

FITNESS

# ballet in the bedroom

It's fitness 2.0. SAVITA IYER-AHRESTANI practises swan arms with a laptop, a webcam—and Natalie Portman's trainer

**S**ure, you can work out at home. Roll out your yoga mat, pop in an exercise DVD, do warm-up stretches with the best of intentions. And then, if you're anything like me, your mind will start to wander. You'll think about Thai leftovers while you half-heartedly work your thighs, and then skip the ab exercises altogether.

But forget about slacking off if you're working out online with Mary Helen Bowers, the New York-based founder of Ballet Beautiful, a workout method that helps women (who have never taken a single dance lesson in their lives) sculpt a ballerina's taut, supple body. Ballet Beautiful's online class can be taken by anyone anywhere in the world, as long as you have a webcam and an internet connection, and Bowers' watchful eye ensures your enthusiasm doesn't wane. She trained Natalie Portman for her award-winning role in *Black Swan*, and works with actors like Liv Tyler and supermodels Karen Elson and Helena Christensen.

Although I'm in the privacy of my New Jersey bedroom, Bowers—a classically trained ballerina who was invited to join the New York City Ballet

when she was 16—can see every move I make, thanks to the video conferencing software that's built into the Ballet Beautiful site.

"Lift your leg just a little bit higher," she says. "You'll feel it more." I adjust my position and steal a glance at the screen to see how the three other women in my online class are faring. Like me, they have logged in from their bedrooms—one's in New York, the other two are in California, and they all seem to be doing great. It's a small, rather intimate group, but Bowers' internet classes can accommodate up to 12 people. She's had women log in from Japan, and has regular clients in Latin America and Western Europe.

There's a cosy, down-home feeling to the whole thing, even though everyone is listening closely to Bowers, doing the moves seriously and feeling the burn (I am, anyway). The laptop is quiet,

save for a few grunts, as we work our abs in a series of fairly demanding moves that hint of Pilates but are really quite different.

Bowers' charm and easy-going manner make even gruelling inner-thigh moves bearable. "Ballet is about building long, strong muscles," she says, as she effortlessly keeps us going. "It's not about bulking up: it's about creating strength, elegance and power."

These are exercises aimed at strengthening, toning and sculpting all the important muscles in a woman's body, and they can completely change the way she looks. "I've had clients tell me that people have stopped them in the street asking them if they're ballet dancers," Bowers says with a laugh.

As we move into swan arms (a series of moves derived from the classic ballet *Swan Lake* that tone and sculpt lean arms), I've decided that I quite like the idea of trying for that killer body with this 21st-century, state-of-the-art workout from the comfort of my own home—and that it won't be long before I log on to Ballet Beautiful again. ■

*Balletbeautiful.com*; ₹1,870 onwards



**TO THE POINT**  
Mary Helen Bowers runs workouts inspired by her years as a ballerina