

Going with the flow at 25th Nia celebration by Michele McLean



Instructor Marla Gold leads a Nia workout at the National Ballet School Saturday celebrating the 25th anniversary of the introduction of the hybrid exercise that combines elements of dance and martial arts.
Photo by Nancy Paiva

April 4, 2008

Nia found its niche in midtown.

More than 100 participants joined in celebrating Nia's 25th anniversary at an event Saturday, March 29 with a variety of instructors leading a workout. Nia is an integrative holistic technique that combines martial arts, dance and yoga.

"With these techniques integrated into one class you get a variety of different movements and you get fit," said Marla Gold, a brown belt Nia instructor, who was at the event. "You get the toning benefits, the cardio benefits, the stretching. It's everything you would get in a normal aerobics class, however, you don't get the up and down high impact on your body."

Nia is taught by certified instructors at fitness clubs, community centres and private studios and there are regular classes at the National Ballet School, at 400 Jarvis St., where Saturday's event was held.

"The space couldn't hold more," Gold said, referring to Saturday's event. "We were so delighted to be in that building. I had a huge waiting list."

Gold said the exercise, which originated in Portland, Oregon, is geared toward finding the natural flow of your body.

"You're looking at the way the body flows naturally," she said. "We encourage that. We also have guidelines. We teach from principles of movement."

Gold explained that there are movement forms that are specific to Nia. "We also teach how to get in touch with your body. As an instructor I'm showing somebody how to move, however, I'm encouraging them to feel it in their body first then express it outward."

Nia can be easily learned the first time out, but it becomes more enriching as you gain experience, she said.

"There's so many layers of information that you can receive in a class...So every time you come you become more familiar with the movement forms and the principals and the guidelines that we follow in a Nia class."

That makes you more aware of how you live in your body, she added.

"We teach at all age groups and all different levels," she said. "People could have disabilities. They could have a neck or back problem. They'll stick with Level 1, which is more working within the core of the body."

It gets more challenging as you reach out, she said, adding she encourages participants to get out of their minds and into their body.

"That's when real fitness happens," Gold said. "That's when healing happens. People enjoy themselves when they do it. It's the joy that brings them back. They don't realize they're getting a workout because it's so much fun. "For more information on Nia, visit the websites www.nianow.com or www.niac.ca.