

Jive test-drive

Jason Draper and **Marianka Swain** test-jive two DVDs from Simon Rich and Nicole Beckey, ten times UK Modern Jive Champions

Ever wanted to look as effortlessly cool as John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John gliding into the school dance contest at Rydell High's gymnasium, leaving all in their wake during "Born To Hand Jive"? Well, it would be unfair to criticise your dance teachers for not looking like the duo that many beginner jive couples wish to emulate, but modern jive – simplified from its far more exciting (though correspondingly more complex) ballroom counterpart – isn't quite as sexy as you might anticipate, judging by Simon Rich and Nicole Beckey's *Modern Jive: Learn To Dance With The Masters – Beginner to Intermediate* (£19.99). Add to that the difficulties inherent in learning a new dance from scratch on a screen, rather than person-to-person, and you find that the medium just doesn't serve the message.

Over two hours' worth of routines, techniques and demonstrations courtesy of Simon and Nicole are presented in front of a vanilla backdrop on a soundstage empty save for our two presenters. Ostensibly easier than the fast-paced routines you'd want to perform to your *American Graffiti* soundtrack, modern jive is actually very difficult to learn as a beginner when your teachers



are about 18 inches tall and behind a glass screen. After a full two-hour run-through, complete novices may come away finding the dance tougher to learn than it actually should be. For beginners, there really is no substitute to turning up to a class and actually getting hands-on tuition, perhaps saving the DVD for refreshers in between lessons.

If you've exhausted the possibilities of the beginners' DVD, Simon Rich and Nicole Beckey have provided a new challenge in the form of *Modern Jive: Learn to Dance with the Masters – Intermediate to Advanced* (£19.99), with 160 minutes of taught routines, technique tips and demonstrations. The latter element is best ignored,

consisting of two short and underwhelming clips, but as a learning tool, this is a solid purchase. The clarity of the teaching clips is appealing, with each of the eight routines on offer broken down into individual figures – from the risky-sounding closed neck break to the lindy pull back and Columbian barrel turns – which were explained in terms of leader's steps, follower's steps and timing.

The lessons were well articulated, although the tone is firmly informative rather than inspiring. The technique section offered some good tips on areas such as spinning, footwork and drops, although many may be familiar to jivers at this level. Aesthetically and aurally, this isn't the most enthralling of dance DVDs: the set consists of coloured lights behind sheets and a plain dancefloor, and the music rather unfortunately reminded me of something you might hear in a lift or a daytime TV ad. Overall, not excitingly packaged, but nevertheless some great material to add to your arsenal. ●

Modern Jive: Learn to Dance with the Masters – Beginner to Intermediate (RRP £19.99) and *Modern Jive: Learn to Dance with the Masters – Intermediate to Advanced* (RRP £19.99) are both available from www.beckmandirect.com