



SPOTLIGHT

No lounging about

BY *Greg Callaghan* PHOTOGRAPH BY *Joshua Morris*

LESS THAN two months ago, before the world became a carousel of ever-tightening restrictions, shutdowns and lockdowns because of the relentless spread of the coronavirus, Brock Ashby, one of Australia's most successful personal trainers, was regularly flown overseas by wealthy clients. Among his celebrity customers here was American pop singer Kelly Rowland whenever she was in town. The 26-year-old Ashby was a shining example of Australia's booming fitness industry, which boasted nearly 3500 gyms nationwide, and at least 26,000 registered personal trainers.

Hardly anyone saw COVID-19 coming, so gymnasiums, like most businesses, have had to be nimble to survive. Many have offered virtual spin and circuit classes via Zoom (a group video communications app) and one-on-one training in the home via Skype and Facebook Live, allowing some of their clients to take bikes and hand weights home.

Ashby's core business had already shifted to virtual training, so he was better placed than many when gyms shut their doors and exercise equipment in parks was

cordoned off. "Because training online is more affordable, you can build a larger client base," says Ashby, who has undertaken plenty of preparatory grunt work. "You have to post a lot of free content on Instagram and YouTube to attract paying clients."

Working out at home is one thing. Getting the gear to do so quite another, following a tsunami of demand – try buying dumbbells or weights benches from sold-out gym equipment suppliers across the country, and you'll discover what I'm talking about. Some resourceful trainers have come up with re-tooled domestic alternatives. My favourite is an Instagram trainer who demonstrates a barbell curl with a broomstick threaded through the handle of a loaded-up backpack.

Leigh-Ann Scott, manager of a Vision gym in Melbourne who takes her mainly 40-plus female clients through strength and conditioning classes via Zoom, insists people, especially all those now working from home, need to keep moving. "You're likely be eating and drinking more – alcohol sales have surged – so you actually have to increase exercise."



Couch potatoes, move over ... Brock Ashby shows his home-based clients how to keep fit using furniture.

WATCH / READ / LISTEN

AUDIOBOOK

The Dutch House

BY ANN PATCHETT; READ BY TOM HANKS

THERE ARE quiet kids, then there are the show-offs who love to read aloud in class. Tom Hanks, you suspect, was that boy down the front whose hand would shoot straight up whenever the teacher called for volunteers. You can hear the quarantined A-lister on Audible narrating Ann Patchett's monumental *The Dutch House* in ways laconic, nuanced and ever-so-slightly smug.

There are loads of celebrity narrators on Audible – Claire Danes, Reese Witherspoon, Ian McKellen – but it is Hanks, an actor associated with some of cinema's most iconic characters, who requires the biggest imaginative leap. Never mind that there's a curious hokiness to his aural take on *The Dutch House*, a historical epic about a brother and sister and the childhood Pennsylvania home from which they are banished. Or that his

habit of rolling one sentence into the next without pause sometimes irks.

It's more that the voice in your ear doesn't always seem to belong to Danny Conroy, the

novel's circumspect narrator. Hanks' Hollywood ubiquity is distracting. Drifting off, as you do when listening to audiobooks, it's as if Forrest Gump is musing on themes architectural, familial and existential; or Woody from *Toy Story* is recalling the past through the lens of 20-20 hindsight; or Chuck Noland from *Cast Away* is describing blue Delft mantelpieces.

The only other book Hanks narrates on Audible is a collection of self-penned short stories. He is more animated there, pacing himself in the way of, say, David Sedaris, who clearly revels in reading his own work. Maybe, like British actress Juliet Stevenson, who narrates more than 130 titles – if anyone can whisk you through a tome like *Middlemarch*, she can – we just need to forget it is Hanks by hearing him read more. Audible, take note. I bet he has his hand up. *Jane Cornwell*

SHOP / PLAY

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