

Masala Bhangra ... Balle Balle!

Bollywood Comes to the Granite State

By Patrice La Vigne



WE ALL HAVE LIVED through many fitness crazes. Jazzercise. Tae Bo. Zumba. I've actually tried them all. Usually I walk away with the same conclusion. I am extremely uncoordinated. However, there's no denying that there are plenty of fitness options out there.

When I heard about the newest culturally based dance aerobic workout—Masala Bhangra—I knew I had to try it. Not just because it's a different way to stay in shape, but because I am slightly obsessed with the Indian culture. I attended my first traditional Hindu wedding of a friend earlier this year and was in awe of the dance. Since then, I have slowly increased my Bollywood movie and music collection. Taking the Masala Bhangra classes puts the icing on the cake for me.

Masala Bhangra means spicy traditional folk dance from the Indian state of Punjab. The Masala Bhangra workout is actually not new. In 1999, Sarina Jain, a U.S. certified fitness instructor, took her Indian heritage and created the exotic and full-body workout. More recently, Masala Bhangra has gained popularity because Bollywood is so present in mainstream culture. And last winter, the

workout craze spread to New Hampshire when Sarina came from New York to offer instructor training.

While there are a growing number of Masala Bhangra classes offered around the state,

I have been taking classes in Concord with Dani-Jean Stuart. Dani-Jean is not your typical aerobics instructor. It wasn't until she saw a review of the Masala Bhangra workout in a magazine five years ago that she became motivated to change her sedentary lifestyle.



Sarina Jain, America's first cross-cultural fitness star is the creator of the Masala Bhangra Workout®. She's an energetic fitness innovator, music-video choreographer, and international television/radio personality.
Courtesy of Masala Bhangra Workout®

She ordered the Masala Bhangra workout DVD, and wanted to take classes around NH, but there were none offered at the time. She ultimately decided she needed to become an instructor at age 50. It took some time though. Dani-Jean went through teacher training with Sarina for Masala Bhangra twice, and tested out her class on some friends for a few months. Now, she is rocking and rolling (or Bollywooding) all over Merrimack County.

I really like the structure of the Masala Bhangra class. Dani-Jean teaches us anywhere from five to eight Bollywood moves per class, teaching each move bit by bit. This helps the person who is directionally challenged and lacks coordination (Hi! That's me!). Make no mistake, though, the entire class is fast-paced enough that you definitely work up



a sweat and burn some mad calories. And after we master all the moves, they get paired together to create an entire dance routine that makes us—or at least me—feel like we are performing in a Bollywood movie! And we yell “Balle Balle!” to tell Dani-Jean if we are having fun!

Long-time aerobics instructor Gina Della Pasqua from Portsmouth said that after she found out that Sarina would be training in NH, she went to the Masala Bhangra website and fell in love with the infectious music.



Gina Della Pasqua, the energetic instructor for this Seacoast class (front center), is surrounded by her enthusiastic students. Ginny Hartnett (front right) also teaches Masala Bhangra in Exeter.

“I signed up for both the master class and teacher training classes and wow, I’m so glad I did,” she said. After the training, she practiced nonstop for a month, then began offering a few free classes in April. They filled quickly with men and women and word spread fast. Now she can hardly fit all the Masala Bhangra classes studios are requesting into her busy schedule.

The situation is similar for instructor Ginny Hartnett, who leads classes in Exeter. She studied dance in college and began teaching aerobics in the 1990s, adding Masala Bhangra to her training this year seemed a natural fit to her background.

The rhythms and movements work your legs, core, gluts, arms ... pretty much every part

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New Hampshire ToDo

of your body, burning anywhere from 500 to 900 calories per hour. The instructors can tailor the class to focus more on legs or arms, depending on the attendants. For example, Dani-Jean loves both the “Dohl Beat” and “Bhangra Square” moves, but they are very different. One is more about dancing and the other is more athletic.

“The greatest appeal of the Masala Bhangra Workout is how fun and different the movements are—it’s like celebrating in a Bollywood movie!” said Ginny.

“No matter what mood I may be in before [class], I always feel great after. I love the classy and earthy feel of this dance. It’s so very different from anything I’ve ever been trained in,” said Gina.

“You don’t see people getting off the treadmill smiling like they do after [Masala Bhangra] class,” Dani-Jean said.

One of the greatest appeals about the workout is that it is suitable for any age, size, or walk of life. Gina said she has had a 15-year-old and a 70-year-old in the same class. Dani-Jean said when she did a Masala Bhangra demonstration at Concord’s Market Days, there was a 5-year-old girl who followed all the moves the whole time.

Participants would agree about the workout’s flexibility. “What I particularly like is no prior experience in dance is required as you learn as you go, which adds a lot of fun to the workout,” said Mary-Ellen Tillotson, who takes Ginny’s classes. “Ginny is a great instructor and makes learning Masala Bhangra fun!”

Dani-Jean said one of her students told her the Masala Bhangra workout incorporated the same combination of energy and relaxation that she got from yoga and that it was uplifting and grounding at the same time.

While New York and California remain the hottest spots for the Masala Bhangra craze since Sarina regularly teaches the classes in these states, there are approximately 100 certified Masala Bhangra workout instructors offering classes across more than 15 states.

Holidays just around the corner mean lots of parties and yummy treats. This couldn’t be a more inventive way to stay in shape heading into winter. I’m thinking it makes a unique gift, too. Now’s the time ... get off your couch and find a Masala Bhangra class near you! *Balle Balle!*

ToDo

A Selection of Masala Bhangra Classes Around the State

Concord

Riverside Taekwondo Hapkido (RTH) Martial Arts and Wellness
68 North Stark Highway, Weare
Drop-in Class
(603) 529-5425
Wednesdays
6:45 p.m.
Instructor: Dani-Jean Stuart

Manchester

Bliss Healing Arts Center
250 Commercial Street, Manchester
(603) 624-0080
Drop-in Rate (\$15 per class)
Saturdays
8:45 a.m.
Instructor: Dani-Jean Stuart

Seacoast

Ioka Theater
55 Water Street, Exeter
(603) 772-2222
Drop-in Rate (\$7 per class) or Prepaid Punch Card
Mondays
5:30 – 6:30 p.m.
Instructor: Ginny Hartnett

Jubilation

2800 Lafayette Road, Portsmouth
(603) 778-7483
Drop-in Rate (\$6 per class) or Prepaid Punch Card
Tuesdays 6:45 – 7:30 p.m.
Fridays 4:45 – 5:30 p.m.
Instructor: Gina Della Pasqua

Great Bay Academy of Dance

1 Raynes Avenue, Portsmouth
(603) 433-4200
Drop-in Rate (\$6 per class) Starting January 12th
Wednesdays
4:30 – 5:30 p.m.



The official Masala Bhangra website, www.masaladance.com, notes other venues in NH where you may find it offered. Check for updates and info.

Let’s Dance Studio

5 North Main Street, Concord
(603) 228-3804
www.letsdancenh.com

Center for Health Promotion

279 Pleasant Street, Concord
(603) 230-7300

Paradise Fitness

10 Main St (at Gonic Mills)
Gonic, NH 03839
www.paradisefitnessonline.com
Phone: (603) 312-0563

St. Anselm College

100 St. Anselm Drive, Manchester
Register at Health Services
Contact: Maura Marshall:
mmarshall@anselm.edu

Greater Manchester Family YMCA

30 Mechanic Street, Manchester
(603) 232-8642

Courtesy of Masala Bhangra Workout®

