



shall we dance?

Wake up your workout with a bit of hula, ballet or bump and grind
By Carly Baillie

POLE DANCING
Inspired by the taut abs and toned triceps of exotic pole dancers, Tracy Gray and Christine Boyer opened Aradia Fitness in Vancouver and have since franchised across Canada. The clothes don't come off, but the inches—and inhibitions—do. “Pilates and yoga are great, but they were invented by a man for a man's body,” says Gray. Moves such as the “fireman spin” and the “sexy bicycle” tone without sacrificing curves. Swinging around a brass pole strengthens arms and whittles away waistlines. It's an incredible core workout without the drudgery of sit-ups, says Gray. But where students really get hot and bothered is during the sultry floor workouts. Runners rave about how the butt gyrations loosen tight hips. Most women save their new confidence and choreography for the bedroom, says Gray, but at least one former student has gone pro. Also offered are lap-dance classes and regular field trips to real (but closed) strip bars where students can strut their stuff. **What to wear:**

Baggy sweats aren't sexy and they get caught on the pole. Think form-fitting pants or shorts. Experts graduate to high-heels. **Cost:** Drop-in, \$25; six-week course, \$129; www.aradiafitness.com. **Other locations:** www.aradiafitness.com (Vancouver, Whistler and Kelowna, B.C., Edmonton and Toronto); www.danse-eroteknique.com (Hudson, Que.).

HULA DANCING

Despite the coconut-bra-and-grass-skirt image of the modern-day hula girl, Hawaiian dance was traditionally performed by men as an offering to the gods. The mostly female students at Makana Aloha Hula in Winnipeg, however, are shaking their booty for themselves. The Prairies may be a far cry from the islands, but Makana Aloha's hula instructor Nenette Alejandria Mayor teaches her pupils to conjure up the warmth of the aloha spirit by working up a good sweat. The constant *akalewa* (figure-eight swaying of the hips) makes it extremely aerobic, she says. “It's a good low-to-no-impact workout that sculpts the core, legs and arms.” And

perfecting the *kabolo* (hula step) while keeping the hips going *and* telling a story through hand movements is a serious lesson in coordination. Those who master it can try Tahitian Ote'a, a faster version set to rapid and rhythmic drumbeats. **What to wear:** Sarongs or wrap skirts and bare feet help dancers get in the mood, as do the fake flowers to put in their hair that are handed out at the first day of class. **Cost:** Drop-in, \$15; 13-week course, \$156; www.makanaaloha.ca. **Other locations:** www.hulaintoronto.com (Markham, Ont.); www.hulaspirit.com (Maple Ridge, B.C.).

BALLET

Who hasn't dreamed of pirouetting across a stage as a prima ballerina or, at the very least, coveted their long, lithe bodies? Adult classes at Toronto's prestigious Canada's National Ballet School, where icon Karen Kain studied, are so popular there's a waiting list to get in. Classes include barre work and start with the basics, so there's no need to know a plié from a pas de bourrée. Ballet is about stretching and extending your limbs and using your body weight as resistance, which creates strong—but not bulky—muscles, says adult ballet program coordinator Robert McCollum, aka “Ballet Bob.” Physiotherapists love ballet for its ability to improve flexibility, joint mobilization and posture. And while those allegro jumps can get you panting, ▶▶

it's all about precision. "Ballet should never be ballistic," says McCollum. The controlled movements teach a mind/body connection. **What to wear:** ballet slippers and comfortable workout wear, yoga wear or a leotard **Cost:** Introductory class, \$17; three-month course, \$195–\$375; www.nationalballetschool.org. **Other locations:** www.albertaballet.com (Calgary); www.halifaxdance.ns.ca (Halifax).

CAPOEIRA

Part martial arts, part acrobatics and part dance, capoeira originated more than 500 years ago with African slaves in Brazil as a means of disguising a fighting technique as a dance so as not to alarm their captors.

