

Belly dancing for fitness

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began taking classes and working towards becoming an instructor.

"Now, I've been doing this for eight years, four years full-time," she said. "I had eight students in my first class. I had to travel around to different studios, and I was limited to what each facility could accommodate." A year in her first permanent location, the room is packed with more than 20 students in her Level 1 class.

From the front of the room, Yasmine yells out "think long and lean" as the group starts doing what most of us associate with belly dancing, the shimmy. However, if you just want to shake your butt, this is not the class for you. The art of belly dance, or Oriental dance, is described as a "beautiful and ancient art form born on the shores of the Mediterranean, nurtured on the Nile, and today performed worldwide." The term belly dance is actually a misnomer from the 19th century French "danse du ventre" (dance of the stomach), it's a simplified term for a dance that involves the entire torso, especially the hips. The Arabic name is "Raks El Shariq" translated literally as dance of the East, hence Oriental dance. Contemporary Oriental dance contains elements from areas of Persia, India, the Middle East and North Africa. Arabic music is the essence of Oriental dance, and much like African forms of music, the drum is at its heart. Perhaps 5,000 years old, the dance is traditionally done at weddings and celebrations, with whole families participating.

"People who don't know think it's hoochie-coochie dance, and it's not. There's a difference between being sexual and being sensual," Yasmine said, demonstrating a one-hip move called the figure eight. "It's not the butterfly. We maintain ourselves as ladies here. Legs are usually shoulder width apart or closer. We don't get any wider than that."

Yet just because there is some decorum to the dance, don't just assume it's easy. Instructor and member of Yasmine's professional dance troupe, The Magic Hips Dancers, Nayna walks the Level 1 class through an undulation that separately moves your upper and lower abdominal muscles. (I'm sure mine is just all one.) Many of the movements, though beautiful, really are difficult, and require something many of us aren't ready for. "Learn to let go," exclaimed Nayna, as the class continued to push their stomach muscles up, out, and in. "We as women are taught to hold (our stomachs) in," said Yasmine. "We have tried to suck in for so long, it's hard learning to let go. If it wasn't meant to wiggle, it wouldn't. Let it be free."

It's this kind of attitude that

Rage

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"This is a well-designed, large-scale, face-to-face study with interesting and useful results," said Dr. David Fassler, a psychiatry professor at the University of Vermont. "The findings also confirm that for most people, the difficulties associated with the disorder begin during childhood or adolescence, and they often have a profound and ongoing impact on the person's life."

Jennifer Hartstein, a psychologist at Montefiore Medical Center in New York, said she had just diagnosed the disorder in a 16-year-old boy.

"In most situations, he is relatively affable, calm and very responsible," she said. But in stressful situations at home, he "explodes and tears apart his room, throws things at other people" to the point that his parents have called the police.

is so appealing to students. Their motto is "be bold, be beautiful, be a belly dancer." There is no self-consciousness and these classes, though there are women of all sizes. "No matter age, background, or size, belly dance is very individualistic. You can be stick thin or voluptuous and a goddess, you don't have to be a certain size or weight. The more curves and assets you come with, sometimes, the better," assured Yasmine. "Other forms of exercise tend to be more masculine with belly dance you can get tone and get strengthening with a feminine edge."

An article in the winter 2005 issue of Habibi, a Middle Eastern Dance magazine, explains the health benefits of belly dance, builds stronger belly muscles, qualifies as a weight bearing exercise, strengthens lower back muscles, shapes arms, eases hand and wrist pain, stimulates lymphatic function, engages the brain, and lowers the chances of developing Alzheimer by 63 percent. "It also works your glutes, hamstrings, quads, and calves; it's a total body workout," said Yasmine.

Mother and daughter dancers Minnette and Charleyne Waiters started in January and say they both love it. "It allows people of all sizes to be comfortable," said Charleyne, "you don't have to



PHOTO: CURTIS WILSON

Belly dancing has many names, but it can help anyone tone muscles and improve strength.

be thin."

"Since starting, I can tell I've lost inches on my stomach," said Minnette, while her daughter proclaimed she wanted to keep her hips! The two also mentioned the misconceptions people have about the dance. "It's not sleazy," said Charleyne, "people who think that are wrong."

"The people at our church were concerned, when we started... but there is no religion involved here. It's just an opportunity to be comfortable and have fun," explained Minnette.

In 2003, Yasmine and the Magic Hips Dancers were nominated by Zaghareet magazine as best kept secret.

In 2005, Yasmine was nominated as Instructor of the Year, and this year, as well as in 2005, the Magic Hips Dancers were nominated as Troupe of the Year. The secret is out. Online registration for the next five week session begins June 12, open house is June 21, and the new session of classes start June 26. You can attend the Magic of Dance recital on June 17 at Pease Auditorium at Central Piedmont Community College. There's also a Magic Hips Belly Camp for kids and teens from June 26-30.

For information on registration, class prices, or recital tickets visit www.magic-hips.com or call (704) 752-8323.

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The Little Miss/Junior Miss Alpha Kappa Alpha Pageant will be held Sunday at 4 pm at South Mecklenburg High School. This year's pageant consists of two divisions. Little Miss for young girls grades 3 through 5, and Junior Miss for young girls grades 6 through 8. For several months leading up to the pageant, 13 young ladies participated in social, cultural and educational enrichment activities that provided diverse and culturally rewarding learning experiences.

Funds generated are used to award educational scholarships to the participants as well as graduating Charlotte-Mecklenburg High School students, and numerous charitable organizations in the Charlotte area.

The Pageant is sponsored by the ladies of the Alpha Lambda Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. Mrs. Debora Blakney serves as president, and Ms. Laverne Ellerbe is chairperson of this year's pageant.

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. was founded in 1908, and is America's first Greek letter organization established by and for Black women. Currently the sorority has a membership of 170,000 women in the United States, Caribbean, Europe and Africa.