

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Julieanne Harris

Performance Art Physical Education

by **Ellen Chenoweth**

The marketing materials were appealing, yet slightly mysterious. “Do you feel intimidated by dance classes? Do you feel bored by fitness classes? Want to learn and explore dance in a supportive environment that values creativity and personal expression?” Yes, yes, and yes, but what would we be *doing*?

It turns out, over the course of 6 weekly classes, we would be: skipping,
stomping, chanting,
fake fighting, listening to our heartbeats,
learning how to do a full body smile.

Pretending that the floor was a canvas and we could paint whatever we wanted on it with our bodies,
opening our heart chakra,
learning about the diaphragm, creating a couple of simple dance phrases and then sharing with a partner,
witnessing a pseudo-marriage ceremony between the two instructors as they pledged devotion to one another in art-making and friendship.

The class turned out to be an exuberant hybrid: half performance art, half physical education, combining into an unusual and unpredictable mixture. CardioCreativity was part of a larger project called *The Dance Apocalypse* involving an ambitious Kickstarter campaign, a performance at FringeArts and extensive social media materials.

A beautiful variety of people of all ages were drawn to the sessions. There were some newcomers each time, but a sizable number of consistent attendees, mostly women along with a few men. People found out about the class through a friend, or a personal connection to Revlock or Bindler, or by seeing a listing in Philly Funsavers. A few ended up in class after seeing a short segment about the project on ABC news.

Revlock and Bindler were careful always to give a variety of options appropriate to a wide spectrum of bodies, which helped create a safe and supportive environment. Providing additional comfort, the instructors packed so many activities into each short session that even if something felt awkward, we'd soon be on to the next thing anyway.

I became convinced that Bindler and Revlock are the Click and Clack (the Tappet brothers on NPR's "Car Talk") of contemporary dance. Just as Click and Clack have degrees from MIT but often hide their smarts behind goofy façades, Revlock and Bindler actually know their stuff. Class usually started with a few minutes of anatomy lessons taught by Bindler in which we would learn (or be reminded) that our spines goes all the way up into our skulls or we'd hear about the mechanics of breathing. These lessons gave a taste of Bindler's substantial body of knowledge. Revlock was masterful in creating community and crafting embodied exercises that were both fun and accessible.

As with "Car Talk," much of the project's success lay in the chemistry between the two leaders co-teaching the class, with the lead role flowing easily between them. Bindler and Revlock had a comfortable and easy rapport with each other; sometimes one would question the other's decision, but always good-naturedly. This model of disagreeing with a collaborator, even publicly, felt like an important lesson.

Perhaps the most valuable and rare quality of CardioCreativity was that it frequently elicited sheer joy from everyone in sight. You witnessed huge, beaming smiles as people came sashaying down a square dance line. At the best of times, it felt like a small, temporary utopia created within the walls of Mt. Vernon church, where everyone was supportive of one another and felt free to express their best selves. The joy was contagious.

CardioCreativity classes, Mondays, February 24-April 7.

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