



# Madonna and me

She is as famous for her muscles as her music. What's the secret? **Tim Teeman** meets her body gurus

**B**ecause he rarely speaks publicly, there are many rumours about Carlos Leon, Madonna's ex-boyfriend and the father of her 13-year-old daughter Lourdes.

That he and Madonna met while running in Central Park, for example. Not exactly: "She was running, I was on my bike. I had seen her a few times before speaking to her," Leon tells me in the fitness studio that he shares with his personal training business partner, Jeff Bell, in St Mark's Place, New York. Was he really arrested for smoking pot in Washington Square Park as a young man? "No. But I was arrested for smoking pot next to the Hudson River in my thirties. I was jailed for two days and it wasn't very nice."

The "Belleon" studio has one running machine, lots of kettle drums and weights and mirrors running down its flanks. For 44, Leon is — well — inescapably hot: lean and well-muscled in a black tank top and tight black shorts, with dark hair, a light beard and soft eyes. Bell, 54, is equally handsome: toned, muscular and looking at least ten years younger than his age. Their classes, not surprisingly, are very popular with women.

Through a collision of circumstances, I have accidentally become Madonna's fitness stalker. After Leon, I will meet her former trainer Tracy Anderson. Gwyneth Paltrow introduced Madonna to Anderson, although Madonna and Anderson's professional relationship ended last year after a rumoured falling-out, followed by whisperings of a cooling between Madonna and Paltrow. Anderson has faced criticism for her business practices and methods, including recommending baby food (as eaten by Jennifer Aniston) as an effective, healthy way to lose weight.

But first Leon: he and Madonna had exercise in common, of course, her physique being as much hailed (toned, lean) as it is criticised ("stringy" arms, "dangerously" thin). Leon worked out from a young age: raised in New York by Cuban parents, he spent much of his childhood roaming the city on his bicycle. "The reason I started getting in shape was that members of my family died at a young age from heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure," he says. "I was skinny as a kid, I wanted to be muscular and get the girls so I started doing push-ups."

He won Mr Peanut, a children's fitness competition, and after school briefly studied police and criminal science. "I was in trouble with the law as a kid — nothing serious. I wouldn't worry if my son got into that kind of trouble — and wanted to know my rights," he explains.

Leon then gave up his studies and became a competitive cyclist. His "true passion", he says, has always been acting, but personal training is all-consuming now. "I live for working out," he says. "The sweating — it really turns me on, taking your body to a whole new level, pushing yourself, then introducing new exercises."

The Belleon workout, which you can follow online, is circuit-based: he and Bell (whose clients have included the singer Mary J. Blige) take me through a range of squats, lunges, crawling thrusts, bicep curls and press-ups. One circuit takes 20 minutes: an hour-long session is three circuits and, as the class gets faster, five. "Madonna and I worked out together



when we were together," Leon says. "It was a mix and match of me following her programme and her following mine. She is always very curious about what's new, what's hot. She is the type of person who will do anything exercise-wise. Right now she is using bands (big elastic ones) for resistance training, and her cardio comes from dance."

As for her body, he says: "I think Madonna knows she sets the bar pretty high for people who see her image in the papers. But bear in mind she has a cook, a trainer, she appears on stage for two hours when she's on tour. She makes her body her business, she really does."

Leon says that Lourdes stays in shape with ballet and observes her father and Bell's exertions balefully: "She sees two old men jumping up and down." He is proud of her recent first fashion line. "I know 13 seems young but she knows what works. Yes, her mother is a big part of it but my daughter is the creative force. Her future may lie in fashion or acting. Whatever she does, I'm with her 100 per cent."

Madonna's celebrity affected their relationship, he says, "especially with the paparazzi. I've learnt to smile quietly but it sometimes gets a little overwhelming, especially if you're having dinner with your daughter. Lourdes doesn't pay attention to it. After being in the public eye for 16 years, I feel uncomfortable in it. I'm a private person — I should have been a monk. I see myself as Joe Schmo, a regular guy."

He and Madonna are "good friends. Just as when we were together, the key is communication and compromise. When we were together I didn't feel dominated by her, we had a spiritual equality. We still do. I respect her a lot. People think she's dominating but that's a character she portrays. I was never intimidated by her. I know that in many people's eyes I am "Madonna's ex-boyfriend" or the father of her child. But I'm a regular guy, I hang out with my buddies and with my dog and my girlfriend. I try to live a simple life."

Leon reveals that he wants to marry soon and have another child, "a son", with his partner Betina Holte, a fashion designer. They have been together for two years. "I have changed. I was scared of commitment in the past. Love is very important to me, it keeps you young."

