

Shoes, glorious shoes

A new scientific study from the US reports that running barefoot causes less collision force to the feet than running in cushioned shoes. Shoe-lover **Geny Caloisi** explores whether the report has any relevance for dancers and their footwear



One of the loveliest things about dancing is choosing the shoes in which to do it. The different colours, shapes, heels and materials of dance shoes make for endless possibilities, but are dancing shoes so different from street shoes and do we really need them?

Anne Lingard, fellow and examiner of the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD) and senior international co-ordinator for the Dance Sport Faculties, has been dancing for over 50 years and she thinks we do. "The wearing of suitable shoes is the most important aspect of safety in our forms of dance," she emphasises.

When we dance, most of the stress in the body is concentrated on the feet, and a well-fitting and supportive pair of shoes is essential to be able to perform any dance harmoniously. Dancing shoes can make the difference between a smooth and gracious dance and a clumsy set of movements that leave us with backache and sore knees.

These days the dancer's choice of shoes varies from trainers to sophisticated stilettos that would make Imelda Marcos drool. But aesthetics are only part of the appeal of shoes, which also need to be comfortable and provide the dancer with good balance.

Tango, for instance, requires shoes that maintain your balance, but also allow you to pivot easily and gracefully. For women, heels between two and four inches create the best line, while men can choose from a variety of dance shoes with no or low heels, but can also go for the military heel which goes up to two inches.

Lingard says: "It is important that – although light – dance

shoes must be well-fitting and supportive. For ladies, ballroom 'normal wear' is a satin or light leather court shoe obviously giving support, with a two-to-three-inch heel, depending on the individual. Most ladies wear heels of two and a half inches.

"For Latin, ladies usually wear a Latin sandal, made by a dance shoe manufacturer, which again will be supportive – and never with a sling-back heel. Men will wear specially made lace-up shoes often with a slightly higher heel for Latin. All shoes will be fitted with a chrome leather sole for anti-slip purposes."

The heel on women's shoes has to be in the centre of the heel of the foot for the dancer to keep her balance. Between the heel and the sole there should be reinforcement so that the shoe can withstand the pivoting strain. It is also key that the shoe hugs the foot so that it will not fly away on a sudden manoeuvre.

Dancing shoes are not designed to last for a long period of time, so it is important to change your dancing shoes →