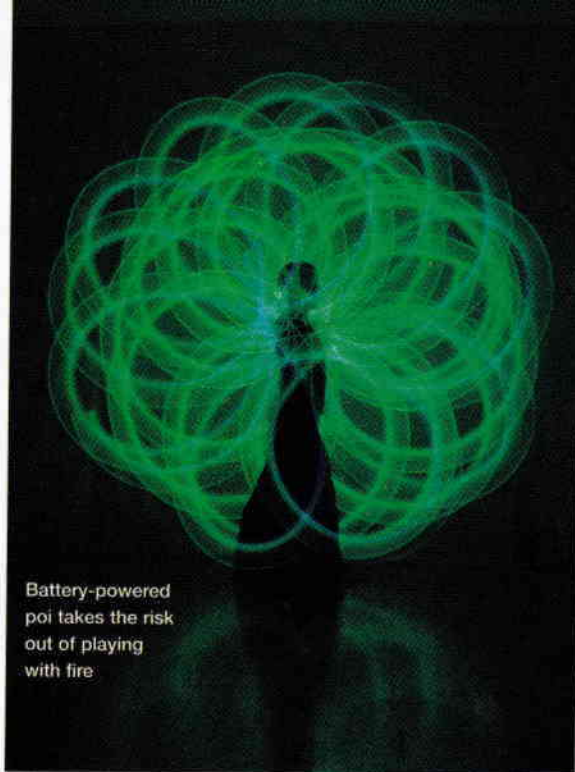
Two capoeiristas "play" in a *roda* (Portuguese for "circle") by ducking and dodging blows, while getting in a few of their own, through a series of one-handed handstands, flying kicks and midair spins. Set to a drum-like beat, the rhythm dictates whether it's a friendly noncontact game or something more aggressive.

"Combine kung fu, percussion and breakdance and you get capoeira," says Richard Toszczak, cofounder of The Capoeira Academy in Edmonton.

"It's a pretty intense workout—excellent cardio, core strength, balance and flexibility," he says. And the need for quick thinking hones reflexes and **reaction time**.

Less about strength, capoeira "is more about outsmarting the other," says Toszczak. And with no division among the sexes, women often "play" men and walk away with the kind of confidence that only comes from kicking some guy's butt.

What to wear: Tradition insists upon all white. Low-slung wide-legged *calça* (pants) and coloured cords, tied at the waist, are a chic twist on the conventional martial-arts uniform. **Cost:** Drop-in, \$10; monthly fee (unlimited number of classes), \$80; www.capoeiraedmonton.ca. **Other locations:** www.axecapoeira.com (Vancouver); www.capoeiratoronto.com (Toronto); www.argentine.ca (Ottawa).



Battery-powered poi takes the risk out of playing with fire

POI

If you've ever been to a full-moon party in Ko Phangan, Thailand, or a Burning Man event, you may have seen someone hypnotically twirling balls of fire. This is fire poi. "Poi" is Maori for "ball" and the practice stems from a dance performed by the aboriginal Maori in New Zealand (who wisely left out the fire part).

"The fire is beautiful," says Nick Woolsey, owner of Play Poi in Vancouver, but he prefers to stick to the dance's origins and teaches it with beanbags on the ends of ropes instead, a modern take on the original balls with tribal markings used by the Maori. With one in each hand, students create patterns in the air by swinging the weights around their body and through their legs, all the while trying not to hit themselves in the head.

"Poi magnifies the movements of the body," says Woolsey, and it provides an excellent means of exploring and training motor skills, balance and full-body coordination. It's a phenomenal upper-body workout, but the legs and torso don't sit idle either. "I call it kinetic yoga," says Woolsey. **What to wear:** Anything that's comfortable and, for those who insist on playing poi with fire, flame-retardant. New LED battery-powered poi offers a safe, but just as spectacular, light show. **Cost:** Six-week course, \$90; www.playpoi.com. **Other locations:** www.yogalab.ca (Toronto). ■