

## Dusting off your Sensual Self

What do a computer programmer, grade-school teacher, lawyer, university student, stay-at-home mom, concert pianist and graphic designer all have in common? They have all gathered and are about to spend their lunch hour at a dance studio learning sensual dance and how to strip. And I am honored to be their teacher for the hour.

There are hundreds of classes like this sweeping the nation in big cities and small towns alike with names like exotic dance, sensual dance, fit-tease, pole dancing and cardio-tease, among others.

For the sassy and sensual side of every woman, these dance classes are designed to create a safe and loving atmosphere for women to learn how to come into their own confident way of movement. Women who takes the classes tone their body, laugh, have fun, and most importantly, comes to know their own value in being a beautiful and confident woman.

### The classes

In most classes, participants learn simple, sexy dance routines and a fun striptease that can be shared with a partner or enjoyed on one's own. Some classes teach burlesque style dance with boas and elbow-length gloves. Other classes use poles and teach the art of pole dancing.

Some women might feel slightly hesitant at first when considering taking the classes. The most common things I hear women say about themselves are 'I am too uncoordinated', 'I have never danced before' or "I could never do that, I'm too inhibited."

I personally felt this way myself when I first started taking classes a few years ago. After learning some of the fun moves, I wanted to dance for my husband, however I was very nervous! I loaded him up with a couple of stiff drinks and kept asking him if he was drunk yet (I don't drink, or would have downed a few myself!) Suffice it to say, all my nervousness was for naught as I felt immediately at ease, and he got a show he'll remember for a quite a while!

Students are encouraged to practice the routines at home by themselves or with a partner. "I thought I would be way too nervous to dance for my boyfriend. I almost didn't do it and am SO glad I did. Once I started dancing, I didn't feel nervous at all. It was sort of like, what's the big deal? Why had I been so fearful? When I danced for him, I've never seen him so in love. He made me feel so beautiful and want to dance more." Jennifer, 26, journalist.

Says Jody, 36 year-old concert pianist and children's music teacher. "When I heard about the class, I felt a combination of excited and nervous. I didn't know how to dance and I thought I would never be able to do the stripping part. After taking only a few classes, I now feel much more confident in my body in many ways. It's not an outward thing, just as though I have a secret that's mine to keep - a confidence booster. I love this new spin on my positive self-awareness. I now find myself thinking, "Damn...You're sexy!" What could be healthier?"

Like Jody, once women start learning the moves and dancing with others in class who also might have been nervous at first, they begin to not only feel comfortable, but to have a great time and want to learn more.

What I experience over and over in women who take the classes is the way they tell me they feel after dancing or performing a striptease. It's not a cerebral, spiritual awakening, but more of a subtle blossoming of feelings of grace, inner power and sensuality that may have been dormant or covered over. These feelings live in how we carry ourselves, how we speak, how we touch and how we listen. It is feeling confident and sensual and alive in the midst of daily routine and busyness.

## Sensuality - Aliveness, Self-expression and Sexiness

I've learned from many mentors, and have come to know intuitively from teaching and learning from hundreds of women, that there exists within every woman a very vital, perhaps hidden erotic nature, a center of aliveness, self-expression and sensuality. She may be buried beneath dizzying responsibilities - raising kids, working at an all-consuming job or career - or she may lie next to a man whose snores lull her to sleep. She's the wild untamed part of every woman, her sensual alter-ego. Some of us are more familiar with her than others, but, to take a guess, I'd say that

too many of these erotic creatures in our society haven't had enough opportunity to show themselves fully out in day to day lives.

The more we, as women, allow this part to come out, get to know her, and encourage her playfulness, the more we learn about this sensual, vital self and the more fully she comes out to accompany us. And... the more fun we both have!

## Stripping

"Like many teachers who teach sensual dance, I like using the word "stripping" because it's a metaphor for the journey that takes place for me and the women who take these classes. We are stripping away layers of social conditioning and self-criticism about our bodies. It really has nothing to do with nudity at all.

You don't have to remove one item of clothing, although it can be very fun to do so. Dancing sensually - moving one's hips, swaying slowly and expressively to music for a partner or by oneself - is one of the most erotic things a woman can do. Whether clothes are taken off or not, it is a literal and figurative stripping away of negative conceptions of our own sensuality and ourselves as fully self-expressed women that have many times accumulated over the years growing up as women in our culture.

Says one 46 year-old student, entrepreneur and mom of 4 "It is so much fun learning the striptease - and the best part, I get to practice at home with my husband. When you've been married for a long time, well, you know... things can get very routine. I'd say it has definitely spiced things way up in that department!"

## The Art of the Walk... Elegance or Scurry?

Even simple exercises in class, like looking at how we walk and practicing a sexy walk, for example, can result in subtle, yet powerful insights about how we live our lives in and out of class. When we walk, many of us, myself included, tend to scurry about with our legs going a mile a minute, our shoulders slumped forward and our minds lost in thought.

Noticing and feeling one's hurried 'gotta get somewhere quick' walk in or out of class can bring about a softening, a slowing and a gracefulness that might otherwise be lost in the quick pace of our daily lives. Plus, a having a sexy strut is definitely a must in doing a strip tease!

Students tell me all the time how they notice their posture has improved and that they can more easily identify when they are 'scurrying' around feeling stressed and choose to be some other way in that moment. Says Sara, a 23 year-old part-time graphic designer "I notice it most when I am walking to and from my car. I usually feel kind of frazzled, walking quickly and always thinking about what I need to be doing next or where I am supposed to be. It feels so good to be able to smile inwardly and remember things we practice in class - making sure we breath, walking slower and walking more uprightly. I definitely feel sexier, and I bet I look so too!"

## The Spell of High Heels

Women love to wear high heels while dancing in class. It adds an extra feeling of sexiness and attitude not usually found for most of us in daily living. "When I wear heels, I feel my posture take on a more seductive shape and I can't help but sway my hips when I walk. Whenever I wear them, I love the way I feel - very sensual and feminine." reports Stephanie, marketing executive, and mother 31.

I personally have always loved high heels and feel they have magical powers - and not just because I am short! I wish every day could be a high heel day! Since having my three kids though, most of my heels remain pushed aside in my closet as I reach for my sneakers or flip flops, more fitting for my busy kid-driven schedule.

## Being a woman equals being sexy!

The greatest lesson I learn from the women taking the classes is that we are all kindred spirits, and we are all on a continuum - single, married, thin, full-figured, with children and without, career-driven or on another path in life. No matter what our walk in life, I've found that feeling alive, self-expressed and sexy is something most women love feeling.

We all wear different hats in different parts of our lives, I know that I wear different ones when I am reading with, or picking up my kids from school, when I am out to dinner with my husband, when I am at the grocery store or the gym, or when I 'm having coffee with a girlfriend. The hat I wear when I am dancing or teaching seems to infuse all the others with playfulness and grace. Women who have taken the classes echo this "I was in Whole Foods today and a song that I've been considering for my solo dance came over the speakers. It was so funny, because I had to suppress breaking out into the routine, but I did swing my hips while walking down the aisles. I felt amazing", says Sarah, 44 author and mother.

There is a saying, 'Every woman should have a little black dress, a scent she feels divine wearing, and know how to do a kick-ass strip tease! Perhaps you have all three, if not, perhaps there is a dance class in your area just waiting for you to join in and have some sexy, uninhibited fun. May your sensual self frolic beside and within you daily. She's just waiting for the invitation!