

# My big fat Greek dancing lesson: Fun with Stavros Flatleys

*There's something surprisingly comforting about being in a tight clinch with two semi-naked Cypriots in white tights, gauzy tutus, red pom-poms, tattoos and not much else. It might have something to do with the fact that Demetrios (Demi) and Lagi Demetriou are both so generously padded, like big squashy sofas.*

Or because they smell so good - a heady mix of Demi's after-shave, washing powder and the teeniest waft of fish and chips left over from lunch. Or maybe just because this father-and-son duo are by far the most encouraging and self-effacing dance teachers I've ever met.

'Yes! That's it! Brilliant - you've got it!' says 13-year-old Lagi, as we all join in. 'Now let's do the chainsaw.'

Er, the chainsaw? 'I invented it - so it's easy. You just wiggle your hips and pump one arm up and down like you're starting a chainsaw. That's it - but wiggle the other way or you'll get twisted. That's it. Brilliant! Brilliant!'

And so, for few minutes, we hop and do the chainsaw and have a thoroughly good time.

'I wish we could show you some of the moves we've got for the final,' says Demi. 'We've been rehearsing for months - and eating as often as we can, obviously - and it's brilliant. You've got to see it. Will you be watching?'

For the benefit of anyone who's been hidden away in a cave, Demi and Lagi are better known as Stavros Flatley, the chubby Cypriot/Greek comedy dancers who've taken Britain's Got Talent by storm. Tonight they will compete in the live final against nine other acts, including favourites Susan Boyle, Shaheen and Diversity, for the chance to entertain the Queen at the Royal Variety Show this summer.

Their act is an hilarious Greek-inspired pastiche of Michael Flatley's Lord Of The Dance, based on a routine Demi used to perform in the family's Greek restaurant before it closed because of shocking food ('the first lesson we learnt is never open a restaurant if you know nothing about food').

The wonderfully irreverent three minutes of Irish dancing, Greek music, blond wigs, naked torsos and tummies has become the surprise hit of the series and has thrust the pair from Winchmore Hill, North London, into the limelight.

'It's been absolutely mad - we never expected anything like this,' says Demi, clearly enjoying every minute. 'I've had all my cousins ringing up from Cyprus saying: "Oh my God, we've just seen you on the news." And just this morning all these scaffolders were shouting: "Oi, Stavros! Can we have a picture?" Can you believe it? They were so happy



just to have a picture taken with me and Lagi ... how nice is that?'

It's not just scaffolders. Videos of their performances have had more than eight million hits on YouTube and countless support groups have sprung up on Facebook.

They are unlikely sex symbols. Demi, 40, is bald, 5ft 7in and 15st, sports a pair of rather furry shoulders and a slew of tattoos, including a map of Cyprus on his stomach, and a huge Zorba the Greek on his back, above the words 'C'mon My Boy'.

Lagi is just 13 and 4ft 11. 'I've lost weight', he tells me. 'I was nine stone, but with all this jumping about I've gone down to eight something.'

Both have impressive tummies, are having the time of their lives and, if possible, are even more likeable off-screen than on. 'It's about having a giggle and making people smile, isn't it?' says Demi. 'But my God, doesn't telly put on the weight? It's got to put on more than ten pounds...'

'Sorry Dad - that's what you look like.'

It all started last year when they were watching telly at home with Mum Karen, 39, (who's English) and sister Elli, 11, and an advert came on asking people to audition for Britain's Got Talent.

'It's our favourite programme, and I turned to Karen and said: "Wouldn't it be funny if I did my Stavros Flatley act from the old restaurant days?" And instead of saying "Don't be stupid", she said: "Yes, why not?"'

'But I wasn't brave enough on my own - I get terribly nervous, always have - and then Lagi said: "Come on Dad, I'll do it with you." So they spent weeks watching and re-watching Michael Flatley's Cry Of The Celts - 'He's so cocky and muscular and full of himself and every time you watch him you smile. What could be funnier than two little fat Greek fellers doing

Flatley?'

