On my return I studied dance and began to teach the four-beat variety and loved it. The more spring the better, with big moves. We had fantastic aerobic capacity and agile bodies with tone – not bulk. Dance does that to you.

If you fancy group dancing, choose your class by the height of the teacher. Why? If your teacher is challenging 5ft and you are Amazonian then you will find yourself unable to keep up – you will be all legs and arms flailing. Just when you get the step your teacher will have moved on. Maddening.

Starting with party time, which category are you in? Are you a quiet shuffler, arms dropped by your sides, gaze fixed to the floor? Do you swing your hips with feet rooted to the floor, are you a side-to-side stepper sort, or do you shimmy? Does your dance stay the same, just speeded up or slowed down? We all have our natural rhythm. Re-awaken those moves within you and shufflers maybe add some new ones. I demand you go and find that open space and let your hair down. It doesn't have to be a show-stopper but with no pazzazz are we not just a teeniest bit (ahem) dull?

In my school days we had a lunchtime disco. I loved competitive sport but also loved the disco. So when I read that schoolgirls are being put off exercise – for life – by being made to take part in group exercise they hate, I question why. Dance is exercise. To dance they don't need to change from their uniform. They don't need to worry about their hair. They don't need to compete, they don't need to break a nail – things they care about as a teenager. They can just move, raise their heart rate, mobilise their joints and best of all have fun. Is anyone listening? 

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