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Introductory Session

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Firming your body with some Latin flair

By **TARA DOOLEY**
HOUSTON CHRONICLE

When the clock strikes six, the beat starts and so do the hips. For the next hour, 19 women and one man in workout clothing and sneakers move to the pulse of Latin dance beats.

From the stage in Sirrom School of Dance's main studio, Raul Orlando Edwards leads. But is he dancing or exercising?

"It's kind of a trick question," Edwards said.

The class, Lose it to Salsa, is one of Edwards' offerings as part of his dance-lesson company Strictly Street Salsa. Twice a week, Edwards turns the moves he teaches to club-goers into exercise.

Edwards' goal is an aerobic workout that strengthens abdomens, backs, legs and arms and increases endurance and flexibility. He sets dance-inspired moves to music that sounds like a party to entice even the staunchest exercise-phobes, he said.

"It's less intimidating because it's fun," He said. "Don't get me wrong, there is work involved."

The class always uses salsa and merengue moves and music, said Edwards, a Panama native. At the end of each class, he adds other Latin music and dance. A recent class called on flamenco, bolero and the Cuban dance, Pilón.



SMILEY N. POOL : CHRONICLE

Raul Orlando Edwards leads a Lose it to Salsa exercise class at Sirrom School of Dance in Houston.

LOSE IT TO SALSA

When: The next 8-week session begins Sept. 4. Classes are Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Cost: \$80 for one class a week; \$120 for two.

Where: Sirrom School of Dance, 5570 Wesleyan, Tuesdays; The Dance Place, 3300 Chimney Rock, Thursdays

Contact: 713-524-3938; strictlystreetsalsa.com

trainer. They focus on changing their exercise and eating habits.

Some students are drawn by the exercise and weight-loss goals. Others are inspired by the music and dance.


Trish James, 42, stumbled onto it about a year ago while looking for a dance class. "You actually move every part of your body, parts you didn't even know you could move."

For Raul O. Garcia, 33, a native of Spain, it's the music that motivates the exercise. "The Latin music has percussive elements, and I just want to get up," he said.

There's also a Weight Loss Challenge, which includes seminars by a nutritionist and a

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