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RAISING THE BARRE: COSMO TESTS THE NEW PILATES

Inspired by the film *Black Swan*, Melanie Senior tries out Xtend Barre: a hybrid of ballet and Pilates...

When I was a little girl, I wanted to be a ballet dancer. I wanted to wear an elegant pink tutu, tie my hair

in a bun and pirouette across the stage with the elegance of a swan. But, like most childhood dreams, it was eventually pushed aside for more exciting activities, like horse-riding or magazine-reading. But I've never stopped loving ballet. Which is why, when an invitation arrived on my desk to try a new workout that combined the graceful moves of ballet with the core-strengthening exercises of Pilates, I jumped (toes pointed) at the chance. But it wasn't just my love of dance that was motivating me – it was also my love of dancers' bodies: long, lean limbs with perfectly toned muscles, they're always fit and strong with not a hint of muscly Madonna-arms in sight.

Meet you at the barre

When I arrived at the class, I was greeted by the woman responsible for bringing Xtend Barre to Australia, Rockell Williamson-Rudder – who just so happens to have the exact body described above. She gave me some special socks (they have little grips on the soles so you don't slide around) and I was ready.

The class started at a hectic pace – aerobic-type moves to warm up, followed by arm exercises using small hand weights. The sequences were rhythmic, energetic and easy to follow, and all practised to a fast, fun soundtrack. Next, we moved to the sides of the room to hold onto wooden barres for support. And this is when the real work began. Leg lifts, back bends, arm raises and deep squats left my entire body burning. But there was more to come. Back in the centre of the room, we did more arm work (by now the “small” weights felt like bricks), then lay on mats for a gruelling ab workout, before finishing with a series of stretches. By the end, I was exhausted but energised. The combination of cardio, strengthening and stretching gives you an all-round workout unlike anything I've done before. And all in a short 55-minute class. Phew!

No experience needed

Rockell discovered Xtend Barre while living in America with her husband. “When we moved to Las Vegas, I noticed the popularity of Xtend Barre classes – not only in Vegas, but the whole of the USA.” It's hugely popular in the States, with more than 50 studios offering classes. “We've also launched in Brazil, Canada and we'll soon be in Asia,” says Rockell, adding that it's already popular in Australia. So what is it about this workout that women love so much? “I think it's the energy of Xtend Barre and how, in 55 minutes, you get total-body toning and burn serious calories,” she says. “It has a streamlining, chiselling effect – and it's a bonus that they have fun and feel graceful at the same time.” And if you end up with a ballet dancer's body, well, that's just a perk. □

COMEBACK CAMPAIGN

It's not just Xtend Barre that's bringing ballet back: it seems to be making a graceful return to popular culture.

Sarah Jessica Parker was recently elected to the New York City Ballet board of directors to raise awareness of the art.

Kanye West's *Runaway* video features a group of black-tutu-wearing ballerinas who pirouette along to the hip-hop track.

Natalie Portman stars as a ballerina opposite Mila Kunis and Winona Ryder in hit horror flick, *Black Swan*. →



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