

DANCE AT ANY AGE

Dance, in particular Tap, Jazz, Hip Hop, Contemporary and Ballet is not just for children, the athletic or the artistic. Stay at home Mums, School Teachers, University Students, Psychologists, Solicitors, Administrators, Early Childhood Workers, Actors – Adult Dance is more popular than ever amongst people from all walks of life, all ages and both sexes. Dance offers both a break from the stresses of daily life and a challenge with its own distinct mental and physical rewards.

In dance class you become part of the grace and elegance, plus have a great workout with lasting toning benefits of lengthening and stretching. The best part however is the friendships and camaraderie, as class mates become like a second family because no one else understands your own passion for dance so well.

You will get out of dance class what you put into it. Dance is just as rewarding for both the professional dancer who receives a standing ovation and the ardent amateur who is thrilled to have just done their first successful double turn. Adults have the luxury to study dance for the pure joy of it and find a terrific class extremely satisfying. The ultimate goal may be to perform on stage at the end of year Concert, which is great fun and a wonderful experience.

Ballet class for adults primarily has the same structure as for children; Barre to warm up and gain fundamental technique, moving to Centre for larger movements. Adults learn differently to children though, by analysis as well as by repetition. Adult Classes tend to be more aerobic with fewer stops so muscles tend to stay warm. Before attempting the thirty-two fouettés from *Swan Lake*, you must first master the single pirouette. Before you master the single pirouette you must be able to balance on Demi-Pointe, and to do that you must have developed control of turnout with correct posture and leg strength. However, combinations are often less gruelling and more ‘dancey’ in Adult Classes.

Pointe class – Pointe Shoes have a certain mystique and are the universal symbol of ballet as they create an illusion of dancing with effortless grace and lightness. It takes a long time to develop the body for dancing, especially the feet. Students must take direction from the Teacher, whether they are ready or not, as there is a risk of injury if pointework is commenced too soon. It is not a question of age (although Pointework is not usually recommended for children aged 11 or under), or of physical maturity, it depends upon strength, technique and commitment. A Dancer will be introduced to pointework gradually by building demi-pointe, calf and ankle strength at the barre, before tackling more challenging exercises in the centre.

In **Tap** class students learn a greater variety of step combinations more quickly than children and perform more complicated rhythm structures and floor patterns. With the focus on percussive rhythms and precise sounds, tap is also a great aerobic workout. Accurate ankle and foot articulation is essential for clean and clear ‘Tapping’ however, it is very likely you will be up and dancing around the room, making your own rhythmic sounds, during your very first lesson.

Modern Contemporary dance is a more weighted style than ballet and has a feeling of being ‘into the floor’. It involves a lunging swinging style of movement and works in turn out as well as parallel positions involving pointed or flexed feet. The torso is more involved in Contemporary styles with contractions, isolations, opposing movements and releases. There will be floor work with sitting, kneeling, lying and rolling actions, as well as jumps, leaps and falls.

Jazz classes have a more ‘*makes me wanna sing and dance*’ energy, based around jazz music and theatrical works through to more rhythmic funky and pop styles. Class may commence with stationery exercises, progressing to combinations, then moving onto to leaps and turns across the floor, often along the diagonal from a back corner. Jazz emphasises sharp movements, isolations especially in the rib and pelvis areas.

Hip Hop is a much more 'grounded' style of dance sitting lower into the thighs and knees with musical downbeats often accentuated. It can be fast moving with a different body movement on almost every count or it can be more lyrical and fluid like Michael Jackson's famous gliding *Moon Walk*. Hip Hop is a highly energetic versatile dance style derived from the street style of 'break dancing' and is often seen in popular music videos that is constantly evolving. Why should the kids have all the fun? Adults can learn to pop it, lock it and '*shake their thing*' too!

Adult students are realistic about their physical limitations, understanding that technique, strength and flexibility can be improved whilst maximising their amount of fun and enjoyment. There is no set 'Dress Code' in Adult Classes. If students feel too exposed in standard dance attire, they are encouraged to wear a Tshirt, Leggings, Exercise Wear or a Skirt allowing them to move freely.

Dancing and Pregnancy: There was a time when dancers were not encouraged to have babies or exercise whilst pregnant. Fortunately both the dance and medical professions are now more enlightened and in fact encourage many women to take class during pregnancy. Always check with your doctor or midwife first, but unless they have a specific reason for advising against it, by all means dance. You may find that your centre of balance changes as the baby bump grows, which will affect your turns and pirouettes, however you may find this is a time when dance is especially joyful.

Learning Dance Combinations can be tricky for beginners, however learning has less to do with intelligence or a good memory than with concentration and focus. You don't learn steps in your mind alone; your muscles must learn them too. Deliberate and continuous repetitions ingrains patterns into your body and develops 'Muscle Memory'. Be patient – mastering steps takes time and practice. The best way to pick up combinations is to mark it as the teacher gives it. This means moving through the steps without doing them fully, including any change of direction and arm movements should always be done full out.

You will get the most out of Adult Dance Classes by displaying considerate, respectful behaviour. Arrive punctually, preferably allowing time to warm-up before class commences. Make sure hair is neat, tidy and off your face and neck. For long hair, make sure it is secured in a bun or similar style to prevent it painfully flicking you in the eyes during turns. Jewellery should be kept to a minimum as dangly earrings, bracelets, large necklaces and rings can be dangerous if caught on clothing during dance movements.

What you learn in class is only part of the picture. As you become more comfortable with the mechanics of dance technique, performance allows you to transform from a student into a confident performing artist. Allow the 'personality' of the performance music to bring out that extra special 'something' in yourself, build fluidity and take the choreography to the next level, by not just connecting all the steps together but by being 'in the music'. Dance is a performing art, and for many Adult Students, performance is both the goal and the reward.

Make new friends, improve your fitness and dance your heart out at any age.

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