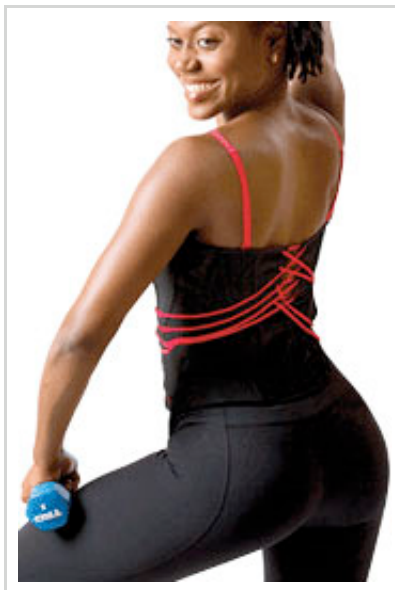


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March 2009: Socacize

By Flannery Dean

Dance fitness is the latest workout trend to pop up at gyms and on TV.



What you need to know about the physical and emotional benefits of getting your groove on.

Ballet, jazz, hip-hop—there's no end of dance-based workouts to choose from. And here comes another: Socacize. Socacize is an energetic mix of Caribbean and African dance styles, explains Ayanna Lee-Rivears, the dance workout's Toronto based creator.

A dancer for more than 15 years, specializing in Caribbean dance styles, Lee-Rivears originally created the workout for fellow dancers who were getting older and less able to dance professionally. Convinced of its broader appeal—booty shaking can be pretty contagious after all—she became a certified fitness instructor and Socacize was born.

Her classes generally consist of women from the ages of 18 to 55. Men are more than welcome, but they may find it hard to concentrate.

"It's hard for them to say focused because we do a lot of gyrations," laughs Lee-Rivears.

An average class runs 60 minutes and the format—10-minute warm-up, 25-minutes high-energy cardio, and 15-20 minutes strength training—is familiar to most fitness class participants.

A full body workout, it's the music and the moves that define each section that really sets the workout apart. If she doesn't have a live drummer, Lee-Rivears draws on spirited Calypso or Dancehall music to set the pace.

Each section of the workout, whether during the intense cardio phase or strength phase introduces steps and moves that are unique to Caribbean dance styles. So get ready to shake those hips.

"We do lots of hip gyrations. The moves are very energetic, up-tempo, and it just makes you want to move your waistline even more than a regular fitness class."

Participants channel their inner Beyoncé with moves like The Bounce and The Shimmy-Shake.

"It's hard to describe, but with The Shimmy-Shake you're shaking your pelvis up and down. With The Bounce you're in a squat position and you're letting your booty bounce up and down," she laughs.

During the strength training section, she adds hip shakes and rhythmic moves to classic exercises like the squat or bicep curl.

Laughter is frequent during a class and Lee-Rivears welcomes students with little to no dance training.

"It's very basic. I break it down for those who don't have a dance background."

She tells shy beginners to enjoy the atmosphere and the opportunity to let loose.

"We're not here to perform. I cater to the majority not people who are dancers. I say enjoy yourself and whatever happens in Socacize stays in Socacize!"

Or not. One of the added benefits of taking a dance fitness class is the ability to take what you've learned outside the gym or fitness centre.

"A lot of the girls come up to me and say, thanks so much, now I can use the moves I learnt in Socacize on the dance floor. The

good thing about doing dance in an aerobics class is that you can also use it when you go out to party or socialize.”

She currently teaches a number of nine-week sessions to the public in and around Toronto and surrounding areas. But it's her dream to see the workout go nation wide. Until then, those in other provinces can purchase a DVD of the workout on the website (www.socacize.com).

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