

# All 'round workout

*Hula-Hoop classes are a fun way to strengthen your core*

BY CAROL A. FORGET

If the last smile you had while exercising was when you found \$5 in the pocket of your track pants, you need to try hooping.

Nearly 50 years after Wham-O tossed Hula-Hoops onto America's playgrounds, men and women are gyrating with larger, more user-friendly versions called Action Hoops and discovering a core-strengthening aerobic workout.

Loren Bidner, 25, has taught and performed hoop for four years and runs his "Centrifugal Force" class out of a spacious downtown auditorium. With degrees in theater and dance, he is part New Age raver, part trendy New Yorker. Bidner keeps his classes small to allow plenty of room to groove.

"I hadn't picked up a Hula-Hoop in at least 30 years," said Diane D'Angelo, 43, a legal secretary and cabaret singer who likes the relaxed environment of Centrifugal Force. She also practices hoop in the lobby of her building at 6:30 a.m.

At a recent class, Bidner handed out hoops to his 10 students, who are 20 to 50

years old and wear loose pants, tank tops and T-shirts. He makes his Action Hoops out of 1-inch irrigation tubing wrapped with multihued electrical tape.

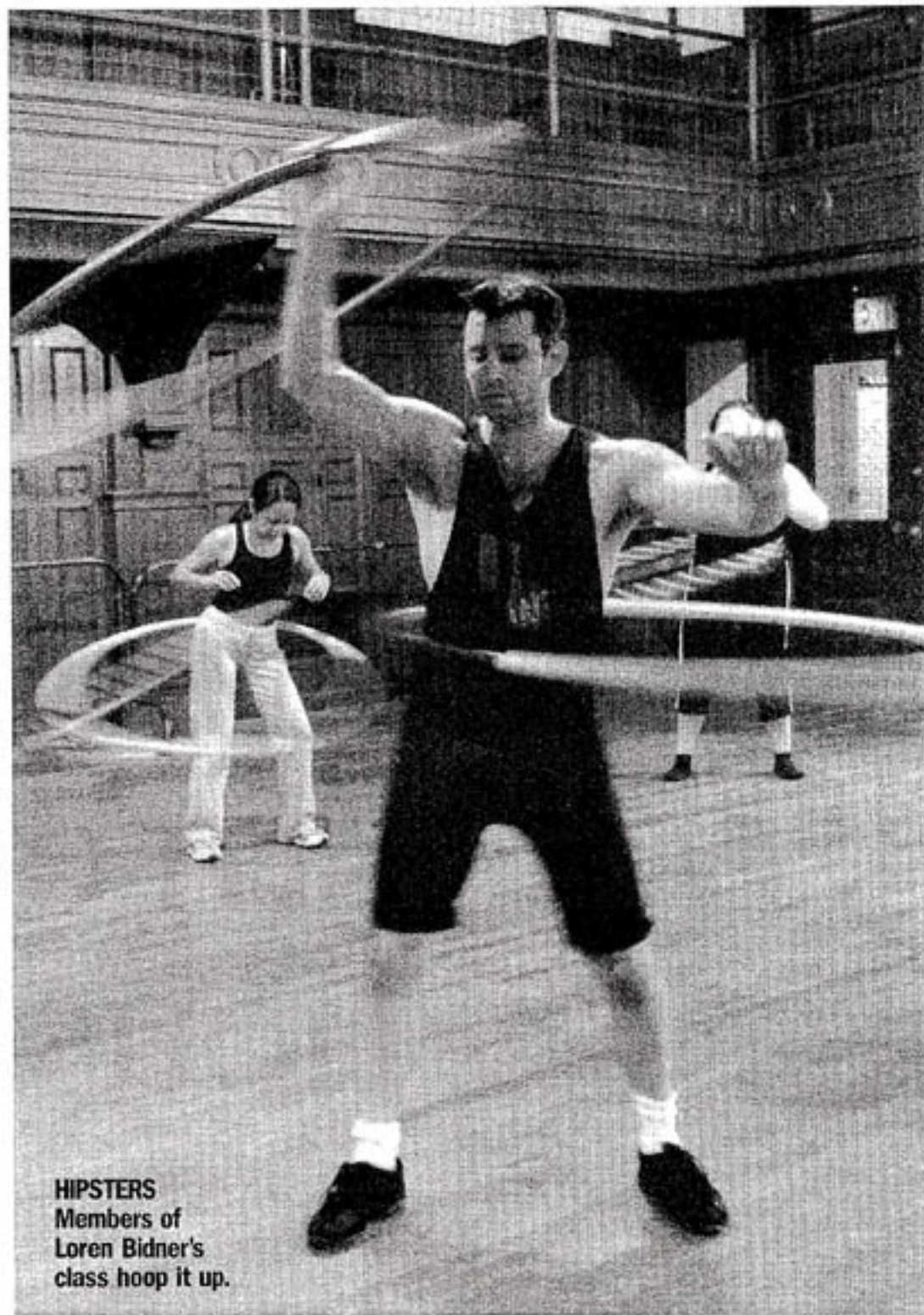
## THE NOSTALGIA FACTOR

The hour-long session begins with Pilates stretches. Students stand with their hoops under their toes, bend forward, pushing the top of the hoop with straight arms, and relax their neck and back.

After more stretching, Bidner tells them to "come to center and find your five," (translation: start hooping and stay at medium speed).

"It's so much fun because it takes you back to your childhood, and it's also demanding," said Sarah Winton, 20, a management associate at an acting studio who has hooped for three months. The slight scoliosis in her back limits her to a low-impact workout. "I feel like I'm standing up straighter and walking without hunching over."

"In hooping, you're building the body from the inside out with these gyrat-



**HIPSTERS**  
Members of Loren Bidner's class hoop it up.

TANYA BRAGANTI

ing and core-stabilizing movements," said Steve Jordan, an educator with the National Academy of Sports Medicine. "The core is the center of your body, defined by your lumbar spine, pelvis and hips.

Most people train only their larger mus-

