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Stepping into the world of Nia

Posted By [Kim Bell](#) On January 11, 2013 @ 3:10 pm In [A Slice of Life,Blogs](#) | [No Comments](#)



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It seemed a good way to start the first work Friday of 2013 – an introduction class to Nia Technique – fitness with a difference. The invite to the media champagne breakfast instructed that I wear loose clothing, and directed me to Studio Kairos in Hume Road, Dunkeld West.

To be honest, I wasn't entirely sure what this class would be all about – I knew that it was a relatively new form of fitness, and that it involved dance and "flowing movements". But, as I

am always keen to try something new, I was happy to give it a try. Plus, they promised champagne after the class, and who can say no to that?

I entered the class with trepidation. Naturally, I like to be in control and battle to get out of my own head let go. Secondly, I am, I admit, fairly self-conscious. And thirdly, co-ordination and I are not as close as we should be. But I do love to dance, (even if I look like an epileptic flamingo).

The class started with a basic introduction to Nia by black belt trainer, Susan Sloane, and Taryn Harris, brown belt. Nia is an advanced form of fusion fitness, which blends martial arts, dance arts and self-healing into one workout. It is considered a holistic approach to fitness, as it addresses the whole person, through integration, sensory awareness and play. (Yes, play).

The concept evolved out of the aerobics craze of the 80s (Jane Fonda, leg warmers and sweat bands). Abandoning their shoes, repetitive aerobic movements and their own self-conscious, founders Debbie Rosas and Carlos AyaRosas created Nia or Neuromuscular Integrative Action. This barefoot "fusion fitness" gained support from the USA medical community for the cardiovascular and healing benefits and by 1987 teacher training had begun. Training encompasses five levels: white belt, blue belt, brown belt and first-degree black belt. Nia can be taught by anyone who has white belt training.

Nia was brought to South Africa by black belt trainer, Kathy Wolstenholme, in 2002, and she has developed a local programme for training teachers. Susan is one such student, who immediately found something within the Nia culture that spoke to her. A qualified yoga teacher and massage therapist, Susan says she has an affinity with people and wanting to heal. Nia was the perfect vehicle, and at the same time, she says she has learnt valuable lessons about herself and what she wants from her own life. She is currently the only black belt with trainer status in South Africa.

As a science, Nia uses systematic movement, moving your entire body with grounded steps and stances from the martial arts (Tai Chi, Tae Kwon do and Akido), dance (Jazz, modern, Duncan Dance and even a bit of ballet), and body therapies such as Yoga. And best of all, it's a full body workout, and you move to your body's own ability – be it a small, more controlled step or kick, to a sweeping embrace of a movement that stretches from your fingers to your toes. Music is used for inspiration behind the movements, and you are encouraged to, quite literally, feel the beat and release your mind enough to flow with it.

Unfortunately, my mind currently seems to have a stronger grip on my body, than my body on my mind; and I must admit while I loved the class (and will go back to try another one), I realise that I really must try not to be so rigid in the free movement portions of the class.

I happily danced, swayed, wiggled and jiggled during the guided movements but when I was left to my own devices, I tended to be bit more reserved, offering an odd hop-skip-step with a weak arm-sway movement, zoning back into my original position like a homing pigeon; while the rest of the class glided, sashayed and swayed around the room. Susan did tell me later during breakfast that this is completely natural for beginners, and I hope, given time, I can escape my own head and just go with the flow.

From the outset, both Susan and Taryn said that Nia is a fun way to exercise, and probably one of the only forms of fitness that encourages you to smile, both at yourself and those around you. And smile you do. I left grinning from ear to ear, feel-good serotonin still surging through my body. Oh, and while the champers was on offer; my newly-acquainted body and I opted instead for a smoothie...

Benefits of Nia:

* Increase the pleasure of living in your body.

- * Strengthen muscles, improve muscle tone, and increase muscle definition.
- * Calm the mind and relieve stress.
- * Improve endurance.
- * Increase grace and flexibility.
- * Improve concentration and cognitive function.
- * Improve posture and even increase height.
- * Improve organ function, particularly that of the heart and lungs.
- * Enhance sensory awareness.
- * Heighten sexual function.
- * Build reservoirs of chi energy.
- * Alleviate emotional problems, including depression, anxiety, and stress.
- * Improve circulation of blood and improve lymphatic drainage
- * Strengthen immunity.
- * Balance the autonomic nervous system.
- * Facilitate weight loss and proper weight maintenance.

For more information on Nia classes in Gauteng, visit www.niagp.co.za or contact Susan Sloan on 011 880 5223 or Kim Hatchuel on 083 657 3377. For information on Nia in the Western Cape, contact www.niasouthafrica.co.za or Kathy Wolstenholme on 021 674 3747 or Nicci Gates on 082 462 4844.

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