

WORDS AMANDA KEENAN

Video shows that you're never too old to keep fit like a ballet dancer

Their graceful moves and incredible levels of physical fitness are testament to years of hard work and a dedication to their art.

But now Scottish Ballet dancers are revealing the secrets of their strict regime to help ordinary women get in shape. Scottish Ballet gyrotonic instructor Kate Menzies has devised a series of online workouts to help tone, lengthen and strengthen muscles and claims that the methods used by the dancers can help everyone lose weight.

Kate, who trained as a dancer for nine years, explains: "We want to make the world of ballet more accessible and a lot of people will be surprised to learn that no matter your age, shape or size, you can take part."

"Our dancers do a lot of stretching, pelvic floor exercises, barre work, abdominal and core training, which all help balance muscles in preparation for demanding dance routines."

"I swear by it and it has helped to keep my body in shape for years. I've had a lot of friends and family ask me to show them some techniques and they were surprised by how incredibly effective and simple some of the moves are."

"That's when I thought about putting together an online fitness tutorial."

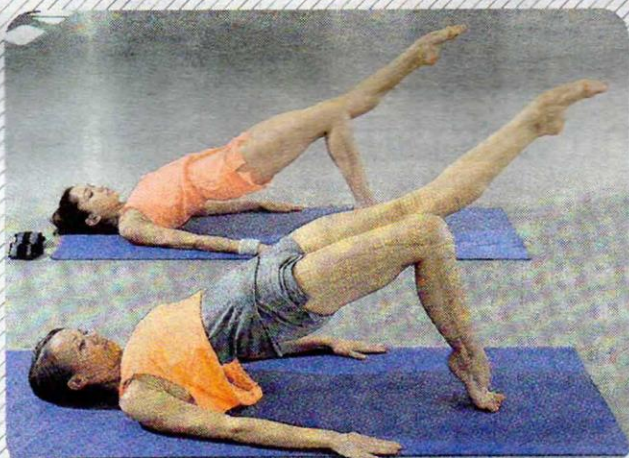
"Along with Scottish Ballet, we wanted something that people can do from the comfort of their own home, without the hassle of going to a gym or dance studio."

"My job involves helping to make sure that our performers are in great physical condition and the techniques I use on them are shown in the videos."

Working alongside

EXPERT... Kate Menzies says ballet can benefit anyone

Series of workouts used by dancers that everyone can do to lose weight and strengthen your muscles



LEG WORK... Dancers demonstrate one routine

elegant dancers Victor Zarallo and Brenda Lee Grech, Kate launched Core De Ballet, a specialised 15-minute introduction to core-based ballet exercises.

Targeting key leg and abdominal muscles, the techniques are widely used by Scottish Ballet performers before taking a class.

Kate, from Glasgow, said: "Core De Ballet focuses on a lot of floor exercises, which I do on a daily basis with my dancers."

"It strengthens the body, stretches muscles and is great for toning."

"It's not fast-paced or high-intensity cardio, instead it's about preparing your body and helping to make it strong. "Anyone can do it, no matter your age or size, and as well as doing a workout, you also learn a bit about

ballet too. The great thing is that you can do this in your living room and you don't have to do the entire 15-minute workout to feel the effects."

"I always say to people to start off by doing a little and then build it up until you're able to complete the full workout."

"The video was launched in January on Scottish Ballet's website and YouTube and since then I've had so many people say that they noticed a difference in their shape. I always thought some ballet techniques could be accessible to everyone and it's great to hear that people now swear by them."

"Core De Ballet was so popular that we went on to create Port De Bras, which introduces a more complex series of exercises aimed at toning the whole body. It follows on naturally, introducing movement and practice to provide a fuller workout."

The online video has attracted more than 70,000 views and proved so successful that Kate and her team have just finished creating Summer Fit - aimed at helping women achieve the perfect beach body.

She said: "This one is a little bit more intense and focuses on the

abdominal area, buttock, thighs and arms."

"We do a lot of lunges and barre exercises, which most ballerinas swear by. It's very effective and you achieve high-impact results in a short space of time. As well as shaping and toning your body, Summer Fit also helps to give you better posture and can help with back problems too."

"This tutorial is more intense than the others and I would recommend trying Core De Ballet first to build up your strength. I think one of the

POISE... Ballet techniques are accessible to everyone



LUNGE... Exercises help tone and strengthen

routine. You want to nail every move and there is an expectation for the performance to be flawless."

"All of our dancers are incredibly talented and I'm fortunate to have a job I really love. I've spent the past 20 years of my life working in this industry and I'm very proud to be part of it."

"I also help rehabilitate dancers who have suffered injury and it's a great feeling helping to get them back to their best."

"Some people bounce back quickly, but it can take others a while to get back into the swing of it."

Kate believes that dancing is now more popular than ever thanks to shows such as Strictly Come Dancing and Got to Dance.

She said: "We are seeing more people coming to Scottish Ballet productions, which is great."

"We have always had a loyal audience but it's great to welcome new faces through the doors too."

"I think these shows are reigniting a passion for dance with many people."

"We hear from all ages and walks of life who want to learn a bit about our productions or they are keen to find out more information about the performing arts."

"If they help to inspire a new generation of dancers, then that can only be a good thing."

"I find all of our productions fascinating and I think more people are learning to appreciate the technique and endurance it takes to appear on stage."

Ballet seems to be moving with the times and modernising, something Kate admits has to be done. Many productions now involve a lot of acting and it's a skill dancers are getting used to.

She added: "There will always be a place for traditional ballets like Swan Lake, but nowadays dancers have more skills to draw on."

"It's about being more relevant both in dance and characters that the audience will recognise and relate to."

● All workout videos can be watched at www.scottishballet.co.uk

For an exclusive look at Scottish Ballet's Summer Fit video visit: www.dailyrecord.co.uk

reasons the online videos are so popular is that they give an idea of just how much preparation performers actually do."

"I think it will create a better understanding of just how dedicated they are to their art."

"To be a ballet dancer, you must be physically fit and strong and it takes years of practice and dedication from a very young age to reach the top."

"We expect a lot from our dancers and they can train for up to eight hours at a time, depending on what

performances are coming up."

Kate knows first-hand just how difficult it can be to reach the top.

The seasoned professional danced with Scottish Ballet for nine years before becoming an instructor. Despite hanging up her dancing shoes, she remains in great physical shape, something she says is necessary to coach her students.

She adds: "I believe you should practise what you preach. It's no good explaining a dance move to a performer if you can't actually get on the floor and do it yourself."

"I loved being a professional ballet dancer and worked incredibly hard during this time, appearing in several shows and touring."

"It was a very exciting time and I'm still as passionate about dance today as I was back then."

Being a former performer, I appreciate just how much hard work goes into each and every