

# and the beat goes omm...

Yogabeats combines classic yoga poses with the latest rhythmic and ambient world music. New-age nonsense or a new level of wellbeing? Heather McGarrigle finds out...

Unapologetically sexy, empowering, provocative and exploratory, Yogabeats is more than just yoga, its pure fun, a practice driven by music and rhythms, leaving you higher than a kite and flying for the rest of the week." gushes the Yogabeats website and I am terrified. I'm really not sure if I want to be sexy and exploratory on a Saturday morning in a room full of strangers. The prospect of being high as a kite for a week holds some appeal, however, so I decide to give it a try.

Traditionally a quiet, contemplative practice, David Sze's brand of yoga involves instructing his students via a head-mic onstage whilst a DJ plays music to suit the movements, poses and mood as the class progresses. The inspiration for Yogabeats apparently came to David when he lived in the former Yugoslavia and used music to block out the sounds of war. He went on to teach Bosnian soldiers and has travelled the globe, visiting festivals and using his practices and philosophies to aid peace projects worldwide. Hippy tendencies and cynicism reside within me in equal measure so, whilst half of me is looking forward to a new, enlightening experience, the other half is dreading a day of new-age claptrap.

As a total newcomer to yoga, I'm invited along to the morning yoga workshop in the Crescent Arts Centre, before the main event later in the day. Jane and Stuart Campbell of Yogakit kindly lend me one of their mats and I remove my shoes. David begins with meditation. Eyes closed, lying on our backs, we're encouraged to mentally explore our bodies. He talks about dropping our preconceptions of ourselves and of our 'place' in the world, about letting our bodies melt into the floor and losing "positionality". I'm not sure if "positionality" is a real word and my 'new-age claptrap' alarm starts to go off, but I'm too content dissolving into a human puddle to really care. As I open my eyes and sit up, I'm in a fairly blissful state.



We do move on, however, and before long we're doing the kind of yoga for which you need to be fairly fit and have excellent balance. Unfortunately I would place myself squarely in the 'Prefer-pizza-to-pilates' category of fitness.

It all begins harmlessly enough with David demonstrating a version of the Sun Salutation. Gently we are eased into the world of yoga poses, beginning with the Cobra. For this, we lie flat out, face down, with our legs straight. Using our arms, we push our upper bodies off the floor and bend backwards as far as we can go. Now David introduces his concept of micro-movements. These are described as "...continuous, low impact moves suitable for all ages and abilities. They do not lock off the muscles or disrupt blood flow; improving flexibility and strength." So, in the Cobra pose, the micro-movement here involves us bending back very slightly more than is comfortable and then releasing: a repeated 'pulsing' movement. It's not painful but I can feel it working on my lower back muscles.

It's when David introduces the more complicated poses, which actually require a degree of poise and balance, that I'm snookered. We assume the 'downward dog' position: supporting your weight on your hands

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## FITNESS yoga

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and toes, with your bum sticking up, back straight and your body a sort of upside-down letter 'V' shape. The pose we get into from this position is almost as difficult to describe as it is to do!

Keeping your left hand on the ground, the right hand is lifted to reach under the left arm. Then you lay your right arm flat out on the ground, put your weight on your right shoulder and right foot, and raise your left arm and left leg up in the air. For me, this is followed by slowly toppling backwards, with my arm and leg swinging, and landing in a tangled heap, giggling. I'm not the only one who can't quite master this solo game of Twister (there are a lot of thumps and a lot of giggles) but I'm consumed with jealousy by how easy David finds it! He's unbelievably flexible, but insists that perfecting poses is not the key to enjoying or being successful at yoga. "It's not about getting your legs behind your head; it's about feeling happy with yourself!"

After two hours, I was exhausted and bowed out. A bunch of ladies in leotards going "mmm", James Nesbitt? Forget it: yoga with this man is a hardcore workout and my strength and fitness just aren't up to scratch. As I dragged my aching carcass out of the room, the rest of the class were still going strong. I attended the actual Yogabeats event that afternoon as a mere observer and, to my humiliation, I spotted nearly everyone from



the morning workshop taking part in the afternoon's three hour session. The black walls, candles and incense burning, soft, coloured lighting and DJ by the stage make it feel more like I've stepped into an exotic nightclub than into an exercise class. All that gives away the game are the 30-odd yoga mats laid out on the floor.

David appears, and as DJ Jay Kay spins the first track, Yogabeats is underway. I curse my lack of fitness because, despite being wrecked from the morning's exertion, I'm soon longing to join in. The funky music and David's amplified voice reverberating round the room makes this a completely different experience from a straightforward class. I recognise the poses, movements and ideas he guides the class through, but the atmosphere is tangibly charged with energy. The choice of music is spot on. From dancey beats and Bollywood-type tracks to soothing, mystical melodies, Jay Kay seamlessly mirrors the changing pace and rhythms as the afternoon progresses.

Ages and abilities are varied but everyone gets stuck into the poses and movements with

gusto. The charged atmosphere is conducive to the pace of this class; it's very energetic at times, but never strays too far from traditional yoga philosophies and meditation. David speaks about the concept of karma and the balance between body and soul. "This mantra is one I find useful; repeat this in your

head - 'I. Forgive. You.' Say it to yourself, to your body, say it to the world, say it to anyone or anything that's ever hurt you. Let go of that pain." Believe it or not, the claptrap alarm stays silent - rather than new-age rubbish, David's sincerity makes this quite a powerful and touching sentiment.

Far from looking tired, everyone is positively glowing by the end of the afternoon. David, too, has enjoyed the day in Belfast and, already, plans are underway for Yogabeats to take place here again sometime in September or October.

Even as a spectator, I found myself really enjoying the Yogabeats experience. With my appetite for yoga whetted, I have actually since begun a class in beginner's yoga. Hopefully, by the time Mr Sye reaches Belfast soil this autumn, I'll be a bit fitter, a bit bendier and, most importantly, well balanced!

*For more information about Yogabeats Belfast this autumn, visit [www.yogabeats.com](http://www.yogabeats.com) or e-mail [info@absolutelyyoga.co.uk](mailto:info@absolutelyyoga.co.uk). Yogakit is online at [www.yogakit.com](http://www.yogakit.com), alternatively ring 028 4483 0855.*