He fights ageing — "although people tell me I look younger than 44" — with exercise, "eating right", drinking lots of water and taking supplements: amino acids and multivitamins. He will "never" have plastic surgery. Next, Leon is planning Belleon studios in Tokyo and London and is creating a TV show focusing on different fitness regimens. On the front desk of Tracy Anderson's studio in Tribeca, New York, the flowers have ice cubes added to their water. Anderson is probably the best-known personal trainer

# body & soul



**Right: Tim Teeman works out with Tracy Anderson. Top: Carlos Leon supervises a class in his New York studio. Above: Madonna and Leon together in 1995**

**“I worked with hundreds of women before Madonna. Who wouldn't be intimidated by her? But she took orders from me**

**In the Belleon studio**

**Dynamic circuits, two or four times a week for 60 minutes. Bell and Leon advocate whole body movement sequences: squats paired with bicep curls, for example. Or, with one leg up working your butt and quads, you'll also do some tricep work with a dumbbell. Camaraderie is also important. "We are in a community atmosphere," the men say. It, it's a hot, sweaty room, so cast off self-consciousness.**

**In the Anderson studio**

**The scary-looking Hybrid Body Reformer is a resistance-based training machine: Anderson has created 1,500 moves around it. Giant elastic bands are used for an intense cardio workout incorporating dance and toning exercises for the arm. Ballet-style barres are used to build strength and flexibility, while metal cubes hang from the ceiling: you get in them and work "every muscle," says Anderson.**

in the world, with her own machines and DVDs: Madonna is a former client, Paltrow is her business partner ("and like a sister to me, one of my dearest friends in the world"). The resistance-based workouts involve pulleys and sinister-looking cubes hooked to the ceiling. Giant elastic bands are unhooked, with which Anderson leads me on a puzzling, but fun, dance routine to deafening music. From this week you can log on to her "webisode" workouts, targeted at specific body types.

Her mother ran a dance school in Indiana and Anderson studied dance in New York. Her father, an entrepreneur, "lacked focus" and had "commitment issues", leading to her parents' divorce when she was 17. After that, she became "almost ADD in how much I focus".

Her ex-husband Eric (with whom she had a son, Sam), a basketball player, had a bad back and it was through the doctors Anderson consulted that she found the basis for her "method" — 3,000 moves

that target small muscle groups and the "problem areas" around them. She has just launched a post-pregnancy workout.

Madonna was her client for three years "I had worked with hundreds of women before her. Who wouldn't be intimidated by her? But she took orders from me."

Did they fall out? "When you work with one person exclusively and they are a priority, how long is that sustainable? I had an 11-year-old son and he was sick of travelling and I was sick of being away from him." Are she and Madonna still friends? "There are different levels of 'friends,'" says Anderson carefully. "We don't hang out but we're not 'not friends.'" Anderson denies that the association ended because she began a (continuing) relationship with Philippe van den Bossche, the former head of Madonna's Raising Malawi charity. She also says that "most of what you read" about Madonna and Paltrow's supposed enmity is fictitious.

Anderson claims to have her own body issues: she is short, she says (5ft), she gained 40lb (18kg) as a young dancer and 60lb (27kg) when she had Sam ("but I was a size zero in eight weeks") and her weight fluctuates (from 93lb to 102lb).

Her famous clients' perceived extreme skinniness, particularly that of Madonna and SJP, has been discussed endlessly. Is size zero really something for which women and girls should aim? "I don't think there's any woman who wouldn't want it if she knew she could get it," says Anderson. "But it's not about being size zero. You can be a killer size eight. It's not about not eating. I love to eat. My collections come with nutrition advice." She defends her advocacy of pureed foods. "These are not 'baby foods,'" she says. "They are large amounts of fruit and vegetable in consumable portions."

Controversy swirls around Anderson. She denies accusations that clients did not have their membership fees refunded after one of her gyms closed in Indiana. "I paid back every single one of them personally. It was one of the most painful things I have ever gone through," she says. (She also denies claims made by a former business partner and boyfriend, Glynn Barber, that she swindled him out of money, but won't elaborate.) Anderson has also been criticised for her fitness trainers not being conventionally certified. "I've spent ten years developing my method. I don't believe in the official way of certifying trainers," she says.

Because of "this rollercoaster and the sniping", Anderson is seeing a therapist. (She also started studying Kabbalah (but Madonna didn't introduce her).)

My immersion in both worlds was brief: Leon and Bell seemed warmer and their studio was cluttered and homely, where Anderson's was chic, but both use opaque exercise empowerment-speak. Yet when you look at Leon and Anderson's perfect bodies and Madonna's supreme feat of physical engineering, it's clear that something is working — and they made it work eye-bogglingly well for her.

Anderson wants to have a child with van den Bossche and intends to broadcast her pregnancy exercise programme as webisodes. There are also plans, similar to Leon's, for expansion in London and Tokyo. Like the woman who links them, Anderson and Leon are becoming brands for whom only global domination will do.

**Carlos Leon: belleon.com; Tracy Anderson: tracyandersonmethod.com; The Tracy Anderson Method Post-Pregnancy Workout DVD is out on July 19 from ITV Studios Home Entertainment**