

A traditional ballet barre is anchored to a mirrored wall for students to grasp during leg lifts, pliés and other moves.



KAYANA SZYMCAK/Staff Photographer

Lindsey Lauderdale (left), Frankie Mercurio, Kim Vernon and Capera Clement concentrate on an exercise during a Bar Method class.

HEALTHY LIVING

Stay on your toes

Low-impact barre-based classes make their Dallas debut

By HOLLY HABER
Special Contributor

Traditional high-impact workouts are out of the question for Lindsey Lauderdale, who has injuries to her knee and shoulder.

Recently, she found a way to tone that has its roots in classical ballet and physical therapy.

The low-impact fitness regimens involve small, repetitive movements, light weights, stretching and isometric holds designed to firm the body, improve posture and extend flexibility. They are a blend of dance, yoga and Pilates set to music with simple, precise choreography.

"I've noticed my muscles are starting to heal, and I'm starting to get definition," says Lauderdale, who takes classes at Bar Method, a new fitness studio at Inwood Village.

Many of these programs have "bar" or "barre" in the title because they feature a traditional ballet barre anchored to a mirrored wall for students to grasp during leg lifts, pliés and other moves. They also tout the potential to achieve the lean, sculpted physique of a dancer.

Such boutique fitness studios have been widespread for

years in New York and Los Angeles but only recently debuted in Dallas. Bar Method opened in August, and Beyond Pilates on Lovers Lane and Pure Barre on Greenville Avenue arrived in June.

"What we're discovering is a rebirth of going back to the basics using the ballet barre to create balance and grace in the body, and also the trend toward the boutique studio versus the big gym," says Sadie Lincoln, who created Barre3 based in Portland, Ore. Like Bar Method and

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Barre-based classes make Dallas debut

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Pure Barre, Barre3 is a franchiser with its own variation on the technique.

Some big gyms have taken notice: Equinox's "barre burn" is among its most popular and fastest-growing programs, according to Lisa Wheeler, national creative manager for group fitness. Equinox's Preston Hollow location introduced the class this summer and was quickly forced to move it out of an intimate yoga room into its largest studio.

"We found that more regions had been wanting it, so now it's been expanded to every region in our portfolio," Wheeler says.

"They get great results, and a lot of people are looking for a low-impact workout. At the end your entire body has been trained, and you leave feeling stretched and not beaten down."

Birth of a concept

The concept originated more than 50 years ago when Lotte Berk, a German dancer who suffered a back injury, created a rehabilitative exercise program that emphasized flexibility, core strength and basic aspects of classical ballet.

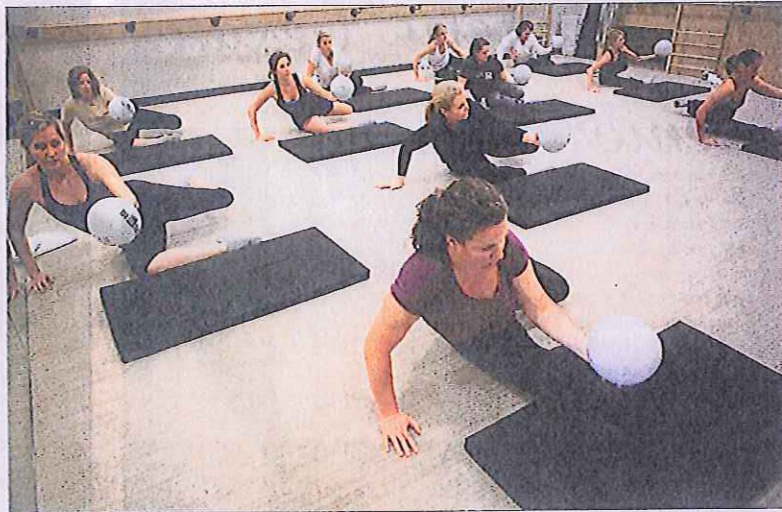
Berk opened her namesake fitness studio in London in 1959, earning a celebrity following. In 1971, American Lydia Bach bought the rights to her name and opened a New York branch.

Spinoffs have since emerged, including Physique 57, which is promoted by TV talk-show host Kelly Ripa.

Bar Method, the first offshoot from Berk's regimen, is rooted in physical therapy. Instructors are especially attuned to making modifications for people with injuries and correcting individuals by name in class, says Lisa Hennings, who owns the Dallas franchise.

"We can work with rotator-cuff injury or herniated discs," says Hennings, an instructor and former dancer.

"You are learning how to stretch your back in order to really engage your core and stand correctly and take the roundness out of the back and release your upper trapezius,



Photos by KAYANA SZYMCAK/Staff Photographer

Lindsay Lauderdale (front) takes classes at Bar Method, which opened in August at Inwood Village.



Frankie Mercurio and other class members use the barres for stretching as well as isometric exercises.

which is where you hold your stress. We are tweaking every single one of your muscles to make sure you are standing correctly."

Cardiovascular workout?

While all the barre variations are strenuous — just think about doing dozens of squats on your toes — some trainers question whether barre classes alone give the cardio-

vascular system enough of a workout.

"My biggest problem with barre was I left not feeling sweaty," says Bethany Meyers, a dancer and gymnast who teaches at Beyond Pilates. So she developed a fast-paced barre class that includes short bursts of jumping and rapid arm and leg movements.

"I wanted that cardio element," Meyers says. "My whole thing is that

the majority of women need to shed some pounds, and to do that you need to eat less or do cardio."

Equinox is also designing a cardio version of its barre class, Wheeler said.

Kimberly Cook, a Pilates instructor at Cooper Fitness Center and a dancer, said barre classes are good muscle toning but are too static for her taste.

"Because I like to move, it didn't keep my interest very long," she says.

Beth Slough, co-owner of Pure Barre in Dallas and a dedicated practitioner, figures people know their bodies well enough to decide whether they need to do additional aerobic exercise. Her classes draw a range of women of all shapes, sizes and ages, including dancers at Southern Methodist University, she says. Unlike most health clubs, Pure Barre dictates modest dress with covered legs and midriffs.

"I had a 71-year-old in here two weeks ago, and she did great," Slough says. "It's no impact, so it's really comfortable for people who don't want to go to a gym."

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