

CIRQUE DU WORKOUT

Aerialates takes core strengthening to a whole new high-flying level

By Elizabeth Millard



The St. Paul-based Core Pilates Studio has the usual contraptions of the trade — machines with padded seats, straps and names like “The Cadillac” — but off to one side is an unexpected addition to the space: a trapeze.

“When people see it for the first time, they get a kind of excited look, like a kid about to play,” notes Elizabeth Skwiot, a Pilates trainer and creator of Aerialates, a workout that combines ab work, balance and upper body strength. “Once they’ve taken a few classes, they tell me that they go to playgrounds between workouts.”

Although the low-hanging trapeze (used for static exercises, not for swinging) might inspire nostalgia for afternoons on the monkey bars, don’t be fooled into thinking this is an hour of child’s play.

Skwiot starts with Pilates mat exercises, and it gets more intense from there, as students learn to hang properly from the trapeze — a tactic that requires keeping the shoulders down and the back muscles activated — and then flip upside down and do even more con-

More advanced students can tackle the “tissue,” giant strips of fabric that draw on bicep power and abdominal control.

The idea for the class sprouted from Skwiot’s long history with aerial arts. After a childhood filled with “hanging from anything, even scaffoldings,” Skwiot became a professional aerial performer, and a teacher at schools like Trapeze Arts in California, and Xelias Aerial Arts in Minneapolis. In mid-2009, she realized that the equipment she used for her aerial work would combine beautifully with standard Pilates exercises, and add a serious dose of fun as well.

The full-body fitness seen from only a few sessions has kept classes filled, but Skwiot is planning to add more, particularly for the chilly winter months when even the playground is too frigid for a quick visit.

“It’s kind of addictive,” says Skwiot, with a laugh. “Once you spend some time integrating a sense of play with a serious workout, it’s tough to go back to just lifting weights.” ☘

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