All their moves were perfected in their sitting room. 'It was difficult doing the long run-ups,' says Demi. 'I broke a vase.'

And Karen, did she get irritated? 'Oh yes. She used to be a proper dancer, she was in Annie and Oliver! in the West End when she was a kid, so she was forever counting "One, two, three, four . . .", but we could never get the hang of it and that drove her mad, too.'

But, eventually, they cracked it, auditioned at the Hammersmith Apollo in London and sailed through into the finals.

It must feel like light years from the old days back in the Sirtaki Taverna in the Nineties where Stavros Flatley first made an appearance. 'Oh my God, it was bad,' Demi remembers. 'You'd see people leaving and going across the road to the kebab shop.'

He's not kidding. It was the only Greek restaurant in London that didn't serve pitta bread - 'That's sacrilege, a Greek restaurant with no pitta, but the chef didn't make them' - and the only Greek restaurant with no plate-smashing: 'Someone cut their head, so it was banned by health and safety.'

To keep the place going, they branched into music - Greek dancing and karaoke with punters getting dressed up as Madonna or Michael Jackson, and Demi singing 'really badly' as Stavros, a Greek god who loved himself.

'And then one day I saw Flatley on telly and thought: "Oh man, how funny would that be?" So I took my wife's leotard, got the hairdresser round from the shop next door, put the music on and did Flatley. She was on the floor laughing.'

The new Stavros Flatley was an instant success and for a while the restaurant was full of customers who were having such a good time they didn't care how bad the food was.

But Demi eventually hung up his dancing shoes and started an electrical contracting firm, and spent more time with his family.

'Family's the most important thing in the world. I try to instill passion in my kids and show them you've got to give things a go, even if you're not so good at it, like football - and how proud was I that Lagi just scored his first goal in 117 games?'

Right now, Demi looks like he might actually burst with pride. 'We knew he was never going to be the thinnest kid in the world - just look at me - but he's really fit.'

'That's the best bit about being half-Greek and half-English,' chips in his son. 'From the Greek side you get all the religion and the weddings, where you have a wicked time and go dancing. And I love being English because of the food. I'm hoping for a growth spurt, to stretch out a bit.'

Lagi's also one of the most well-adjusted 13-year-olds I've ever met. In fact, nothing much seems to bother him. He certainly isn't troubled by stage fright on live television in front of 14 million viewers.

'The only reason I was fine was because two days earlier my dad said: "Remember Lagi, it's just a laugh, that's all." And then it came to the night and he was terrified.'

'Oh my God!' says Demi. 'I was so nervous. I couldn't help it. Poor Lagi was trying to calm me down. It was so daunting walking out there. I was thinking: "What have I done?"'

'It was brilliant, Dad. Ant and Dec were great. And I got a hug and a kiss from Amanda Holden and got to shake Simon Cowell's hand - he's taller than I thought.'

And now they're nearly as famous as the real Michael Flatley, has it changed their lives? 'I'm 40 years old, so he gets the young girls coming up to him and I get the grandmas. It's nice that they ask for a picture, but it's not like we're David Beckham.'

'But I got mobbed, didn't I Dad? I went to buy a milkshake in Southgate and there were all these girls screaming for a picture. So we went outside and they had me pinned up against the wall,' says Lagi.

And did he secretly enjoy it? 'Just a bit, yes!' Is there any danger of them getting big-headed?

'If we did, Karen would bring us down to earth. We'd still have to go home and load the dishwasher. And do the hoovering - Monday and Friday are hoovering nights in our house. And cook the dinner. . .'

'I'd be lying if I said we were talented,' says Demi. 'We're having fun, and we're making people smile, but it isn't difficult and it doesn't take any skill. It's just a couple of quite fat geezers moving their feet very quickly. And that's it.'