



GINA DANCES AND YOU CAN, TOO

By KIM J. GIFFORD

Photography by JOHN SHERMAN

The exotic rhythms of Middle Eastern music drift down the hall of the Richard W. Black Recreation and Senior Center, alerting visitors of the class underway even before the sweeping veils and shimmying bodies. It is a Tuesday evening in Hanover, N.H., and instructor Gina Capossela's Level 2 belly dancers, whom she affectionately refers to as her "goddesses," are working on "threading the needle," an intricate dance that swoops jewel-toned veils.

"The key is to keep the veil always in motion. The transitions are more important than the moves," Capossela instructs the room of women in their 40s, 50s and 60s, some curvaceous, others thin, all clad in leotards, leggings or yoga pants with glittering hip scarves tied at the waist.

Giggles erupt here and there as a veil momentarily catches on an arm or an elbow, but Capossela, a slight figure at the front of the room, watches in the mirror, untwisting her arms and guiding her veil in slow motion — rethreading the needle, so to speak — allowing students having trouble to observe the proper technique. Soon a flurry of cloth and color engulfs the room. Capossela adds a shimmy or a graceful flick of an arm and the dancers follow in unison, the metallic adornments on

their hip scarves jingling to the sway of their hips. The sound, the movement, the flow, the energy mesmerizes and I, so rarely comfortable in my own skin, begin to entertain a surprising thought — perhaps I could do this, too?

CELEBRATING WOMEN

Although this thought bewilders me, Capossela notes it is not unique. Many women seek out her classes to come to terms with their bodies, and find themselves embracing their shape as the class continues. Capossela inquires of students their reasons for taking her classes and says, "I think the biggest reason is to feel at home in our bodies, that's the big, glaring obvious thing. I think of the woman who simply said, 'I'm here so I can look in that mirror,' pointing to the mirror at the front of the room. I've had 18-year-olds fighting their weight take the class and say, 'Now I like my body, I like how I'm shaped,' and I've had women in their 50s say the same thing. This form of dance doesn't favor one particular body shape. Every single body shape has things that it can do that look great."

Perhaps, but it is one thing to hear this and another to believe it. Capossela's dancers all come to believe it. Perhaps the reason

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