

DANCE REVIEWS

All the latest dance releases

Streets ahead

Marianka Swain is swayed by the show-stopping Latin in *StreetDance 2*

First of all, let me assure you that you do not need to see the first *StreetDance* in order to appreciate the subtle nuances of its sequel; on the contrary, the plots are eerily similar. While the original paired street with a contrasting style (ballet) and created a shocking, victorious fusion, the latest instalment pairs street with a contrasting style (Latin – mainly tango and salsa) and – you guessed it – creates a shocking, victorious fusion.

Once again, our lovable ragtag band of underdog dance protagonists face a seemingly unbeatable rival crew; this time, to avoid any confusion, said unbeatable crew is actually called Invincible. But popcorn seller/street dance hopeful Ash (Falk Hentschel) and crew manager Eddie (George Sampson) have a daring plan: recruit Latin diva Eva (Sofia Boutella) and create a radical style blend that will change the dance world forever!



Sofia Boutella (centre) is Latin diva Eva in the film

However, as we established in our analysis of best-ever dance films (*Dance Today* October 2011), the success of this genre lies not in originality of plotting or an Oscar-winning screenplay, but in the reassuring presence of our favourite elements, and here *StreetDance 2* fares well. Outrageously sexy stars? Tick. Enjoyable locations? Tick. Life lessons learned? Tick. Pleasing dance journey from early trauma to final showdown via rollercoaster training montages? Big tick.

In fact, there's almost too much going on in this brisk 90-minute jaunt. The opening gives us a whistle-stop global tour (with unexplained logistics – is

there a fortune in popcorn?) as cheeky chappy Eddie recruits intriguing, morally ambiguous street dance misfits for Ash's new crew. But, other than some domestic squabbles in a Paris youth hostel and a 3D pillow fight (no, really), the potential of this *Ocean's Eleven*-esque group is never fully mined. Instead, they're reduced to a series of impressive but rather soulless tricks, ironic given the film's mantra of dancing as passion and connection.

Centre stage belongs to the dance romance, but as muscle-bound Hentschel has all the charisma of a pencil sharpener and delivers his lines (including an excruciating voiceover) as if under duress, the film really belongs to the sensational Sofia Boutella, who shows off outrageously by both dancing and acting everyone else off the screen.

Making a memorable entrance in a boxing ring, she proves that Latin can be every bit as strong, daring and heartstoppingly exciting as street, with the added bonus of emotional depth. Aided by delightfully improbable support from Tom Conti as her uncle, Boutella lends an otherwise lightweight dance-themed Euro-railing trip surprising gravity and much-needed star power, and she and her incredible moves will be a welcome presence in any future films. ●

StreetDance 2 3D will be released nationwide, in both 2D and 3D screens, on March 30.