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WITH MARTY
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the GLOBAL dance studio

OPENING YOUR DOORS TO A WIDER WORLD BY NANCY WOZNY

In a quaint shopping center in northwest Houston, the windows of New Vibe Dance Studio read, “Ballet, Tap, Drill Team, Zumba, Kathak.” It’s not the usual roster for a neighborhood dance studio. Are the demographics of U.S. suburbs changing so quickly that the demand for world dance forms has filtered out to small suburban studios? For certain cities like Houston that have a diverse international population, the answer is a definite yes.

Whether the goal is to offer adults an alternative to beginning ballet or yoga, respond to the interests of an evolving community or simply to be at the forefront of a new trend, world classes can set your studio business apart. *DT* spoke with four studios about how they’ve introduced a world dance curriculum, each from a different perspective.

When owners **Victoria McDonough** and **Beyonka Young** opened the doors of Houston’s **NEW VIBE** last summer, their goal was to offer some form of cultural dance. Located in an area where dance studios are as numerous as nail salons, they decided to aim for a unique identity. “Both Beyonka and myself appreciate the beauty of the dances of other cultures,” says McDonough, “so we were exploring the idea of including African and Asian forms of dance from the beginning.” It just so happened that Hannah Igoe, a trained Kathak teacher who also teaches modern and lyrical, walked in their door as they were setting up shop. Igoe is well-connected to the growing East Indian population in the area, and she now teaches classes to adults and children.

Zumba, a fitness program set to Latin rhythms developed by Beto Perez, is the studio’s first venture into Latin forms. “We wanted to offer something more exciting than typical aerobics, and Zumba seemed like a good fit,” says McDonough.

PERFORMING ARTS NETWORK in Miami, FL, came about when founder **Ilisa Rosal** became aware that a group of artists needed a place to teach and rehearse. Faculty members are professional dancers, either with their own companies or as members of another. “We offer a place to train seriously in flamenco and other forms; we offer traditional and contemporary training,” says Rosal, who also is the founder and artistic director of Ballet Flamenco La Rosa. “We wanted to create a place to study these forms intensely with people who make their living dancing. There are also opportunities to apprentice or perform with a student company.” Classes include Irish step, Middle Eastern dance, Afro-Haitian, Afro-Cuban, traditional African dance and several levels of flamenco, along with ballet and creative movement. PAN welcomes children and adult beginners to their classes, too. “We are happy to have students who are looking for a creative way to get some exercise,” says Rosal. “We are a wonderful mix of professionals and hobbyists.”

Rozann Kraus, director of **THE DANCE COMPLEX**, in Cambridge, MA, didn’t set out to create a multicultural dance center. “It just kind of evolved,” she says. “After all, Cambridge is one of the most culturally diverse places in the state.” In addition to modern and ballet, students can choose from a dizzying array of global classes, including Kathak, Brazilian, Irish, Caribbean, flamenco, Middle Eastern, Latin ballroom, African and Afro-fusion. “It’s like the United Nations around here,” says Kraus, who oversees a faculty of 48 in her 18,000-square-foot facility. Adults flock to these classes, and it’s not unusual to see modern dancers testing the international waters as well.

The way Kraus makes it work is teachers rent studio space from her. “We

want to encourage entrepreneurship in our teachers,” she says. For those starting to build a following, a class fee split can be arranged, but generally the rent is the same regardless of class enrollment. Rent includes front desk services and publicity in the form of twice yearly open houses, faculty concerts, frequent press releases and posters in the lobby.

When **Kimi Okada** and her colleagues at **ODC** in San Francisco were planning to build their new facility, Dance Commons, they hoped to not only reflect the cultural diversity and wealth of world dance teachers in the Bay Area, but to create an inclusive environment. “We wanted to celebrate the notion that everyone of all ages and levels can experience the joy and spirit of dance,” says Okada, school co-director. To achieve diversity (ODC’s program is in ballet and modern), she turned to another dance studio: Consuelo Faust’s Rhythm & Motion, which includes both a workout program that is influenced by world styles, and an extensive array of global classes.

