

HEALTH & FITNESS

THE ZUMBA PARTY

By Jenna Caputo



CARLA SCHLIST LEADS A ZUMBA CLASS AT BALLROOM ON SUNSET IN LATHAM. PHOTO BY JULIA ZAVE

Zumba. The term seems to have become a part of every day language these days. Everyone is talking about the “Z-love,” and you can’t seem to turn on the TV without seeing it. Advertisements and infomercials, yes, but it has also been featured on *The Biggest Loser*, National Dance Day, *So You Think You Can Dance*, in all the local gyms, at parties, fundraisers – everywhere! But what is Zumba?

The surface answer is Zumba is a fitness program. But below that surface, Zumba is a community that not only provides a killer workout, but a support system and a network of people and tools to help you with your fitness goals. The Latin-inspired dance fitness program was created by mistake over ten years ago by founder Alberto “Beto” Perez, when he accidentally forgot his traditional music for the aerobics class he was about to teach. Improvising from what he had in his bag, Beto created an on-the-spot dance fitness party that has taken the world by storm. Now the world’s most successful dance fitness program, Zumba has over 14 million participants across more than 150 countries, and the number keeps climbing.

Zumba takes the concepts of many dance styles, but focuses on salsa, merengue, cumbia, reggaeton, flamenco, tango, belly dance, samba, quebradita, soca,

bachatta and hiphop. Combining them with exercise techniques and cardio moves set to blood-pumping music, Zumba provides a fierce, full-body workout that feels more like a nightclub party than a day at the gym. The workout sheds pounds (expect to burn 700-1000 calories in an hour), tones muscles, strengthens the heart, releases stress, and lifts the soul – no partner, no experience, no grace required! The class appeals to all ages, all fitness levels, those with dance experience and those who have never danced a day in their lives.

Why does Zumba have such a wide appeal when most other fitness programs only have a limited audience? The festive atmosphere of Zumba as opposed to the tedium of a gym is a part of it, but there seems to be a deeper level. “Zumba is the world’s most successful dance fitness program because it changes lives far beyond losing weight. The universal appeal of music and dance, combined with the party atmosphere nurtures a social aspect that empowers its participants and creates a bond that is constantly striving to do good for their respective communities. It’s electrifying, addicting, contagious and rewarding,” says Carla Schlist, a Zumba and fitness instructor in the Capital District.

Carla has seen the Zumba explosion first hand. What started out as a small con-

tinuing education class suddenly rocketed into so many students that she had to rent the huge ballroom space at Ballroom on Sunset in Latham. She decided to take the risk and jump into it full-time, and now also teaches at several other venues throughout the week. She has students with every kind of fitness goal – women looking to get back to pre-pregnancy shape, some simply wanting to lose weight, and some incorporating Zumba into their training programs as a cross-training activity.

“Since Zumba is a full-body workout that incorporates both cardio and toning while also concentrating on the crucial core, it works well as a natural compliment to many other sports. The dancing combined with toning elements gives them a great overall conditioning workout,” Carla says. She has several runners in her class that use Zumba to strengthen their upper body and core, swimmers looking to keep up the strength in their lower bodies, and dancers wanting to make sure their muscles don’t settle too much into one style, while also incorporating the crucial cardio element.

Zumba constantly strives to offer different options and they now have several classes to choose from: Zumba – the original sweat inducing dance party; Zumba Gold – modified Zumba for those with physical limitations, active seniors

and fitness beginners; Zumbatomic – for kids; Zumba Toning – using toning sticks for extra strength training; Aqua Zumba – Z-fun in the pool; Zumba in the Circuit – part of a strength training circuit at Curves locations; Zumba Sentao – using a chair as a prop for an intense sculpting class.

The key to incorporating Zumba into your current workout is to know your goals and your limits. If you’re looking to use Zumba as a cross-training exercise:

Be sure to find an instructor that not only has the Zumba certification, but is also a licensed fitness professional and/or has an extensive dance background. You want to be sure you have someone with a full understanding of how the body works.

Talk to your instructor about your goals or concerns to see if you should be doing any modifications to the moves to coordinate with your fitness level and training goals.

Make sure you have the right shoes. If you’re a runner, don’t expect to wear your usual sneakers to class. Running shoes are not designed for lateral movement. You need a supportive sneaker with a smooth sole – preferably a shoe made for dance fitness.


Don’t stress about getting the footwork absolutely perfect. Zumba moves very fast with little to no instruction on choreography. Follow your instructor and do the best you can, but remember that the most important aspect of Zumba is to have fun and just keep moving.

Zumba should never feel like work – it should be a party for your body and soul!

Many participants have inspiring stories of what started them on the Zumba party. Quite a few had Zumba impact their lives so much they decided to go on to be instructors themselves. Each story seems to keep coming back to the Zumba community and how incredible both the physical and mental effects have been because of that support. There is something about it that offers a natural support system, therapy session, stress relief, community service, exercise partner that just reaches across all fitness boundaries and brings all of its participants together.

If you want to get in on the “Z-love” yourself, go to www.zumba.com to find a class near you. Most places now have a program, but read up on your local instructors’ backgrounds to make sure you find the right class for your personal fitness goals. Many instructors will also do private parties, fundraisers, and corporate wellness events. 🌟

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