

Continuing Education: Dance To It

Education: Whether it's hip-hop or ballet, there's a dance class for you

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With the popularity of television shows like *So You Think You Can Dance* and *Dancing With the Stars*, along with movies like the *Step Up* trilogy, *Mao's Last Dancer* and last year's Oscar-winning *Black Swan*, dance is in high demand in New York—for professionals and beginners alike. While fitness classes in gyms have an increased focus on dance—with pole dancing at Crunch or jazz at Lucille Roberts—studios such as Broadway Dance Center and **Alvin Ailey's Extension Program** hope to prove that dance is no longer limited to the insanely thin and nimble.

For years, students from across the world with a passion for dance have been flocking to the city to study with the choreographers at BDC, founded by famous jazz dancer Frank Hatchett. "Most of

our students are here to reach professional goals in the dance industry, but we have a large market of people coming just to lose weight and get in shape," said April Cook, the PR director for BDC. "With the rise of all the dance shows on television, our beginner classes saw tremendous growth a few years ago that has been maintained." Teachers Luam, Sheryl Murakami and Rhapsody—who have worked with big names such as Rihanna and Beyoncé—continue to draw an impressive number of students from around the globe.

Japanese students Risa Mihara and Naho Takahashi are visiting for the year. They hardly speak English, but their eyes light up when asked if they enjoy the studio atmosphere. "Yes! Very much," said Mihara, a theater and jazz dancer. The girls are loyal to BDC and don't take class anywhere else. "BDC is the absolute best," Takahashi said.

Down the hall, Long Island's Nora Moutrane, 22, is leaning against a glass window, watching a ballet class before leaving for an audition. Moutrane sings and acts, so she focuses mostly on theater dance. "I do a lot of ballet and contemporary dance, but the studio has influenced me to try hip-hop." Even for a skilled dancer like Nora, picking up new skills in hip-hop dance class isn't easy. "It's really hard for me to get the style down, but it's fun to be doing something new and different. Hip-hop has that attitude which is really fun; it's very theatrical in a way."

While speaking with Nora, fellow dancer and rapper-on-the-rise GG walks over. GG is about to film her first music video and is holding auditions for dancers next week. Nora, who has rehearsals for an upcoming production of *Guys and Dolls* in Brooklyn, said she will try to make it. Conversations like these are the norm at BDC. A corkboard wall opposite the ballet studio advertises auditions and job postings. Dancers sit on windowsills and in lounge areas in the hallways, networking, sharing audition information and reviewing combinations.

"Even though most of the students are here to train, BDC is very welcoming. Even dancers at the top of their profession still take other classes—you can be great at hip-hop but need to build up your ballet skills. In this sense, BDC is very encouraging," said Cook. "Hip-hop is very characteristic of New York culture, so I think that's why it remains so popular here."

A few blocks north of BDC is the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater school, which includes one of the most prestigious dance schools in the world. While the school offers their Ailey Extension program, which provides dance and fitness classes for the public, the vibe inside is serious and intense. Whereas hip-hop and jazz funk dominate the schedule at BDC, ballet dominates at Ailey.

Danielle Schlauderaff, 21, is a Minnesotan import studying Psychology at Fordham University and dancing in the three-year certificate program at Ailey. Her focus is on modern and contemporary styles, although like any good dancer, she can do a little bit of everything. Her friend explains that at Alvin Ailey, it's about status. "I have friends who never danced before that took Zumba and hip-hop classes here. It seems like Zumba is really popular for newcomers."

Although there are options for beginners, Schlauderaff believes you need serious confidence. "I guess the school is welcoming because there are people from all over the world, but I think it's intimidating. It's pretty competitive."

Places to Take Dance Classes

Instead of picking up the remote this week, put on your sneakers instead and head over to some of the city's best studios:

Broadway Dance Center 322 W. 45th St. (betw. 8th & 9th Aves.), 212-582-9304, \$18/class.

Djoniba Dance & Drum Centre 126 E. 13th St. (at 4th Ave.), 212-477-3464, \$17/class (African/ Caribbean dance).

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater 405 W. 55th St. (at 9th Ave.), 212-405-9500, \$16.50/ class.

Paul Pellicoro's DanceSport 22 W. 34th St. (betw. 5th & 6th Aves.), 212-307-1111, \$25 (Spanish and partnered dance).