

Beauty, Health, *and* Fitness

EDITED BY SARAH BROWN

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Fitness: Masala Bhangra



THE AILEY EXTENSION

There is something undeniably brag-worthy about getting your workout at a dance studio rather than a gym. Housed in the same building as the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and Ailey School, the Ailey Extension offers a program for nondancers that has all the prestige of a studio and none of the intimidation. The instructors are first-rate; all of the classes are \$17 each, with no need to sign up in advance; and neither fancy footwear nor chignons are required.

Set to a thumping Bollywood-inspired sound track, Masala Bhangra (masala means “spicy” in Hindi) is a standout. Created and taught by the very toned and vociferous **Sarina Jain**, the physically demanding class is a modern adaptation of the ancient Punjabi bhangra dance, known for its core-shaking beats of the two-sided dhol drum. Though a stereo ordinarily blasts these rhythms, a live percussionist will keep the beat during a special workshop at 5:30 p.m. on October 17.

My first class incorporated lots of lateral chassés, jump-turns into squatting positions, and hand and wrist twisting, none of which any of the students (a random assortment of gym rats in search of novelty), principally myself, were remotely successful at. But it didn’t matter—we were all having too much fun. Says Jain, “I always remind my students at the beginning of class to pretend they’re at my wedding and so let’s celebrate!” If you are easily embarrassed or the slightest bit self-critical, the unconventional choreography is probably not for you. (Beginner classes in Capoeira, Sabar, and West African and Afro-Cuban dance that concentrate more on technique are also offered.) But if it’s upbeat music, a motivating instructor, and a party atmosphere that draw you to a workout, then Masala Bhangra may just be the spice you need to shake up your fitness routine.

—**Kimberly Straub**

Mondays 8–9 p.m. at 405 West Fifty-fifth Street; alvinailey.org.

Photo: Dwana Smallwood (former dancer with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater) and Amos J. Machanic Jr. (AAADT dancer). (Annie Leibovitz)