“Basically, we were putting two huge organizations together. It took a

year to do the feasibility study,” says Okada. “Administratively, it was like being shot out of a cannon; we went from 2 classes a day to 27.”

Today, four years into this joint arrangement, Faust and Okada report that their two populations have mixed well. Like the other studio directors, they are pleased with resulting crossover enrollments of students. “ODC dancers love the workout program,” says Faust. “Modern dancers try global classes, and there’s a sense of mixing populations.”

The reward for all the negotiation, finagling and rearranging is that when the studio directors walk through the building and hear the gentle strains of ballet music mixed with world beats, they know they have created a place where dance is truly a global concept. Recreational dancers feel welcomed and mix and mingle with professionals. “It’s thrilling to see so many kinds of people in the building,” says Okada. “We built a home for dance that is really special.” **DT**

Nancy Wozny writes about the arts and health from Houston, TX.

adapting your space

SOUND-PROOFING

Kimi Okada of ODC found herself unprepared for just how far the sound of live drumming travels. “In the beginning, we had some complaints from our neighbors and needed to move some classes,” she says. As time went on, they added more sound-proofing in some of the studios in the form of large acoustic baffled wall panels. Because the original construction did not include sound-proofing between the studios, there are also concerns over what’s happening next door. She learned quickly to place slow meditative classes like Feldenkrais as far away as possible from noisier ones.

Rozann Kraus of The Dance Complex handles sound issues through careful scheduling. “We never schedule two classes with loud accompaniment at the same time,” she says.

FLOOR SURFACE

“Certain teachers love wooden surfaces and we try to accommodate them as best we can,” says Okada. “We have one studio where anything goes; bring your spike heels.” The Dance Complex protects its floors by putting marley underneath all floor-seated instruments.

TEMPERATURE CONTROL

Keeping everyone happy with the ideal studio temperature is an ongoing issue at ODC. Workout students prefer it cool, while professional dancers prefer more moderate temperatures. “Even though each studio has its own thermostat, it’s hard to keep everyone pleased,” says Okada. —*NW*

The Global Dance Studio is continued on next page

Opposite page: PAN photos by M.J. George, courtesy of PAN; Rhythm & Motion photo by Drew Kelly; ODC Dance Commons photos courtesy of ODC; ©iStockphoto.com/2

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The Global Dance Studio, continued



Consuelo Faust

Anyone Can Dance

Consuelo Faust's Rhythm & Motion dance workout class

Waiting outside my daughter's dance class at ODC Commons one morning, I heard music from the next studio. First a pop song by Prince, then salsa, hip hop and swing. Intrigued, I walked over to investigate. The class I saw was different than anything I'd seen: people from teen to 60-something dancing in a circle, hips shaking, arms circling and legs kicking as they propelled their sweat-soaked bodies toward and away from a teacher in the center of the room. It was as much a communal event as an aerobic workout, as much a celebration of moving freely, playfully and without self-consciousness as a dance class.

