

PUNK ROCK MEETS AEROBICS

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No one is likely to mistake either Hilken Mancini or Maura Jasper for an exercise nut.

Long after local health clubs had closed for the evening, these two veterans of the city's arts scene would typically make their appearances: Mancini, 31, as guitarist for the critically acclaimed rock band Fuzzy, and Jasper, 35, as the mind behind the creative bookings at Somerville's recently closed Gallery Bershad.

In their

own way, though, they were keeping in shape. "We would put records on and dance," Mancini recalls with a smile. "We would put on Fugazi and go 'Ah, yeah!' and dance around. We would do this together all the time, because we love music and we thought, 'Why can't we get other people to jump up and down to music they love?'"

Jasper continues the thought, as the two longtime friends are prone to do. "Why is it that you can push the coffee table aside late at night and jump up and down in your living room as opposed to doing it here?"

Here is the Middle East, the Cambridge rock mecca, where the two have recently concluded a prototype class for Punk Rock Aerobics, their collaborative combination of traditional aerobics with a dance workout set to the decidedly untraditional strains of punk music. Beginning Aug. 2, they will lead twice-weekly classes in the club's spacious downstairs performance space, as well as at two locations in Jamaica Plain.

What had begun as a lark in January became more seriously appealing in March, when the two became unemployed within the same week. "For some reason, I was getting these things in the mail about taking an aerobics certification course - I think because I was a dancer," says Mancini, who has studied dance as well as performed professionally. "I would often ask myself, 'Rock 'n' roll life is kinda hard. What other way can I make money other than a bad day job?' So I thought about teaching aerobics and Maura said, 'Yeah, this punk rock music would be fun.'"

With the idea of a fun approach to health as their objective, the two set about creating Punk Rock Aerobics. Throughout the process the two clung closely to the do-it-yourself ethos that guided punk at its inception, in the '70s.

Jasper busily created mix tapes of favorite punk songs while Mancini faced the considerably more daunting task of getting certified as an aerobics instructor. Her preparation culminated in a 14-hour day of both written and physical testing.

"I made Maura help me, basically saying, 'This is our idea. You have to help me do this,'" Mancini says of studying for the written exam. "She helped me make flashcards and read through books to figure things out, like how to figure out heart rate."

"The written part is really hard because other people are entrusting you for the time that they're there," Jasper elaborates. "We've been immersed in fitness books, everything from 'Weightlifting for Dummies' on."