

let, Nia (which combines dance, yoga, and martial arts), and even belly dancing, along with the more traditional workouts. “Hey—whatever gets people moving!” says Jill Johnson, the new director of the dance program within Harvard’s Office for the Arts.

Johnson knows that many people are intimidated by dancing, which makes it hard to be comfortable as a beginner. She encourages nonprofessional dancers not to worry so much about how they look, but to concentrate on how they *feel*: dance is a way to explore what of ourselves gets expressed, and our relationship to others on the dance floor. “We worry about how we are perceived by others,” she adds. “People say, ‘I’m not a dancer’ and that shuts off curiosity about it. We were *born* with the capacity to dance! Children who see someone playing music on the street will move to connect with the beat. That instinct gets lost because of who we think we are supposed to be as adults.” She advises starting slowly. “Hip hop is very popular,” she says. “Some of it involves complex coordination. Breaking down a phrase into smaller steps can sometimes help. Try not to look in the mirror too much.”

Johnson trained classically through her teens, then was “opened creatively” by the variations of modern dance. Her work has blended the two—and other dance forms—through intricate compositions with her longtime collaborator,

Dance Resources

Among the organizations that lead and/or promote social dancing in New England:

<http://www.havetodance.com>

A fairly comprehensive resource for regional swing dances. Also good contact information for other dance forms, including tango, hustle, and salsa

www.salsaboston.com

Great for finding lessons, clubs, and performances. (See dance lessons section for venues outside of Boston.)

www.arnb.org/Northeast.php

Cajun/Zydeco music and dance

<http://wadabo.drupalgardens.com>

West African dance and music classes and events, primarily in Boston

www.dne.org

Dance New England is an umbrella group that coordinates free-form dances. The website also has an extensive list of other kinds of dances to join.

www.jehkulu.org/contact.html

Dance and drumming classes, performances, and festivals in and around Burlington, Vermont

www.facone.org (the Folk Arts Center of New England), www.folkdancing.org (the Folk Dance Association), and www.neffa.org (the New England Folk Festival Association), all offer details on international folk dancing and music venues.

www.earthdance.net

Earthdance, based near Northhampton, Massachusetts, offers classes, workshops, and events with an emphasis on dance and interdisciplinary somatic arts that “focus on sustainable living, social justice, and community.”

www.zumba.com/en-US/about

The trademarked dance fitness program Zumba, performed to international music with a heavy Latin American sound

www.niaboston.com

The site lists classes, teachers, and workshops.

choreographer William Forsythe. She is interested in “waking up the neural pathways” through dance and wants to engage in interdisciplinary partnerships with

Harvard researchers to better understand how dance affects brain activity and plasticity. Specifically, she would like to make clearer the connections related to the effect of movement on and in the pre-frontal cortex of the brain and how the cognitive processes develop. “So much of the body is *patterning*, which has helped me learn new things in the studio,” she explains. “Approaching a certain step in a dance and trying to change it is like the process of recovering from an injury. The pathways are re-patterning in healing and recovery the same way they are when we are learning new ways to move our bodies in dance.”

In the classes she teaches, Johnson has her students warm up through “cross-hemisphere coordinative exercises”: swinging their bodies across their midlines by moving the right and left hands to opposite, specific points on the body (e.g., ankles, knees, elbows, ears). “The legs also move across the body in subtle opposition to the directions of the hands.