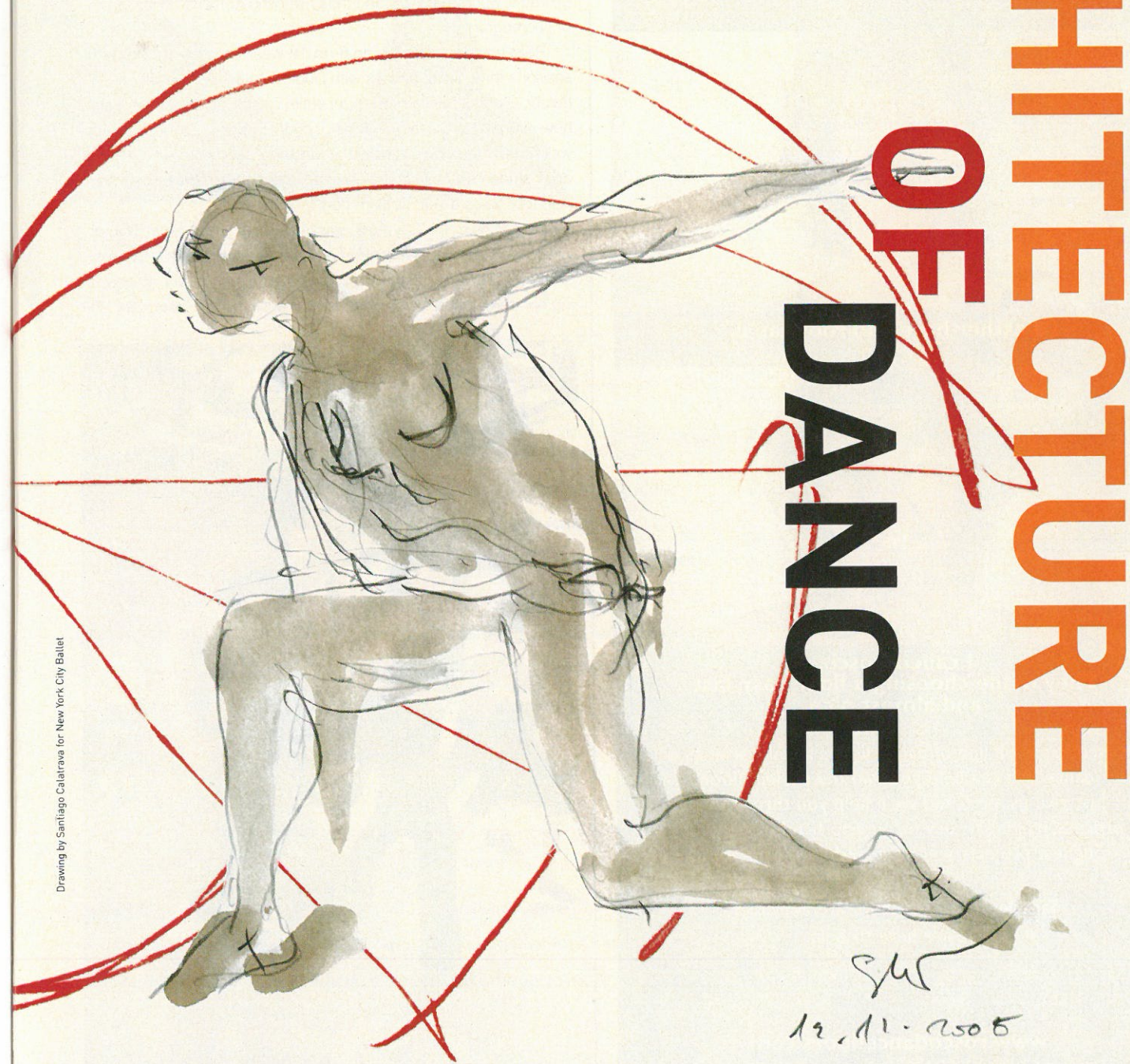
What I had discovered was Rhythm & Motion, a program of dance workout classes that for 30 years have given the Bay Area a lighthearted outlet for creative expression and a way to get fit. In 1978, Consuelo Faust and Catherine Hebert, two dancers and choreographers between gigs, began teaching "Dancergetics," a licensed dance aerobics workout. Realizing they could create a hipper, "dancier" class, they soon struck out on their own. The premise was simple—hire professional dancers to lead classes, choreograph routines that got dancers and non-dancers alike moving and make classes fun and welcoming. "People can be intimidated by a dance class," says Faust. "There's this idea of the 'house of dance.' By calling it the dance workout class, you get people to climb through the window."

Word spread quickly and classes were soon packed. After holding classes in 16 locations around San Francisco, Faust, the program's artistic director, opened a studio on Mission Street, where over a span of 26 years, rent increased from \$800 per month to \$12,000. Since R&M partnered with ODC in 2006, classes are now held in beautiful new studios to an expanded student base. "Some ODC company members come to our dance workout class," says Faust, "and some dance workout regulars decide to take ballet. There's no hierarchy; it's a wonderful blend."

