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WORLD WOMAN

Strictly Comiskey



TWO TO TANGO: Geraldine with Owen Cosgrave; top left, dancing with one of the other students, above with newlyweds Simon and Hazel

WHEN a bloke offers to show me some fancy footwork he usually means footsie. And an invitation to go dancing usually means I dance around my handbag while he props up the bar. If he turns into John Travolta on the dancefloor, it usually means he's foreign. But all that is changing, as Irish lads put a pep in their step and take proper dance lessons.

The country is in the grip of a dance craze, with classes most nights of the week in every town.

And while they used to be full of girls who had to take turns at acting the guy, our men are finally copping on to the fact that feet are not just for kicking a ball.

A bloke who knows a few nifty dance moves can run rings around his rivals - as I found out when I accepted an invitation to dance from one of Ireland's top twinkletoes.

When Owen Cosgrave told me to Strictly Come Dancing, I was on the floor faster than Grease Lightning.

The hip-swivelling Dubliner has been dancing competitively since the age of three. Having represented Ireland all over the world, Owen stepped back from the contest scene 10 years ago at the age of 25.

But he wasn't ready to hang up his dancing shoes. Owen's on a mission to have everyone in Ireland on the dancefloor. And with 15 roving instructors working for his Just Dance group,

Looking for a way of shifting those festive pounds? Our very own twinkletoes Geraldine Comiskey slips on her dance shoes and cha-cha-chas her way to a firmer tush

at 19 locations in Dublin and plans to start up in Galway, Cork and Kilkenny, there's no excuse to be a wallflower. At €75 for a course it's also a very cheap form of entertainment - and more fun than watching it on TV.

Owen promises he can turn anyone into a dancer in six lessons. But I had itchy feet and wanted to do it in three. It was no mean feat but I danced my socks off for three hours solid as Owen put me through my paces in a range of different classes.

First up was hip-hop. I felt very hip as I unleashed my inner Britney. But there's more to this than bopping around the way we do in nightclubs. Try doing it in synch with 20 others and you soon find you've got two left feet.

This is why choreographers are needed to make sure

everyone goes smoothly in live performances, I realised as I joined the last lesson of the course. I found myself two steps behind until we had done the routine a few times.

"It's more about attitude than steps," Owen told us. "You need to tell yourself: 'I'm too good for this class!' Then you'll get it right."

We were all girls in this class but Owens says it's just as popular with guys around the country, as they rock their inner P Diddy.

Owen is trying to encourage his girlfriend, a fitness instructor, to take it up. "She might be a bit intimidated because I'm such a good dancer," he says.

I could see why as a gym instructor she would not want to do this at the end of a long day at work.

As we jumped, spun, lunged, twirled and bounced up and down on our knees to Christine Aguilera, I broke into a Derrrry sweat.

Just as well we were all wearing casuals. This is probably the only way to look sexy in trackie bottoms.

After an hour hip-hopping, I was ready to go all posh and try some ballroom.

Anyone who has seen reruns of 1980s sitcom Hi De Hi will find this a bit scary. And even Strictly Come Dancing fans might be put off at the thought of having to glam up every time they step out.

But there wasn't a spangle, sequin or starched shirt to be seen

