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Strictly come tantzing: Danielle attempts to keep in line

THIS ISSUE: Strictly Israeli

You don't need a prom dress – just energy – for this lively London dance class, says **Danielle Goldstein**

Walking into the cavernous hall where Strictly Israeli Dancing takes place every Thursday is daunting. Through the double doors a swathe of parquet flooring leads the eye to a big stage at the back, with a small table beside it laden with sweet and savoury snacks, and drinks. A few people dart around quietly and efficiently, setting up for the imminent class, one of whom is Russ Leighton, our DJ for the night.

"This class started 10 years ago," he reveals while at the same time re-reading his laptop for the extensive Israeli soundtrack to be played tonight. The dance session – or harkada – takes place down an unassuming side street in a church hall in Golders Green. You'd never know there were close to 100 Jews spinning, sliding and clapping inside. "Between 70 and 80 people come each week and it goes on until midnight," Irit Khan tells me. She's our instructor tonight – one of many who teach Strictly – and has taught here for the past eight years. "There are certain steps to each dance," Russ informs me, "and there are a lot of dances." Choreographers from around the world create these moves to all kinds of melodies "from music that was made five months ago to 30 years ago to 100 years ago. From Greek styles to Latin to Yemenite", Russ adds. The choreographers then share these dances via the internet and live workshops so that teachers can learn the moves and pass them onto their classes, so no matter where you are in the world you can join a class and keep up.

There aren't many beginners' sessions at Strictly ("between five and 20 a year") because it isn't the easiest style to get into, but once you do it can be a lot of fun and a great workout. One of the experienced dancers, Jackie Schapira, who's been coming

since Strictly started – but dancing for the best part of two decades – tells me she loves everything about it. "I enjoy the music, the steps, the dances, and it makes exercise fun. Plus, mentally, it's very healthy to have to remember the thousands of steps."

Thankfully a couple more early birds arrive and help me out in the beginners' class, which runs for half an hour from 8pm before the main class takes over. Schapira wasn't joking about those steps. I only have to learn around 15 in my session, but I still struggle to follow. We start with Nigun Atik (An Ancient Melody), a dance by Rivka Sturman from 1956, and Irit runs through everything so quickly that my only hope of learning is by watching extremely carefully. The other dancers encourage me, indicating when I should be rotating to the right or crossing my legs to the left.

Throughout the 30 minutes we run through seven dances, very swiftly, including Jonathan Gabbay's 1970 Sulam Ya'akov (Jacob's Ladder) and Shlomo Maman's 1978 Gvanim (Colours). The music varies hugely, as Russ said, ranging from rock 'n' roll and pop to traditional Israeli folk. And while the dances are certainly energetic, you can move at your own speed. "The benefit of Israeli dance is that it's active without being too difficult," assures Irit. "You can decide how hard you want to push yourself." ■

Thursdays, 8.30pm, £6. strictly-israeli-dancing.co.uk

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CONTACT: www.jewishglasgow.org/israeli-dancing, 07971 812 837 (Michelle)

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COST? £5

CONTACT: 07941 382 740 (Dianne), israelidancing@menorah.org.uk