

## Buddha-boom: More yoga classes get a backbeat

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**Tasha Flourney**

**Plain Dealer Reporter**

Steam water dripped everywhere from the windows down to the feet resting on the floor. The temperature rose high above 70 degrees as Bob Marley's rhythmic beats pulsed the room. People struggled to hold poses, but then Jay-Z's voice streamed in and kicked the class into high gear.

Everyone moved from a gentle sitting pose to a forward bend as the hip-hop artist blared, "Excuse me; what's your name?"

A yoga hybrid, the Hip-Hop Yoga class kept enthusiasts flowing at the Evolution Yoga studio in Beachwood. As American popular music moves slowly into the yoga mainstream, more people have caught on to the yoga trend.

Hip-hop, disco and rockin' power yoga are a few hybrid styles teachers use today to stretch the bounds of the 5,000-year-old healing art and spiritual practice.

Diana Kampinski came out of Aaron King's Rockin' Power Yoga Class at Evolution recently recharged.

"I think the music helps me let go," Kampinski said. "I feel like dancing on my mat."

Ian Lopatin, president of At One Yoga studio in Phoenix, Ariz., teaches power yoga classes along with King. In August, he came to Cleveland and taught a two-hour class that mixed the upbeat rhythms of rap and R&B with the poses, breathing and concentration of yoga.

Pop music, he said, gives newcomers a mainstream entry into yoga.

"The idea is to get yoga out there," said Lopatin. "We need to be helped into it more than our ancient ancestors. We try to bring [in] people who might not have come on their own."

About 16.5 million people in the United States now practice yoga, an increase of more than 30 percent from 2002, according to a survey conducted by Yoga Journal magazine. Now a mainstream fitness practice and big business, more than 70 yoga centers and teachers are listed at the online hub [yogacleveland.com](http://yogacleveland.com). The new styles and yoga boom have sparked a debate over whether the commercialization, particularly music, overshadows the Hindu ritual.

Yoga teacher Guru Bhandari, who has taught at the Indian Community Center in Cleveland Heights for nine years, said music distracts practitioners from achieving an important tenet -- a clear mind.

"I never use music. It's like a lullaby to the mind," said Bhandari. "When you play the music, it's substituting your craziness with the music. It's trying to hook your mind in becoming silent."

Beverly Singh, owner of the Atma Center in Cleveland Heights, is more concerned about safety and self-awareness for yoga students.

"My concern is that in an effort to come up with a new idea of the next best thing for Americans, people are going to get hurt and not understand what yoga is," said Singh. "It's not just a physical practice. It's looking at the whole self."

Lopatin and Evolution Yoga owner Sandy Gross understand traditional yogis such as Bhandari and Singh but said yoga must grow and adapt to American interests and culture.

"It's a living tradition. It must evolve, like our studio," said Gross, whose studio holds about 50 classes a month for about 2,000 students after opening in the spring.

Typically, yoga classes integrate a musical sound of sorts, but they tend toward chimes, bells or soft chanting.

Clyde Chafer favors music from Van Morrison in the classes he teaches at Karma Yoga in downtown Cleveland. Chafer said music should be a personal choice, whether it's traditional chanting Hindi music or mainstream pop.

"If it works for a person's class, it's totally up to them," he said, "What's traditional? We build tradition different ways. As a teacher, I also like it to be silent, too. You have to go by the energy of the class."

To reach this Plain Dealer reporter:  
[tflourney@plained.com](mailto:tflourney@plained.com), 216-999-4961