

## Nia works the 'five sensations' of agility, flexibility, mobility, stability and strength

### WORKS FOR ME

Peek into a Nia class, and at first it may look like jazz dance, with combinations of steps to recorded music (often with a world-beat flavor). A moment later, everyone's punching, complete with guttural huhs, as if doing aikido. Next, they're skipping in a modern-dance improvisation.

The multiple forms are a hallmark of Nia, which stands for "neuromuscular integrative action" and integrates dance, martial arts and healing arts such as yoga. Founded in 1983 by fitness instructors Carlos and Debbie Rosas, it has grown to 2,000 instructors in 31 countries.

"We describe Nia as a movement and life practice, not just a workout," says Debbie Rosas, who (with Carlos) directs Nia Technique Inc. in Portland, Ore. "It's designed to teach you about the body and get you to fall in love with your body."

Or, as Encinitas instructor Meredythe Dee Winter puts it, "We say Nia is like chocolate."

JANICE STEINBERG

**The routines:** In a typical class, you'll do an hour-long routine, broken into three-to-seven-minute sections based on the music tracks. But it won't be the same routine every time.

The Rosases have created a bank of routines, with names such as "Global Unity" and "Dream Walker." Every routine works the "five sensations" of flexibility, agility, mobility, stability and strength, but some are more aerobic, others meditative, and another might challenge your coordination by combining percussive feet and flowing arms.

### ALL TOGETHER NOW



*Dan Linsteadt ran through some typical movements in a Nia class at the Mission Valley YMCA. Nia, which stands for "neuromuscular integrative action" integrates dance, martial arts and yoga.*

**Hip hip hooray:** Many moves may remind you of doing the bump. For Rosas, "When you create movement in the pelvis and hip joints, that frees the spine. If the spine is free, you have grace and power. You move energy in the base two chakras. You condition the psoas muscle that connects the upper body to the lower body. You stimulate natural breathing."

Who can do Nia? Laura Linsteadt, who teaches at the Mission Valley YMCA, says, "I've had students in their late teens up to early 70s." An instructor will offer options for levels one, two and three – for instance, a grapevine walk instead of a more vigorous traveling turn.

Nia does require "an adventurous student," Rosas says. "We color outside of the box. We ask people to move around and make noise. For someone who doesn't want to get off their mat, we're not for them."

**Benefits:** Along with the aerobic and stress-reduction benefits of moving for an hour, Winter mentions profound changes from becoming more grounded – she found relief from chronic knee pain. "When I took my first intensive in 2001, Debbie and Carlos taught me how to ground my feet for the first time," she says.

**Getting started:** Nia is done barefoot in comfortable workout clothes. Classes are offered at many San Diego YMCAs, typically for about \$10, and at private clubs, where the cost may be slightly higher.

**Information:** San Diego County YMCAs –ymca.org; Meredythe Dee Winter (CIA-Dance, Encinitas) – (760) 944-0403. For a complete listing of area Nia teachers and more information, go to nianow.com.

*Janice Steinberg is a San Diego dance writer.*