

Byas: Where dance and exercise converge

By MELANIE BYAS - Telegraph correspondent

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If you've been around Macon long enough, no doubt you've heard of Paula East, the classically trained dancer and choreographer who can be found in various venues around town. She spent many years performing and entertaining audiences in this country and in Cuba during that country's 1950s revolution before she permanently settled in Macon.

East studied ballet, modern dance and voice at Boston Conservatory, dance at New England Conservatory, and music at Berklee College of Music. Obviously an expert at her craft, she also is a co-founder of the local chapter of USA Dance.

These days, East leads various classes throughout the region, including regular sessions at the Macon Health Club and Georgia Sports Hall of Fame, where she recently was recognized with the prestigious designation of ambassador of dance.

East has devoted her life to dancing. As her love of dance evolved, her expertise in movement was perfected and eventually culminated in Paulanetics, a method she developed during a stint as a guest instructor at Harvard University Dance Complex. A former director of special activities at Harvard Business School called East "an accomplished artist and outstanding athlete," and he applauded the program for its creativity and artistic value.

Paulanetics is not your typical aerobic exercise and that is because East is not your typical dance instructor. All the movements in the program, which reflect her years of experience as a professional dancer, combine dance with isometric training.

East describes Paulanetics as a blend of yoga, tai chi and the specialized movements of dance that she created to relax, stretch, tone and strengthen the body. The program takes a holistic approach, requiring participants to concentrate on the whole body rather than isolated muscle groups.

During class at the Macon Health Club, the music is peaceful, the atmosphere is serene and there isn't even a large amount of what looks like real exercise taking place. The movements in sequence are very much like dance as exercise and they have a kind of simplicity about them.

East believes in the importance of maintaining flexibility throughout one's lifetime, so the program is designed for everyone.

"The beauty of Paulanetics is that anyone of any age can do it anywhere," she said. "All you need is a few minutes."

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