cles, Jordan says, but to have a strong body overall and make the movement muscles more efficient, you need a strong core.

Bidner ramps the speed up to 10 and then back down to five. The class swivels and sweats. Varying abilities within

the class aren't a problem because of the individual attention Bidner provides. Some students practice whirling their hoops one-handed over their heads like lassos. Others inch forward while gyrating, with the Brazilian percussion music providing the guiding rhythm for their slow-motion samba.

"I lead the class toward a creative dance movement," said Bidner, who uses improvised, mostly instrumental music in his sessions. "If they can focus on the music, it frees up their bodies and gets them out of their head."

## MAKE-IT-YOURSELFER

Before ending the class with yogic breathing exercises, students hoop with eyes closed to the sounds of wind chimes. It's more than a cool down. Removing the visual stimuli forces the mind/muscle connection to work harder and increases the calorie burn, says Jordan.

"I've found that it keeps me in unbelievable shape," said Megan Leff, 29, an assistant location manager for a network reality show. She started hooping 2½ years ago at a String Cheese Incident concert, an event to which some audience members toted hoops. Leff has dropped 10 pounds since starting Bidner's class three months ago.

And how cool is spinning a hoop?

"I love playing with props," said Todd Reichart, an actor in his 40s who juggles and unicycles. He wanted to add the hoop to his bag of tricks, and unable to master the Wham-O model in his basement, joined Bidner's "hula-yogic" class. After seeing the Action Hoops, he bought a coil of tubing and made two of his own.

"One day I'll make hoops for the whole family," he said.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

■ **Centrifugal Force at Children's Aid Society** 219 Sullivan St. (between Bleecker & W. Third, auditorium). Tues., 8-9 p.m., and Wed. 8:30-9:30 p.m. \$15 per session. Reservations recommended. (212) 473-4960 [www.hoopclass.com](http://www.hoopclass.com) or [Hoopclass@hotmail.com](mailto:Hoopclass@hotmail.com)

■ **Trapeze School NY** Hudson River Park, just below Canal St. Sat., 12:45-1:45 p.m. (917) 797-1872 <http://newyork.trapezeschool.com/classes/hoops.php>