

JAZZ DANCE

Group choreographies and a shrinking market

A few years ago, André Lucas, an independent jazz dance teacher, gave as many as 21 dance classes a week around the city. Now, he only teaches 10. Lucas blames aerobics for jazz dance's lagging popularity.

Philip Cole, another jazz dance teacher, agrees. He cites aerobics' quick-fix allure as the culprit in the public's change of taste.

"People don't want the discipline in the art form — you cannot make a dancer in four to six weeks," he says. "Aerobics is a quick process. In four to six weeks you've burnt off what you needed to burn off."

Cole is particularly sensitive to the shrinking numbers: for 15 years he was co-artistic director, along with Don Jordan, of the Dance Factory. It went out of business in December.

Jazz dance hit its peak during the '80s, when flashdancers tore the ribbing off their sweatshirts and signed up for classes that featured group choreographies set to pop, jazz or dance music.

Around the same time, aerobics classes began to pop up in health clubs and sports centres. They attracted the cardiovascular-conscious and those who felt dance classes to be too difficult.

Lucas has little respect for the competing discipline.

"Aerobics is a dance where you don't have to think," the classically trained dancer scoffs.

Lucas, who could probably shop for groceries while doing an arabesque, puts a class of beginners through a choreography set to an energetic cut from Prince's latest album. During the break, one student practices a sequence from the class routine, lunging, turning and stepping, all the while watching herself in front of the wide mirror.

Lucas is happy with the progress of his die-hards. He strongly believes that others, who have forsaken jazz dance for — as Cole puts it — the fast-food workout, would enjoy jazz dance.

"We used to have a lot more people who came to dance for recreation," he laments. "It would be nice if those people would come back."

All three jazz dance teachers can be reached at Académie Vartanian, 486 Ste. Catherine W., 393-3640. A single class costs \$11, monthly rates are lower.



Flamenco instructor Sarah Vincent: Expressing joy, sadness and hate.

"Squeeze it," he yells. The students swing their arms and shake their bodies as the polyrhythmic music drives them on to an even faster tempo.

After the class Suzanne, 51, remarks how she loves not only the ritual aspect of the classes but what it has done for her figure.

"It's great for your sex life," she announces.

Selwyn Joseph teaches Afro-Caribbean classes all over the city. For info call: 337-9770.

FLAMENCO

Emotional discipline

Sarah Vincent believes that flamenco is ideal for letting out all of the emotions.

"It's a very 'feeling' dance," says Vincent, director of the Académie

Flamenca. "Joy, sadness, hate — they can all be expressed by flamenco."

Tragically earnest Spanish guitar, intensified by a loud chorus of men's voices, booms from a stereo. The 10 women in Vincent's class stop clapping. They assume the traditional flamenco pose: one arm in front, the other held high. These women look tough and severe. Their heavy heeled shoes stomp on the parquet floor.

Vincent is proud of this advanced class. They've been with her for a few years, and now have the discipline, she says, to truly bring out the emotions in the dance.

In order to dance the flamenco and let out the passion it calls for, students must put their inhibitions aside, says Vincent.

"We have people who are very shy," she says, "and they have to fight that."

"Her class has given me expression," says Risa, one of the students, during a break. "I like the intrigue of flamenco."

Rosalía, another student, adds, "I was trained in ballet but that seems like a fairy-tale dance compared to this."

The two soft-spoken women go back to the floor to get ready for the zapateado, a dance that relies mostly on stomping. The music goes up, they strike their poses and severity, again, has taken over.

AFRO-CARIBBEAN

A delirious repertoire

Selwyn Joseph teaches Afro-Caribbean dance to anyone who can keep up the pace.

"Get it down. Keep it going," he tells the class as they undulate, shimmy and hurdle across the studio floor. Joseph, 46, becomes drill sergeant in his own delirious Caribbean dance army. Caribbean dances like calypso, mambo, merengue, limbo and soca (a merging of soul and calypso), along with national dances of Africa, make up the course repertoire of the two-hour nonstop Afro-Caribbean class.

Whether moving like a funky ostrich or stomping rhythmically to the music, the class looks like they are rehearsing for Carifete, Montreal's annual Caribbean carnival.

Their Danskins darkened with perspiration, the students position themselves for their final workout of the evening, a shango, originally a West African ritual to induce possession by one's god.

Joseph remembers his grandmother bringing him to the shango festivals in Trinidad.

"Some would bring their sick to be healed by the high priests while others would dance for days and nights," says Joseph, who gives 20 classes a week.