

HEALTH & FITNESS

THE RHYTHM IS GONNA GET YA

It's like the best night out – with no hangover in the morning!
Ruth Walker wonders why we're not all dancing to keep fit

I've left many fitness classes drenched in sweat. A significant number have rendered me red-faced and wheezing.

But it's a rare class that, as well as those satisfying symptoms that prove you've well and truly worked your flabby ass off, leaves you beaming from ear to ear, grinning with pure joy.

That, my friends, is the power of dance. I don't have what you'd call natural rhythm (though there are times I've been pretty convinced I was shaking it like Beyoncé out on the dance floor). I don't have ambitions to give Julianne Hough a run for her money. But, man, I do love to dance. The fact that it also improves fitness, sculpts muscles, burns calories ... well, that's just a bonus, right?

As well as Alvin Ailey's program of dance fitness classes that includes Zumba, Cuban, hip-hop and bellydance, the center has just launched three new classes for summer that turn up the heat. I was granted a taster that left me wanting more.

MASALA BHANGRA

This high-energy session has been dubbed one of the top five workouts in the US, and it's easy to see why.

Led by Sarina Jain, the 'Indian Jane Fonda', it's a complete cardiovascular workout blending traditional dance steps (screwing the lightbulbs, anyone?) with all the joie de vivre of a Bollywood movie.

"I was born and raised in the US by Indian parents that migrated to the States in the 1970s," says Sarina. "Both Mom and Dad wanted to make sure we kids would



grow up with the best of what the west has to offer without forgetting the East. Dad made sure to send us to India every summer to spend time with our families, our grandparents, and learn to appreciate what the Indian culture is all about.

"My father was our rock. He would always tell us to be proud to be who you are and to respect the culture you come from and to stand on our own feet.

"One day, my Mom called to say, 'he is not breathing anymore.' My father passed away to a massive cardiac arrest at the age of 47. So, to honor him and everything he told us to be proud of, I created Masala Bhangra. I wanted to tell him that not only am I proud to be an Indian woman living in the US but now I teach aspects of our culture though fitness."

Sarina has been working in the industry for 23 years and hosted five seasons of Discovery Channel's All Star Workouts on FITV. She has taught at The Ailey Extension for five years, and 2015 marks 15 years since the birth of Masala Bhangra.

"The class is for everyone and anyone who wants to get their groove on Indian style," she says. "It's open for everyone, from those who are just starting to work out to those who have been working out for years. Students can expect to build stamina. They can expect to open up their mind and hearts. They can expect to learn a routine without feeling intimidated. They can expect to step into a different world and get lost in the music and dance of the Indian culture. They can expect to lose weight and get stronger both mentally and physically."

Still not convinced? One of her students has lost more than 50lb by coming twice a week, and is now on the Masala Bhangra World Dance Celebration performance workshop.

DANZATONE

Looking for 60 minutes of non-stop dance that'll sculpt your body, invigorate your mind, and rejuvenate your soul? Join the line, then, for this combination of dance, plyometrics, stretch, and relaxation. The focus is on maximizing core strength while also working on legs and general flexibility. You'll get a mix of music, incorporating merengue, mambo, bachata, salsa, reggaeton, dembow, and hip-hop.

Making sure the rhythm gets ya is Jose Manuel Ozuna, born in the Dominican Republic, who began his dancing career at the age of 16. He's worked with some



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of the most important artists in the contemporary Cuban dance movement, and is a certified fitness instructor.

"Fitness is not like a drive though," he says, "it's not a quick fix. We want to motivate the public to know that they can find their own strength and that they are stronger than they think."

Dance skills are not required – but a willingness and commitment to take part are. "Results include a boost in self-esteem, more energy, muscle definition, muscle strengthening, co-ordination, stress release, natural cleansing, and of course weight loss.

"We have had both women and men with a weight loss that ranges from 20 to 150lb. In losing weight, they increase both muscle mass and strength, which has helped them maintain their weight loss and a healthier lifestyle.

"Our philosophy is to teach students that the workout doesn't get any easier but they get stronger. We try to switch the routines, exercises, and techniques around to keep the class creative, and at the same time the students see and experience their fitness level growth which motivates them to stay on the right track."

THE AILEY BARRE

Coveting the long, lean lines of a ballet dancer? Frankly, who doesn't? This class is intended to help us all on the road there. Increasing flexibility and, with luck, exuding balletic power and grace, the underlying theme is that the classic 'Ailey body' is within reach of all of us.

Led by Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater principal dancer, teacher, faculty member and trainer Sarita Allen, you're in the most capable hands possible. Sarita was personally taught and certified by Joseph Pilates and trained with Julio Horvath, creator of the Gyrotonic Expansion System.

"I remember my first performances with AAAA dancing barefoot, the power and freedom that I felt through my training," she says. "I want to share that same excitement of movement and performance with all who attend my class."

Ailey Barre addresses the core principles of posture and alignment so, she says: "Being fit is not a requirement since body placement and positioning are essential for all optimal fitness endeavors, even common activities such as walking. You just have to be willing to have fun and sweat!"

The results, she says, are immediate. "You will feel good, your body will be aligned and vibrant, the 'kinks' ease out. Health benefits include noticeable muscle strength, long and lean muscles, a stronger core, better posture, more energy ... even weight loss."

The class combines resistance bands and cables with the barre. But, more than that, says Sarita. "It's infused with historical enthusiasm through a great calorie-burning fitness routine. You leave feeling like you literally 'performed' the class. It's a great confidence builder."

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CALENDAR

Masala Bhangra

Mondays:
8pm-9pm
Saturdays:
10:35am-11:25am

The Ailey Barre

Thursdays:
6pm-7pm

DanzaTone

Saturdays:
9:30am-10:30am

www.alvinailey.org

A letter to Sarina Jain

"When I started Alvin Ailey classes two or three years ago, I first started doing the African dance, but every time I finished that class and saw all the happy faces going into your class it made me wonder what is that class all about? When I heard the music for the first time and how excited you were to see everyone and how encouraging you were and still are that made me want to join your class. Although I am not able to come that often, the Mondays that I am able to attend are always so much fun."