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Drawing by Santiago Calatrava for New York City Ballet

Photo by Drew Kelly

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Shown above: Heidi Latsky, dancer/choreographer, is the artistic director of Heidi Latsky Dance and The Gimp Project (www.thegimpproject.com).

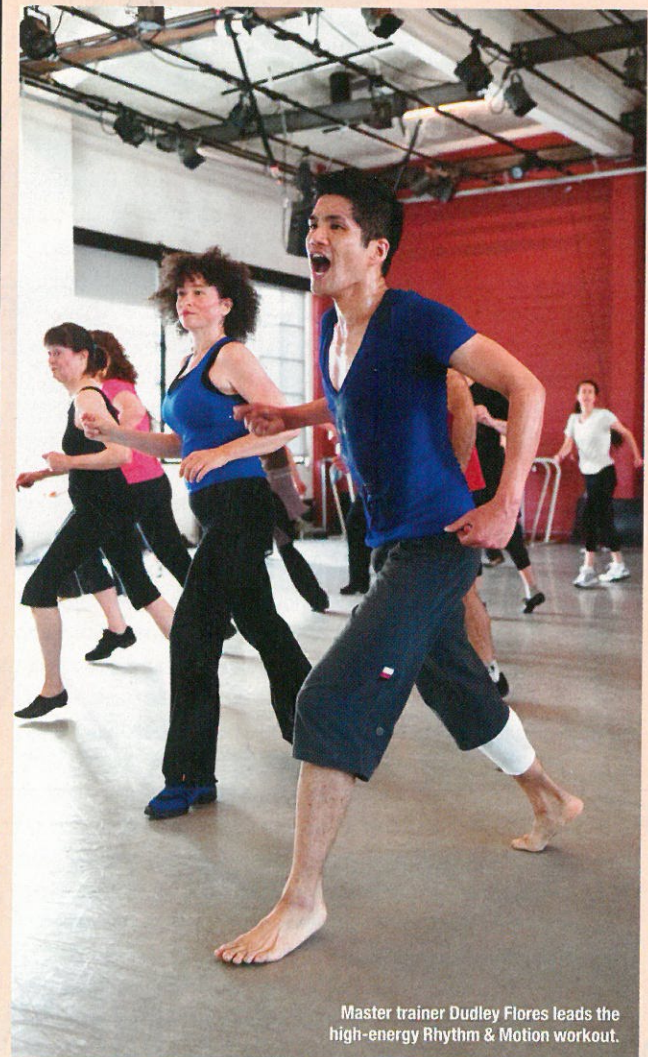


The Global Dance Studio, continued

Faust started by doing all the choreography herself, but as the program grew, other teachers began contributing routines. Over the years there have been more than 1,500 routines created, and there are currently 25 teachers. Classes include a warm-up, a session of high-energy choreography and floor work to strengthen and stretch abdominals, arms and legs. In addition to the classic R&M dance workout "Fusion Rhythms," there is "Modern Rhythms," which incorporates contemporary dance moves, as well as "Essential Fusion Rhythms" and "Essential Modern Rhythms," which are geared toward beginners and those wanting to focus on intricacies of choreography.

R&M teacher training is an 8- to 12-week process of three-hour sessions three times a week with Dudley Flores, R&M's master trainer. Student teachers learn an entire class—"It shocks dancers how difficult it is to learn an hour of choreography," says Faust—as well as how to convey a sense of fun and inclusiveness, how to draw students in and lift their spirits. Teacher-training sessions are held four times a year to learn new material.

In addition to the Bay Area, classes are currently held in Ohio at Cincinnati Ballet and in Brooklyn at the Mark Morris Dance Studios. "We are building and nurturing this wonderful community, emphasizing our belief that anyone can dance," Faust says. —Caitlin Sims



Master trainer Dudley Flores leads the high-energy Rhythm & Motion workout.

Photo by Drew Kelly



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