

## FIT TO BE TRIED

Amanda Phelan

THE unfamiliar sound of sensuous music fills our small living room, where my partner is clutching the hip of a voluptuous woman in tight glittery black trousers and a plunging red sweater.

He is sweating. She is smiling, but keeping a watchful eye on his feet.

After all, it's not every day a girl gets to dance with a six foot four (190cm) Aussie bloke put together like a series of uncontrollable paperclips, whose notorious clumsiness resulted in him being banished to a corner of the room to sit still in a chair during the birth of our child.

This is the man who wouldn't even dance at our wedding.

And here he is, concentrating like his life depended on it, as he shuffles – slinks, for god's sake – into a sexy slow-step samba.

Welcome to the world of salsa. It's a dance exercise trend sweeping the country and combines fitness, fun and even socialising. Most dancers are between 25-35 and single, but plenty of couples and older people are into it too.

"We've had a few couples meet at our classes – one couple are getting married and having their reception in a tapas bar, with salsa music of course," says Hilary, our instructor.

Hilary fell in love with salsa during a holiday to Italy 10 years ago, and became a qualified dance teacher. She now runs classes in Dublin five nights a week, with numbers ranging from 20 at her Salsa Fit sessions to 100 at the traditional Thursday night gig held at the Garda Club.

Although the starting level is slow, when you get skilled and confident enough to go to a club, you're likely to be dancing for up to four hours.

"Now that's a good workout," says Hilary, "and fun too."

She's designed a special cardio-salsa class for those signing up to improve their fitness.

The format is more like an aerobics session – we stand in line, with no partner required.

But it still has the [sensual body movements](#), [great music and stimulating steps of salsa](#), and it's a [good cardiovascular workout](#).

And you don't need to have great Latin rhythm to take part in the classes.

"The most common opening sentence I hear is: 'I've got two left feet'," says Hilary, 35.

But before I can lure my other half into a public class, he insists on a private lesson.

Hilary instructs him to loosen his hands a little on my waist. They're white at the knuckles where we're linked in the centre between our feet, with thumbs raised.

Our five-year-old young fella hoots with laughter as Hilary instructs us in a "one, two, three, pause, five, six, seven, pause" mambo shuffle forward and back.

Do you want to join in? she asks him.

“Only if I can dance with you,” he simpers. Smart kid, Ruairi. It’s not so mortifying watching your parents shimmy to the sounds of Santana’s *Oye Como Va* when you’re in the clutches of a babe with long dark hair and circular wiggling hips.

As for the adult male, he’s starting to look like he’s enjoying himself. He perked up considerably after being told he gets to lead: “This is good domestic role reversal,” he mutters feelingly.

But he’s still clutching my hand like a vice.

“Try to put one hand behind your back in a manly fist as you swing out into a half-turn,” Hilary instructs.

The salsa moves are simple, and the pause on steps four and eight gives the rhythmically challenged a moment to collect their thoughts – and their feet.

“Everything seemed to make sense. Everything below the waist anyway. My hands were a bit lost, and kept wanting to swing around the place like I was in a jazz club,” reports my hubby after lesson one.

“The manly fist swinging behind my back was a bridge too far for my first lesson,” he says. “But that’s probably because I was worried about clocking you.”

By the end of the hour, we realise the dancing looks and feels better with smaller movements, instead of our start-out gambit of exaggerated clomping.

And to my astonishment, we are now going to group classes to try it out in public, where men often outnumber the women.

“I wonder why that is,” I ask my bloke.

“It’s got a lot going for it,” he says. “Good music, simple steps, and the chance to call the shots with your wife – and she can’t answer back.”

We’ll see about that.

WE TRIED: Salsa dancing

DID IT WORK? Good for fitness and fun

PLUSES: Great music and brightens your social life

MINUSES: The odd bruised toe and kids may laugh at you

COST: 10 euro per class

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