

DANCE REVIEWS

All the latest dance releases

Practice makes perfect

Marianka Swain samples
Youlie Mouzafiarova's book
Fifty Latin Dance Exercises

Whether or not ballroom dancing is ever fully recognised by the International Olympic Committee ("A Question of Sport", July 2012), the athleticism of high-level competitors and health and fitness benefits at all levels are undeniable. Less clear-cut is how we integrate sporting training elements, from warm-ups to supplementary physical work, without sacrificing artistry, self-expression and fun, but Youlie Mouzafiarova's *Fifty Latin Dance Exercises* strikes an excellent balance.

Drawing on her experience as a competitor, coach and adjudicator, Youlie focuses on the development and control of muscle groups in order to improve technical ability and partner work, prevent injuries and ensure a strong foundation. While some of the material will no doubt be familiar to advanced dancers, her detailed, precise descriptions create an ideal to

aim for and an important reminder of the fundamentals.

However, this is also a superb introduction for beginners, avoiding abbreviations and technical jargon and breaking down each stage clearly, with explanations of what you should be doing and feeling and helpful visuals. It can be tricky following a book rather than a DVD, but Youlie's concision means you don't end up wobbling around on one foot for ages while you wade through the next lengthy instruction.

There are general exercises, which could serve as a warm-up for class or be used separately; exercises tailored to the five Latin dances that build on the basic syllabus; exercises answering that age-old question "What are my arms meant to be doing?", with pointers on shaping and flow;

exercises for connecting different parts of the body, for example integrating arm movement into a basic rumba action; exercises for rotation, including isolation and spotting; and partner exercises for connection, from a basic push/pull to parallel and opposite body rotations.

There's guidance on adapting the exercises for your level, for example, suggesting beginners use a form of support in a balance exercise or advanced dancers change the timing of a Checked Forward Walk to create a bigger body movement, so you could dip in and out of the book from your first step onwards, finding new ways to challenge yourself as you grow more confident. Teachers

could also use the exercises effectively in a mixed-ability class.

Whether you choose to combine several in a mini workout routine or slip into an exercise during your tea break at work, Youlie encourages control, individual strength and gradual build-up, rather than skipping important steps or relying heavily on a partner. With both leaders and followers challenging limits at a competitive level and our knowledge of the physical principles and benefits of ballroom growing, this book will certainly have a place in future training. ●

Fifty Latin Dance Exercises, by Youlie Mouzafiarova with David Pullinger, is published by FastPrint Publishing and priced at £24.99.

