

Junckers SylveSport Beech Variation on NewEra UnoBat at Central School of Speech and Drama



PUT A SPRING IN YOUR STEP

A proper sprung dancefloor is the key to ballroom bliss, learns **Marianka Swain**

“The heart of a studio is the floor,” declares Mark Rasmussen of Harlequin Floors. Alex

Ivanets, who with wife Lisa runs A & L Dance Academy in Southampton, agrees: “It’s the most important

thing for dancers. People love coming here, knowing they can experience the kind of floor you’d find at a top competition.”

Sprung floors are synonymous with ballroom, yet their rise is relatively recent. “Until the late 19th century, most stages were just wood on joists and floors were built directly on to concrete, offering no cushioning,” notes Mark.

As ballroom became more widespread, so too did sprung floors, which used metal leaf or coil springs to create bounce. Blackpool Tower Ballroom opened in 1899 with its specially designed 12,240sq ft floor – built partly in response to the Winter Gardens’ staggering 12,500sq ft Empress Ballroom, which debuted in 1896.

These floors aren’t just notable for their size and quality, however, but for their durability, says Tower Ballroom manager Danny Hickey. “It’s seen serious action! We do close every January for two weeks so we can strip the varnish off, sand it down and revarnish, otherwise it’s fairly low-maintenance. Our regular visitors soon let us know if it’s not up to scratch.”

“A properly installed floor is guaranteed for five years, but generally flourishes for much longer,” explains Mark. Dance Options has had the

same one for 22 years – “we clean it by walking up and down it with a towel on the end of a broom, soaked in white spirit and linseed oil,” says Richard Rust. Eva Hanson, who represents floor manufacturers Junckers, adds: “They can last a lifetime. Most just need a bit of refinishing after a decade, and they come up as new.”

That promise of longevity is what persuaded Alex to invest in a Junckers maple sprung floor. “It took a few days to install after we had it shipped from Denmark, and it’s now a real talking point. We make sure there’s no spillage and that people always use heel protectors, but it’s very hard-wearing.”

Damian Evans and Clara Guzzardi took on an even greater challenge when they decided to transform “a really manky gym” into Caterham Dance School. “We originally planned to just refurbish, but the 3,500sq ft space was split into subdivisions, hopeless for travelling dances. We ended up stripping everything back – the only thing left was the toilets!”

Mindful of budget, they sourced a reclaimed beech floor, but when it arrived from Edinburgh, “one of the pallets was stolen. They eventually sent a replacement, though we

actually had to open the studio with three-quarters of a floor.” It took a lot of work to prepare the reclaimed wood, recalls Damian: “We had to check for loose glue and nails, sand it down with hired sanding machines – a good way to get completely covered in dust! – and use shellac to make it more golden.

“We’ll have it rebuffed annually and use heavy-traffic varnish, but no oil – we don’t want anyone slipping.” Damian also subscribes to Alex’s heel-protector policy, “although it’s a working floor. It’ll never look brand new, and it shouldn’t, because it’s meant to be used and loved by dancers. It’s absolutely worth it: as a teacher, ➤

Floor lore



A sprung floor consists of a cushioned subfloor (rubber blocks or pads) under a wood or vinyl finish.

Vinyl’s easy to maintain with just a weekly clean, while wood floors, while aesthetically pleasing, need more attention: they take on moisture, meaning the traction changes and they sometimes open up.

There’s a number of options when it comes to material, colour and finish, including branding if you fancy foxtrotting across your logo.

Permanent floors can be fitted to any size room, and you can also get semi-permanent or touring floors.

Harlequin floors are £60–£100/sq m, plus the cost of top surface (£20–£50). Junckers’ are £55–£75/sq m.

If you take on a serious salvage project like Damian and Clara’s at Caterham (pictured above), it’s a big commitment: Damian estimates they spent about £16,000.

There are hundreds of floors installed every year worldwide – and Junckers says the UK is top of the list in Europe, with a recent resurgence.

The best floors offer a perfect balance between spring and support, enough traction (so you don’t slip) but not too much (or you can twist your foot). Like Goldilocks, you need to find the one that’s just right.

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Dancers from Tap Attack testing Harlequin floors



Harlequin WoodSpring floor

Harlequin Liberty floor



doing long hours, you really feel it in your knees and ankles when you're on an unforgiving surface."

Harlequin has joined forces with Dance UK to research the health benefits of proper dancefloors, and the results are compelling, with leading orthopaedic surgeon Boni Rietveld stating that a hard floor "has the effect of causing

serious return shock waves and can bring about injuries or premature wear in the cartilage".

One major problem is people not understanding the difference between sports floors and dancefloors, notes Mark. "Athletes wear cushioned footwear and don't have to worry about slipping or inconsistencies. If dancers

aren't sure of their surface, they'll either be too timid or expect a soft landing and get a shock. We spend a lot of time educating architects and supporting teachers who are pushing for appropriate floors."

Of course, many classes take place in multipurpose venues like village halls, and not everyone can afford a top model, "but we make roll-out versions and a variety of affordable choices. People think of it like a Ferrari – I'd love one, but it's beyond my reach. That's not true. We really want to encourage responsible practice and give dancers every opportunity to be the best and enjoy the surface they're dancing on." ●

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Danny Hickes, Blackpool Tower Ballroom