

Fitness fun

Folk dancing groups provide energizing activity for all participants

BY SARAH BUEHRLE
For the Dayton Daily News

Winter fitness can mean dreary trips to the gym filled with mind-numbing repetition, but there is a thriving alternative: dance.

Wouldn't you like to say that you are part of that tumbling, risqué tradition called cancan? How about impressing a date by knowing how to dance the minuet? In most cases, all it takes is the desire to move and less than \$5 to embark on a fun fitness routine that allows one to lose weight and increase energy while learning about different cultures.

Mike Clark has attended dances with the Miami Valley Folk Dancers for 15 years.

"I usually feel more alive when I leave that place than when I go in," Clark said. "For me, it's the only thing I can do to relieve stress."

The Miami Valley Folk Dancers (MVFD) is a group of approximately 60 people who practice the ethnic dances of many cultures, including Europe and Latin America.

Never seen a traditional Slovak dance? No problem.

MVFD holds a one-hour, beginning-level class at the start of each evening. Then all newcomers can test their wobbly legs to requested music. The dances are mixed to accommodate singles and couples, and range from low-impact dances to fast-flying footwork.

"Any physical activity is good for the body," John Pappas of MVFD said. "It's not quite aerobic, but it gets the heart pumping and the muscles stretching. The true folk dances don't have a prescribed

level of energy. If you want to put more energy into it, you can still fit in with people."

At MVFD, the strength and endurance required vary during each class, and people can always sit one out.

But if you're feeling feisty, there's always the cancan. "It's a sprint from beginning to end," said Jeanette Watts, a member of the French folk-dancing group Bagatelle. "Every bit of tumbling that you did as a kid in your front yard is probably fair game."

Cancan dancing consists of a group constantly running and high kicking, usually while a soloist does round-offs, walks on their hands, or does anything else the dancer can think of to do. The cardio workout is intense — no treadmill required.

"I was seeing myself differently," Watts said of dancing the Cancan. "I was skinny. I was beautiful. There is something very therapeutic about that. One of the best benefits is I don't think that one of us thought twice about eating chocolate during rehearsals."

Belly dancing builds confidence while it tones, isolates and strengthens muscles. Because belly dancing is more about control than gymnastics, it can also be done by people who have muscular-skeletal problems such as arthritis.

Aja is a belly dancer and teacher who uses one name and who suffers from fibromyalgia, a muscular disorder.

"I'm one of those people, if you tell me to take a walk every day, I'm just not going to do it," Aja said. "The only way I can do it is if it's fun."

Aja said that belly dancing can be a fast workout, such as when dancing to drumbeats, or it can be a very smooth, controlled dance. A dancer can isolate a part of the body, maybe the rib cage, and slowly work that portion of their muscles. This intense focus, coupled with flexing and relaxing, strengthens muscles without straining.

Also, it can be fun, sexy and done by almost anyone.

"It doesn't matter what size you are," Aja said. "There are beautiful dresses that cover your midriff. You could be a size 20. Women these days don't let that stop them. This dance gives you a connection to your femininity. It gives you confidence."

Aja, of course, does not want to downplay the physical benefit. Since she returned to belly dancing a year ago, she has lost 30 pounds.

Through dance, a person exercises all sorts of muscles, can begin at any level, and can get an aerobic workout. Dayton is filled with dance organizations all waiting for residents to make the first move and edge out on to the floor.

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AJA

Belly dancer, teacher

Miami Valley dance offerings

CASUAL DANCE GROUPS

Miami Valley Folk Dancers

- **What:** Traditional folk dances from around the world, all levels.
- **When:** 7 p.m. Thursdays, open dance/lessons; 2:30 p.m. second Sunday of the month.
- **Where:** Michael Solomon Pavilion at the Dayton Community Golf Course, Kettering.
- **Cost:** \$1.50 each night or \$30 for a year.
- **Call:** Carolyn Stovali at 427-2120, or John Pappas at 427-2543.
- **Web site:** www.geocities.com/mvfolkdancers.

Miami Valley Dance Council

- **What:** Mostly contra, square dancing and clogging.
- **Call:** 432-0283.

SPECIALIZED DANCE CLUBS

- **What:** Bagatelle, traditional French folk dances.
- **More info:** Leslie Hyll, 259-4917, or leslie.hyll@trw.com.
- **What:** Cancan dancing group, offshoot of Bagatelle.
- **Call:** Jeanette Watts, 222-7672.
- **More info:** Looking for a few dancers specializing in cancan, also seeking people willing to learn slower minuets for public performance in World A'fair in May.
- **What:** Zivio, Slavic dancing.
- **Call:** John Pappas, 427-2543.

DANCE CLASSES

- **What:** Belly dancing by Aja.
- **Where:** Lohrey Center 2366 Glenarm Ave. Dayton.

- **Cost:** \$40 for eight-week course.
- **Call:** 333-3131.

➤ **What:** Celtic Academy of Irish Dance, traditional Irish folk dancing, competitions, performances.

- **Where:** 5438 Burkhardt Road, Riverside.
- **Cost:** \$35 per month.
- **More info:** 256-6086 or e-mail celticacad@aol.com.

SPECIAL EVENTS

- **What:** Middle Eastern Dancers Night. Open dance, food, cash bar, professional dancers gather to free dance; good place to see what belly dancing is, not a performance.
- **When:** Second Thursday of each month.
- **Where:** Christopher Club, 3150 S. Dixie Highway, Kettering.
- **Cost:** \$5.
- **Call:** Kira LaFabe, 435-7142.

- **What:** Caravan of Hope, belly dancing performance/benefit accompanied by dinner.
- **When:** Saturday.
- **Cost:** \$25, all proceeds benefit fight against cystic fibrosis.
- **Call:** 298-2235.

- **What:** Celtic Academy of Irish Dance's annual show, *Celtic Movements*.
- **Where:** Northmont High School, 4916 W. National Road, Clayton.
- **When:** Feb. 24.
- **Call:** 256-6086, or e-mail celticacad@aol.com.

- **What:** Schehera's Belly Dance 7, professional belly dancing workshops, performances.
- **When:** June 1-3.
- **Web site:** www.mindspring.com/~bellypages/