

To beat stress, put on your dancing shoes

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THE afternoon light falls in the large terrace room of Bluebells School with 35 odd students concentrating on their ballet movements. It's the basic-intermediate batch at Ashley Lobo's dance class.

Justin Yep, 25, shouts instructions to the group dressed in leotards and ballet shoes. Watching him closely are Mehneer, 23, and Shaira Bhan, 21, now in their fourth year of study. They see themselves as professional dancers.

And 14-year-old Nishant and 16-year-old Hardeep, whose technique is so good that it's only a matter of time before they get to go abroad for a degree in classical ballet.

Cut to Shiamak Davar's vigorous dance-cum-fitness routine at yet another school, Tagore International, after school hours. Aneesha Dalal, the 24-year-old instructor, has just finished orienting her four-to-six-year-old batch — 15 of them with parents in tow — and is now concentrating on a bunch of teenagers who are doing a complicated and distinctly Shiamak routine on *Mohabbat karle karle*. Most of them nurse a dream of becoming professional

dancers and being spotted by Davar himself to perform with him on stage.

For a while now, western dancing has been the hottest and most sought after skill in the Capital. Everyone is talking Salsa, Hip Hop, Jazz Ballet and Afro Jazz.

"People have just realised that western dance is not that easy — it takes three to six months just to know your body," says Ashley Lobo, whose school, with its six centres, attracts

around 1500 students, ranging from five to 67.

Lobo, who studied dance in Australia, believes in using the techniques of classical jazz and incorporating modern movements in it. "People come for workouts, relieving stress, as a place to socialise and also because more and more are thinking of dance as a career option," he adds.

For example, Mehneer and Shaira, also instructors, are very hopeful that they will be absorbed in the bur-

geoning dance industry. "I have already done two commissioned shows for GE and JJ Vallaya's designs. I hope I get more such assignments," says Mehneer brightly. Hardeep, who has been learning for more than a year, remembers how he and his brother wanted to learn Jazz, Ballet and Hip Hop because they had heard people talk about it. "I never got to see any of it before I joined the class though. But now I cannot stop dancing and I know I am good," says

The Danceworx: Ashley Lobo
Jazz ballet, contemporary style; seven levels

Rs 850 per month or Rs 1,950 for four months

Contact: 6428320-1-2

Shiamak Davar's Institute of Performing Arts

Fitness and dance styles like Salsa, Afro-Jazz and Hip Hop; five levels

Rs 2,700 — 18 classes

Contact: 6936590-1-2-3-4

Copacabana: Renate Menascue and Django

Latino ballroom dancing, including Salsa, Mambo, Passo Doble, Rumba

Rs 1,200 per month

Contact: 9811037484

Salsa Sudada: Salsia India (Kaytee, Shar, Joschi and Gene)

American and Cuban Salsa (Park Royal Hotel)

Rs 1,200 per month for four classes

Contact: 6221145/3344

Sangeet Shyamala, Vasant Vihar

Classical ballet, twice a week

Rs 1,500 per month

Contact: 6141005

Institutio Hispania

Salsa batches, three levels

Rs 2,800 for three months

Contact: 6968016/43

the Class XI student of Guru Harkishan Public School.

"Indians are shy. They do not know how to open up," observes Renate Manescu, a Romanian ballet dancer, who has recently opened a school for ballroom dancing with her dance partner, Django.

"I came to India to learn Kathak 10 years ago but no one wanted to watch me perform. So I began teaching. Most people come to me to hone their dancing skills for business parties.

And they are extremely focussed about what they want to learn — not a little of everything but only one style. Right now, everyone is crazy about Salsa, but I do not know how long that will last," she says.

"The body language is a little freer these days. Earlier couples would not hold hands though they were married but now they have opened up," she adds.

At Davar's institute, the students learn a little of everything. There is 20 minutes of fitness and 45 minutes of dance.

"We do not do any specific style, it all depends on the music," says Dalal, who

has been teaching for seven years now. "In 1995, when Salsa became a craze, we had Argentinian dancers who flew down to teach us. And our latest entry, ever since Davar began to do films, is the Bollywood style," she adds.

As each two-month course ends with a show, students have become accustomed to stage performances.

"It is so professional. There are lights, dress rehearsals, all that cheering. That is what makes us want to do it full-time," gushes 18-year-old Priyanka while 14-year-old Samudrika admits that she wants a career

in theatre and is learning dance as an additional skill.

There is also the added incentive of being asked to audition for Davar himself. "Two to three hundred kids are picked every year as potential dancers for his troupe. That is what we all want to do," says 13-year-old Arundhati.

"Anyone can join — someone who is overweight or with a low self-esteem. In the last batch, I was wedged between two old ladies. And I had to do the final performance with them. I really enjoyed the interaction because they were so much fun," says 16-year-old Akanksha.