

Can silence lead to the look of love?

QUIET LIFE
Siobhan keeps it hush hush

WHAT happened when the Mirror's motormouth Siobhan McNally tried silent speed dating?

They say if you look deeply enough into a person's eyes, you can see their inner child. Actually, if you spend an evening staring into 20 sets of men's eyes, you can see their outer child.

I've tried out various dating methods to find a bloke but none as surreal as my Shhh Silent Dating night.

This was a speed dating night with a twist – you can't speak at all until the end of the two-hour event. That's a toughie for a chatterbox like me.

With the dating scene dominated by like-or-swipe apps like Tinder, Shhh Dating's Adam Taffler is trying to turn back the tide with his, frankly, retro idea of real people actually meeting.

Doing it in complete silence, however, is a relatively new concept – this being Adam's 30th event since he started nearly two years ago – and is about allowing men and women to connect on a deeper level. Or as I prefer to call it, being undisturbed by the limits of their conversation.

So I joined 40 other silent dating hopefuls at a bar in south London to find out if I can change the habit of a lifetime and communicate non-verbally.

On arrival men and women were put in separate rooms, so I had a stiff drink at the bar to calm my nerves and chatted to Cam, 22, who'd come from Slough in Middlesex. "I wanted to try something different," she said, "something that meant I didn't have to speak."

While chatty career-girl Emma, 28, from London, told me: "Well, I've tried everything else, so I may as well give this a go – and also prove to my grandmother that I am not in fact trying to stay single just to spite her!"

Adam says his events target the 20-30s age group so I just hoped nobody would see 45-year-old me and wonder who'd brought their mum.

Calling for silence, maestro Adam began the first half of the evening by breaking the ice with some games.

Twirling the ends of his extravagant handlebar moustache, Adam then invited the boys to join us in the main

room. Hands in back pockets, they crept into the middle of the floor, possibly hoping it would swallow them up, while the girls practically backed themselves into the walls.

Then we were ordered to mingle with Adam's order: "I want you all to start walking around, eyes down first, and take in what you're seeing – shoes, socks, bandy legs, that sort of thing."

As we shuffled around he yelled: "Come on, it's like the Shawshank Redemption in here – try and mix it up, raising your eyes and begin to pay attention to the people around you."

Over the next half an hour, Adam tried all sorts of crazy techniques to break down that British reserve.

I think something inside me died when told to pretend to fight Oriental-style to the tune of Kung Fu Fighting, but that wasn't anywhere near as bad as the game where we had to mimic

good look at the male contingent. They were all young and attractive but Tom and Peter, the two 6ft-odd pink-shirted City types, stood out – mostly because they towered over everyone else.

Finally the men sat opposite the women at a table, we were all given score sheets to fill in, and when a gong sounded every minute, we moved to the next seat opposite a new man.

My first partner, a dark, spiky-haired guy kept grinning inanely, bobbing his eyebrows and swivelling his eyes. But if I thought that was the longest minute of my life, I had a lot to learn.

The next three very young chaps passed me by in a blur of head nodding, shiny faces and shaking of clammy hands. My notes about one of them read: "Hands like a wet fish, does his mother know he's out?"

A Tom Cruise lookalike insisted on sitting there with his eyelids turned inside out – sadly, the most interesting thing about him.

Then I arrived at the naughty boy table – sternly watched by Dr Love – as they pushed bits of paper across the table at girls. Note-writing is frowned on by the Shhh Dating team.

“A Tom Cruise lookalike sat there with his eyelids turned inside out – sadly his most interesting quality

When the final gong went, I felt like I'd gone six rounds with Mike Tyson. Meeting that many people in a short time is exhilarating and exhausting.

Handing our score sheets to Adam on

the way back to the bar, I noticed a few couples begin to pair off. Clearly the eye gazing had worked some magic.

The next day, emails were sent to 80 to 90 per cent of participants telling them they had at least one match.

But the email that dropped into my inbox read: "There were no matches for you this time." I'd probably scowled at them rather than gazed alluringly.

Then again I'd ticked only four out of the 20 men on the basis they looked old enough to push my bath chair.

I've since been working on my eye-gazing technique, but my friend Ali just says I look "mad and starey", Back to the drawing board.

■ For more info, contact shhhdating.com



STEPPING OUT
Siobhan dances to it