

A new movement in movement

By Shari Shallard

Maybe it's global boredom with running machines, maybe gym memberships are starting to feel a little extravagant in this economy, or maybe people have simply concluded it would be nice to grimace less while exercising. Whatever the reason, recent trends in aerobic fitness suggest there is growing demand for more creative and enjoyable workouts.

One of this decade's most explosive non-conventional aerobic creations – the Latin-dance inspired Zumba – resulted when Beto Perez forgot the music meant for his class: he made a last-minute substitution of Latin tunes, improvised some dance moves, and left the thrilled participants wanting more. Patented in 2001, Zumba is now taught in more than 40,000 locations around the world and the associated merchandise is enjoying the same kind of success.

Now, a number of other revolutionary fitness concepts are taking root within the industry, each addressing not only body, but a host of psychological aspects that are critical to happy, healthy living. Modified and rebranded versions of hula hooping, juggling, and belly dancing have become portable, affordable, and – most of all – fun forms of fitness for growing numbers of women (and, to a lesser degree, men). These spirited options offer fulfilling alternatives to decades of more traditional aerobics classes – and the sportswear industry would be wise to take notice of the apparel niches and needs that each activity is spawning.

Hooping: lithe body and lively libido

Last October, at a healthy kids fair held on the White House front lawn, First Lady Michelle Obama picked up a hula hoop and swivelled it 142 times. Anyone who wasn't impressed with

Hooping improves core strength, cardiovascular endurance, flexibility, balance, coordination, and overall toning.

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that feat hasn't picked up a hula hoop lately; keeping a hoop in orbit is not nearly as easy as kids make it look.

Hooping is, however, as fun as it looks – and the health benefits are just as pleasing. Improvements in core strength, cardiovascular endurance, flexibility, balance, coordination, and overall toning (specifically the abs, thighs, buttocks and arms) are among the many reasons to hoop. The founder of HoopGirl, Christabel Zamor, has a background in cultural anthropology, mythological studies, and a range of global dance forms – but it is hooping that compelled her to reach the energetic masses with performances, DVDs, hooping classes and a teacher training programme.

"People are passionate about hooping because they don't think of it as exercise, they think of it as play," Ms Zamor tells W SA. "The fun-factor separates the HoopGirl Workout from other fitness routines because it feels more like a party than a class. In addition to losing weight, hooping really ramps up your libido and self-confidence, which are two happy side effects; all of this gives this workout staying power."

The list of equipment is short – a hula hoop and some space to move – but a hooper's choice of apparel has significant bearing on the ease and efficiency of a hooping session.

Jasmine Patten, founder of Hoopclothes.com, describes her hooping apparel as being "designed specifically for movement first". A clothing designer for 12 years (with a self-proclaimed passion for active wear) and a hooper for five, Ms Patten founded Hoopclothes.com after recognising her own struggle to find hooping-appropriate clothes; the site carries her own line, Dervish, as well as pieces from independent designers.

While the colourful prints and whimsical designs reflect the sport's cheeky personality, each piece takes into account what's needed to keep a hoop in orbit. Ms Patten tells W SA that sportswear designed for hooping should create a smooth silhouette ("too many things can get in the way of the hoop", allow free movement of shoulders and offer adequate grip ("it's best to use material that is not slippery"), and impart "a sense of fun and individuality – just like all of the hoopers".

While a tenacious search online will unearth several designers of hooping pants and ensembles, Hoopclothes.com currently appears to be the leading spot for creating that sassy silhouette.

Juggling: laughing all the way to the scales

One of the first things Heather Wolf will say about juggling is that it's almost impossible to do without smiling. Her company, JuggleFit, encourages parents to juggle for (and with) their



Butterfly pants from Hoopclothes.com are colourful and fitted, reflecting both the whimsy and function of hooping apparel.

 Jasmine Patten

kids, couples to try it together, and friends to do it in groups. "It's almost impossible to avoid laughing together while learning to juggle together," she says. "Just try."

Ms Wolf's clients have so much fun learning and practising that they're often surprised by the associated health benefits – though that is precisely why JuggleFit, started in 2006, has captured the attention of otherwise reluctant exercisers. Classes, DVDs and a website (www.jugglefit.com) teach participants how to 'juggle your way to fitness' with scarves and balls, incorporating key elements of humour, balance and meditation into the workout.

"I see JuggleFit targeting those who are looking for a way to fit exercise into a busy schedule and want a workout that they can do right at the moment they have time to exercise," she says. "It also appeals to athletes, as it improves coordination; seniors, as it exercises the brain; and families, as it's a great exercise to do with others."

From a solely physical perspective, Ms Wolf says that juggling burns around 280 calories per hour (comparable to walking); tones upper body with its constant arm movement; tones core and legs due to the balance required; and engages body parts that often go unused – providing much needed lubrication to joints in the arms and shoulders.

"Juggling involves constant upper body movement of the shoulders and arms," she says,



A performer and teacher, Tamalyn Dallal says that appropriate belly dancing apparel should not constrict belly and hip moves.

Tamalyn Dallal

Belly Dancing: femininity and bone density

Perhaps the greatest metamorphosis of purpose has been belly dancing's move from its roots in traditional Arab culture to today's Westernised appearances in music videos, performances and fitness classes, and, most recently, the lives of average woman seeking a more exciting workout.

According to Tamalyn Dallal, an instructor, performer, and author of several books on this subject, women are drawn to this feminine form of self expression. "There is not much room for femininity in western culture where you have to be aggressive to get ahead. [In belly dancing, you] don't have to be skinny, and often curves are a plus," she tells WSA. She adds that a sense of community grows from this activity that welcomes teenagers to senior citizens.

Considered to be a weight-bearing, low-impact exercise, belly dancing benefits core muscles and bone density – and can burn around 300 calories per hour. "It is great exercise," says Ms Dallal, "which makes people with any body type feel good."

Even though many classes are for fitness purposes only, with no intentions of public performance, participants often wear pieces that acknowledge the dance's rich, beautiful history. "Legs should be visible to the teacher or student, but not bare," says Ms. Dallal. "Pants should be worn low in the hips so as not to constrict hip and belly moves. Scarves that enhance the hip moves can range from sparkly scarves with coins and beads made in Egypt or Turkey, or now in India and China, or they can wear a simple skirt-like wrap."

Due perhaps to belly dancing's longer standing in popular culture, several lines of belly dancing gear are available (Ms Dallal's favorite pants are from Suhaila Salimpour's online store, and she mentions Melodia and Sharif Wear as other popular brands). However, like hooping apparel, the options come from niche retailers rather than sportswear megabrands.

An opportunity for grins and growth

Last year's launch by Reebok of Jukari Fit to Fly trapeze classes was a big-name nod to this tidal wave of more innovative workouts; however, the movement largely remains in the hands of entrepreneurs and independent designers. It is perhaps those nimbler entities that are best equipped to experiment with this vast opportunity for growth, and most apt to realise that those consumers seeking to smile their way to fitness form an enthusiastic market on the brink of an energetic boom.

Heather Wolf juggles with fitted pants, a snug sleeveless top, and, of course, a smile.

Howard Robinson

