



An OULA-Good Time

A REFRESHING, FULL-BODY MISSOULA-MADE FITNESS CRAZE

ARTICLE BRIANNA RANDALL | PHOTOGRAPHY PROVIDED

If you step into an OULA class, you would immediately agree with its motto: “Funnest. Workout. Ever.” College students twirl alongside grandmothers. Top 40 music pumps through the air. People sing aloud, grins plastered across their faces and their arms waving to the beat.

OULA founder Kali Lindner could have launched her dance fitness business in any number of cities across the nation. Los Angeles would have made sense, or perhaps a western town with a bigger population, like Boulder or Bend—two cities Lindner and her husband had lived in prior to Missoula.

Instead, almost five years after its inception, this popular high-energy dance workout program is deeply rooted in Missoula, which is also the genesis of OULA’s name. Why did Lindner choose Missoula?

“I can’t imagine a better headquarters for OULA,” Lindner says. “The people in Missoula are truly following their dreams and living their passions, and are so supportive of others doing the same.”

In fact, community is an integral piece of the OULA brand. Its website emphasizes that OULA is connection, with self and others. OULA is community.

So, what, exactly, is OULA? It’s fun. And sweaty. And fast, and goofy, and sexy, and challenging and invigorating. This fun new

fitness craze is summed up by Lindner as an hour-long class that shifts the focus from how you look to how you feel.

The repertoire of routines includes 400-plus songs, featuring movements from hip-hop to salsa, intermixed with strength-training poses like lunges and squats. Lindner’s choreography combines her experience as a trained dancer, yoga instructor and Nia teacher. The workout is based on learning by doing, rather than stopping to teach new choreography.

“My goal is to create easy-to-imitate moves that open chakras and tone the whole body,” she says. “And that keep everyone moving, too, since you can’t compare or compete if you’re jumping and spinning.”

OULA Fitness has spread quickly from its Montana-based epicenter, with classes now offered across the country from Palmer, Alaska, to Portland, Maine. More than 150 instructors are teaching hundreds of classes per week in cities like Seattle, Minneapolis, Houston, Duluth, Minn., Provo, Utah, Los Angeles, and even across the border in Mexico.

Because the focus is on how you feel rather than how you look, OULA participants enjoy working out in a supportive, non-judgmental setting rather than feeling competitive or image-obsessed, which is a common by-product in other fitness environments. The classes tend to feel more like a party with

friends, especially since many of the participants are regulars who identify themselves as “OULAgins.”

With more than 40 instructors in Missoula alone, OULA is now offered at almost every fitness facility in town, including gyms, the University of Montana, Dickinson Lifelong Learning Center, and the Downtown Dance Collective.

In addition to the original hour-long class, Lindner also expanded her business to include three new programs. OULA Power is an intense 45-minute conditioning class that focuses on strengthening and toning using body weight. OULA Junior engages kids aged 4 to 11 with child-appropriate music and plenty of fun movement. Lastly, OULA X is a monthly dance party held at different Missoula venues that allow OULAgins to let loose in a social setting.

“OULA is about living a fuller, better life and wanting to help others do the same. I’m constantly blown away by the caring nature of everyone involved in OULA,” says one OULA participant.

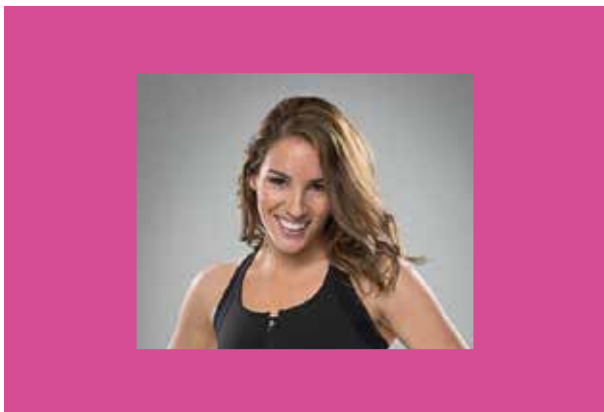
This caring nature is evidenced by the Missoula-based OULA instructors who donate time to mentor and support new instructors across the country. In addition to an intensive weekend training session, Lindner requires that new instructors participate in a three-month-long mentoring program. This ensures the newcomers understand the philosophy of OULA, which Lindner believes is just as important as the actual dance training.

“People donate time to OULA because they believe in it, are affected by it, and want others to succeed at it,” explains Lindner. “You couldn’t find that kind of dedication in most communities.”

This year promises to be another year of growth for OULA.

Last month, Lindner put on the first OULA Retreat, a sold-out five-night “adventure for the soul” in Baja California, Mexico. In the next few months, OULA is offering instructor training courses in Los Angeles, Missoula and Denver, and is also presenting at national fitness conventions in Chicago and Colorado. Meanwhile, Lindner is happy to be raising her family and growing her business in the Garden City.

“I definitely plan to stay in Missoula,” says Lindner. “It’s an inspiring place to work.”



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