

FITNESS | DANCE



CAN YOU DO THE ZUMBA?

Move to the beat of this laid-back but fast-moving Latin exercise

By Elizabeth Simpson
The Virginian-Pilot

THE INSTRUCTOR CLAIMS to have never danced before she tried Zumba.

But once the Latin music starts – bongo drums, trumpets, guitars – and Dawn Bradley’s hips start to swivel across the exercise room, that’s hard to believe.

Her knees swing side to side, and her hips back and forth, merengue-style. Her eyes flash. Her hands fling off in the air, as if to say, “Ay, caramba!”

Bradley makes you think you can do it, too, and that’s the scary thing.

Zumba is one of the latest crazes in exercise. A fitness trainer in Colom-

bia, Beto Perez, stumbled upon the idea when he walked into his class one day and realized he’d forgotten his aerobic music.

He grabbed some tapes of his favorite Latin salsa and merengue music from his car and improvised an exercise routine with dance steps he grew up with.

The laid-back but fast-moving Latin dance exercise became his most popular class. He brought the idea to the U.S. in 1999, where “Zumba” eventually grew into DVDs, videos and training courses for some 12,000 instructors in 35 countries.

Bradley took the Zumba certification and began teaching at the

See ZUMBA, PAGE 5



DELORES JOHNSON PHOTOS | THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

Instructor Dawn Bradley leads a grooving and swaying exercise class at the Great Bridge/Hickory YMCA in Chesapeake that integrates Latin dancing. It’s called Zumba.

[Continue](#)

ZUMBA | *It's fun, it's energizing ... more like free dance'*

Continued from Page 1

Hickory/Great Bridge [YMCA](#) five months ago.

She wears a tight black exercise top and sleek black pants. Brightly colored beaded bracelets grace her wrists, and hoop earrings dangle from her ears.

I'm wearing a baggy gray T-shirt and athletic shorts. But my mother was Mexican, so I'm hoping some part of my genetic makeup will rise to the occasion.

"It's easy, don't be intimidated," Bradley says. "You can do it low impact or high impact. Don't panic and don't feel embarrassed."

She starts with a simple march that quickly morphs into a saucy dance, knees swinging one way, hips not far behind.

One glance in the mirror and I see my father's Midwestern blood is diluting my Latin roots. All those casserole-and-square-dancing genes are tamping down any hope of a credible merengue.

Even though I'm doing the same moves Bradley is, I look like Steve Martin's wild and crazy guy on "Saturday Night Live," shoulders bunched up around my ears.

But I don't see anyone else laughing at me, so that's good. There seems to be an unspoken "bad dancer amnesty" at play here.

And that's the key to this brand of exercise.

The focus is on having fun, enjoying the music, moving, moving, moving until you're sweating off the pounds. By the end of 45 minutes, you feel as if you've finished a dance set



DELORES JOHNSON | THE V-P

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in a nightclub on a hot, steamy night.

And, OK, yeah, then you get in the car to pick up groceries and do the laundry, but still there's that 45 minutes where you think, "Hey I'm doing the salsa here."

Bradley says Zumba appeals to people who are tired of the precision of the step exercise classes and the intensity of the hard-core aerobics. (Who still can't do the grapevine step? Raise your hands.)

"It's more of a friendly woman exercise," Bradley says.

There are about 20 women here this morning in June. Heel, toe; heel, toe; arms flying back and forth in the air. Hips going hither and yon, with a handful of us doing everything just the opposite of everyone else.

But that's OK.

"Everything goes with the beat," Bradley says, breaking into a running pattern like football players do during conditioning.

"Zuuuuumba!" someone on the dance exercise tape cries out.

"Almost there, get those hips moving," Bradley says.

Carol Farmer, 46, has been coming since Bradley started the class, which means her percentage of moves in the right direction is way higher than mine.

"It's fun, it's energizing. It's more like free dance. It's very easy and fun."

About 35, 40 minutes into the class, Bradley shows a little mercy.

"OK, guys, get ready to come back down. Feel your heart rate coming down. *Uno, dos, tres*."

Audrey Strojny, 39, said she's into hard-core, no-nonsense exercise, like boot camp sessions and triathlons.

"I thought, 'No way I was doing this shaking stuff. I have no rhythm. But it was fun.'"

Like me, she made the mistake of looking in the mirror – you can't avoid it when you keep turning in a circle – and thought, "Oh, yeah, I'm really bad."

But it didn't matter, because she was sweating – elixir to serious athletes – and having a good time.

And I'm holding out hope that by my next session, my mother's Latin blood will rise to the fore to meet the challenge of merengue.

It could happen.

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ready to move?

■ [Eastern Shore Family YMCA](#), 26164 Lankford Hwy., Olney, (757) 787-5601

Mondays, 6:40 to 7:40 p.m.

Tuesdays, 8 a.m. to 9 a.m.

Thursdays, 5:05 to 5:45 p.m.

Saturdays, 9:15 to 10:15 a.m.

■ [Great Bridge/Hickory Family YMCA](#), 633 S. Battlefield Blvd., Chesapeake, (757) 546-9622

Mondays, 8:30 to 9:15 a.m.

Wednesdays, 4:30 to 5:30 p.m.

Sundays, 1:15 to 2 p.m.

■ [Indian River Family YMCA](#), 5660 Indian River Road, Virginia Beach, (757) 366-0488

Fridays, 6:35 to 7:35 p.m.

■ [Mount Trashmore Family YMCA](#), 4441 South Blvd., Virginia Beach, (757) 456-9622

Mondays, 7:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Wednesdays, noon to 12:45 p.m.

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