

Emma Freud's legal highs: ecstatic dancing

EMMA FREUD



The invitation was to attend a studio in south London to throw my heart and soul and limbs into three hours of unselfconscious, unjudged, uninhibited dancing, gyrating myself into a state of ecstatic trance. I accepted with glee.

I was on fairly familiar ground here, having grown up in the hairy, hippy Seventies, with weird meditation retreats, spiritual workshops and wardrobes lined with tin foil for growing entry-level weed (it might have been coriander). So I felt confident I was returning to my (former) people. But I made one mighty mistake; in a moment of insanity I invited my editor to come with me, because I thought it might loosen her up a little. I arrived in yoga pants and an ethical T-shirt (obvs). She overthought it and wore white shoes, tight white slacks and a CBeebies T-shirt in case anyone mistook her for a dental nurse.



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We entered the venue and asked if we should take off our outer layers. "Get as naked as you can," said the flower-festooned fairy on the door. The editor visibly weakened. The dance studio was dimly lit with twinkling lights, decorated with tarot cards and teeming with a crowd last seen at Woodstock in 1969. The editor quavered. "Breathe," I said, and we inhaled a ripe scent that I hadn't experienced since watching an Ibiza sunset with some free spirits who'd been dancing enthusiastically since dawn without access to shower facilities.

A hundred of us stood around the perimeter of the studio. A gentle, bearded man said there was to be no alcohol, no talking, no shoes and no spectating. He also explained that if someone tried to dance with you and your heart said no, to put your palms together, bow your head and whisper: "Namaste." We each downed a shot of liquid cacao - I don't know why - and everyone (apart from the dental-nurse editor) started gyrating, twirling and undulating with the vibey beats. The music intensified, as did the spiralling. Two revellers entwined their limbs like a writhing human pretzel. A few people went down on all fours to crawl to the beat. The bass dropped and so did one dancer's harem pants. It was intense, passionate, abandoned and ecstatic, and throughout the session my terrified editor politely mum-danced, hopping from one foot to the other, while glaring at her watch.

After we left she said she'd never had less fun, but in fairness I think she usually attends tea dances. For me it was the sort of natural high that would have been easier to access had I been unnaturally high. But for an hour I was transported back to my youth of bidis, brown rice and BO, and that was a thrill. Tantric time travel: I can't recommend it too highly. Our editor can't recommend it at all.

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