

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

LA, City of Pole Dance Dreams

Katia Kash · Tuesday, August 4th, 2015

“How is your vagina?” says my neighbour on the bench to another girl.

“Crying,” she replies with a chuckle. They exchange a hi-five. One o’clock, Sunday afternoon—a room full of false eyelashes, Plexiglas high heels and full evening make-up in spite of the scorching LA daylight. I’ve trained with pole-dancers in all corners of Europe and the UK, but nothing had prepared me for this. I am in LA, in the pole dance school of my dreams. I am in heaven.

Amidst this coterie of sassy badasses, it feels like I’ve stepped into Moulin Rouge backstage. I fish a pair of golden heels from the “Lost and Found” basket—I am here in transit and I didn’t pack mine. I am the only person without high heels. Makes me think of the days back in London when I was the only one wearing “stripper heels.” I remember those days with nostalgia – the best pole school in the famous attic—now long time shut, sold and converted into an office. I had a reputation. My showcases were censored, because my moves were “vulgar.” British pole dancing is very Victorian. The classes are referred to as “pole fitness” and any reference to ‘stripping’ is a taboo. The classes are seriously expensive and the clientele correspondingly monied. I trained with only one working stripper, the rest were city girls, lawyers, interior designers. A very expensive hobby.

Here I sit watching in awe, and sometimes I think I’ll need to wash my eyeballs later, given how dirty the moves are. It’s amazing!

Here, in one word, is America, and it’s what over the pond we call the “American style.” I used to watch on repeat YouTube videos of performances by the teachers of this school, and they were some kind of icons for us. And now I feel I am inside what used to be a far away dream.

The teacher is a brunette Jessica Rabbit lookalike poured into a canary green bustier. My eyes are glued to her prominent derriere clad in fluorescent leggings. Music starts, the routine begins. Jessica Rabbit is very sympathetic – she goes around the room, restless in her encouragement and cajoling the students. She really cares everyone is doing their best.

“Shake your boobs!” she encourages. She demonstrates the proper way to do it. “See this bustier?” she points her long manicured nail to her canary bustier, “It all used to be encrusted with crystals. I wore it on a tour in China and after three months of shaking, there was not a single stone left! So that’s what I call shaking!”

Jessica is a burlesque artist alongside her career as a professional pole dancer. I think I am falling in love...

Today's class is choreography. The very concept of 'pole choreography' would be dismissed by someone with ballet background and some years in gymnastic training. Yes, it's no ballet, where you have to wear yourself out polishing one move for weeks. It's not even street dance, where you sweat like a bitch. Here they teach you how to stroke yourself while standing bent forward —bum up in the air—and of course you think "Fuck!" but it's something that filters students more than any killer arabesque en pointe. It breaks something inside women — all dream of being able to handle it—that blend of sexiness and exhibition—but in practice not everyone can handle it. I've seen many women capitulate, saying "I don't like rubbing against things in public." or "I just don't like the floor!"

The moves are "easy" —technically easy—but they have to be performed with ease. Jessica says something I totally agree with: "You need to know what you are doing with such confidence, that you stop thinking about it, and then comes the very moment, when you are free from nailing the technique—that space is free for your style." She is a good teacher.

As with 'proper' dance choreography, pole choreography uses associations to help dancers remember the moves. In a contemporary dance routine they can use memos like "slap a fly and throw it over a shoulder," "slash the whip" and "basketball throw". Pole choreography has its own abstract language—all wrapped around "a woman's world." "This dress is Chanel," Jessica demonstrates the move as she moves her hands smoothing the hem of an invisible dress. "I am a good girl," she pouts and writes a circle with her hips. We don't even get to touch the poles but I am not bothered.

I approach Jessica at the end of the class and say I've almost fell in love—she hands me her card and a handful of compliments too.

You acquire most unlikely knowledge in a pole dance class—that it's easy to slide on a dusty floor, allowing the dancer to ditch knee-pads (I've had some bad bad floor burns as well as pole burns); that a bit of shaving cream applied on thighs makes the skin sticky and it grips the pole better.

I return the following day, intent to try every teacher on the schedule this week. Next one is the icon of my icon—the favorite of my beautiful Argentinean teacher from London—the woman who taught me everything about pole.

Brynn is more of a girl-next-door type, yet she has a wild streak. She has bleached white hair and a few tattoos. She turns out to be a tiny one—I imagined she would be taller when I watched her videos. She is a very experienced pole dancer with 17 years of a gymnastic background, and yet she is very approachable, nothing like an arrogant guru. Such is a teaching method here in the States, generally—very encouraging, very attentive. You get a lot of praise, or at least I did.

Everything is possible. America!

I've seen a lot of pole dancing and it can get repetitive. But this tiny pole elfin has some unique moves. I drag a trick—one hand stand with a roll over a shoulder—into my bag of tricks.

My pectoral muscles are crying next day and my left shoulder is dead but I go to the new class with another big name pole dancer. It's a power switch off in the street, and I arrive into a room lit up

with candles and a fairy-light-garland. It's quite atmospheric. It's a spinning pole class with pros, and the teacher plays some perfect music both for the ambiance and the flow that spin adds. I admit I am not up to train with competition level pros, but I've traveled far and I came specifically to get a feel of a class here, with that legendary teacher. She has a short bob—I've known her as a woman with long wavy hair from her videos. Clip on sleek ponytails and big hair wigs are a common performance wear among pole dancers. Lots of moves are based on hair flicks and some beautiful head rolls (my favorite).

She is very sweet. She nurses me around with my tentative spinning pole attempts. I make a video of a few interesting moves. She doesn't mind at all, she helps me film it.

There are three students in this class besides me. A guy and two girls. All I want is to watch them freestyle! They are seriously good. The guy is more of an athletic pole than sleek pole, but also looks natural in this least expected environment of a female realm. The girl who is next to me is helping me when the teacher is busy.

I've made some friends in this school. It was easy. The first friend I made was attending nearly every class a week. She shared her "Dry Hands" with me—"a performance enhancing solution"—and gave me tips to where look for some cool pole shoes.

Windows—slab to slab—face Hollywood Boulevard. Rare pedestrians, although an uncommon species in LA, slow down their walk as they walk by...

The dirty old man inside me want to die happy—women with muscles, women with curves, women with sense of humor, women with style...I think of the words I heard long time ago—"Everyone dances like they fuck." And I can't agree more.

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