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## ODC DANCE / RHYTHM & MOTION

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October 27, 2014 · by akonecki · in FEEL · Leave a comment

“It’s as if there’s a big jelly jar around you and your hips are cleaning off all the jelly.

Far from a fluid flourish of jelly coated hips, mine jerk and twitch stickily about the imaginary glass. Surely “*Absolute Beginner*” Tribal Belly Dance” is a misnomer.

When I enter the classroom I find a middle-aged man with a large belly dressed in a black t-shirt and sweatpants warming up with enviable self-assurance at the barre, swinging his leg like a furious pendulum. I, on the other hand, possessing zero dance experience, stand there awkwardly waiting for class to begin and avoiding eye contact with my reflection in the mirrors lining the front studio wall.

A small but widely diverse assemblage of chattering students arrives—a young woman with harem pants and dark hair in a loose, high-set ponytail; a woman with a tiny, still-wrinkly newborn sporting lilac noise-canceling headphones, wrapped tightly to her chest; and a man with a bald patch, a painter’s brush mustache, and a bandana tied around his neck. The man smiles at me and introduces himself as Angelo. He tells me he enjoys the class, and usually attends each week because it’s good exercise and gets him out of the house. When I mention that this is my first dance class, Angelo gently tries to shoo me to the front where he assures me the instructor will be able to give me extra attention. I shuffle up a few feet and give thanks when a few stragglers arrive and hastily fill in the gaps.

Our instructor **Jill**, a woman with long auburn hair swept through with blond, clicks through her iPod at the back of the classroom. The beautiful wailing of a reed instrument bursts through the speakers, softly punctuated by undulating percussion. Gliding to the front, she begins to slowly, hypnotically, roll her hips. We’re asked to do the same, and I am instantly jarred out of the trance into which I was lulled so quickly, seduced by the rhythmic flow of body and music. Rather than a soft ripple, my hips grind and heave. I risk a glimpse at the mirror through eyes squinched nearly shut, as if preparing for the imminent “Eeek eeek eeek!” of the *Psycho* shower scene. Alas, it is nearly as horrific. I look like a cut-rate Patrick Swayze showing Jennifer Grey how to dance dirty. A row behind, Angelo smiles and sways his hips side to side.

The tumbling, throaty notes of the music quietly subside, replaced by dizzying strings, exotic and mesmerizing. Never breaking the fluidity of her hips, Jill tells us to step right... left... right... together, as she floats almost imperceptibly to the right. I step right... left... oh crap. I forgot about my hips. Next to me, the baby slumps soundly asleep above the smoothly gliding hips of its mother. Right... [rotate]...left... [rotate]... My galumphing steps run me nearly into my neighbor. “Small steps!” Jill instructs, meandering between us. “They should only be slightly wider than your feet.” At least I’m not the only one struggling with subtlety of motion.

Prompted by a question from the young woman in harem pants regarding the position of her knees, Jill guides us through another move elemental to belly dancing. “Right, up, left, down. Your knees should be bent. Rather than moving within the horizontal plane of the jelly jar walls, you should think of your hips as rotating like a ball socket.” Tightening my thighs I tuck in my lower abdomen to raise my butt, then pop out my right hip, tuck in my butt... wait. Do I have that right? Jill’s upper body remains still, her hips and thighs operating on a seemingly opposite axis. Mine, however, can’t stay still, and must move one way in order for my lower body to move the other, like an overly welded robot. Catching my reflection in the mirror, I suck in my breath with a wince.

After more shufflings and gyrations across the room and back, the music is quieted, and we circle up for deep, slow stretching. My lower spine clacks and creaks, knocked out of sync from its fellow vertebrae above. We gather our shoes and bags and open the classroom door for the Afro Cuban class eagerly waiting in the lobby.

I was awful. Awful! But the beat of the tabla and the beguiling tremolo of exotic flutes are pulsing in my ears, gently nudging my limbs into new ways of moving.

**ODC School / Rhythm & Motion** offers a **wide array** of dance classes for all ages and levels of ability. When I visited, I could barely decide on a single class. “Afro Cuban” is accompanied by live drums! The “Bollywood” class description conjures Technicolor visions of a frenzied pop-soaked music video. Get a **class pass** and give them all a go (first timers get to try a class for \$5!).

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