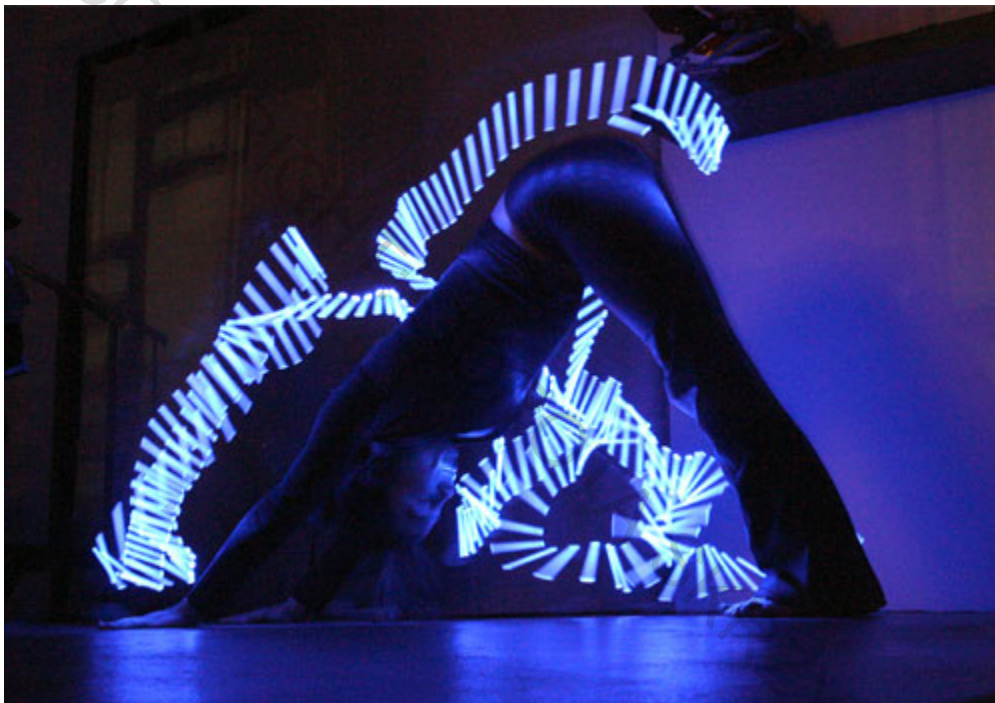


YOGA IN L.A. WITH MICHELLE GOLDSTEIN

On busy Ventura Boulevard, there is a sign of tranquillity. It's orange with etched outlines of a lotus flower and it's called Rising Lotus Yoga; it's here that I met my new favorite yoga teacher: Michelle Goldstein.

In the world of yoga the statement "favorite yoga teacher" is not necessarily attached to a rating scale. Yoga is a personal expression so explaining a favorite teacher can be as intricate and complex as explaining who you are. Perhaps the best place to start then is to draw a picture of the Michelle Goldstein experience, and then interview the yogini.



Michelle-Goldstein-Doing-Yoga.jpg (46.81 KB) Viewed 410 times

A Michelle Goldstein class is a thoughtful evolution of movements, never the same experience twice, with the one common denominator being that you sweat a lot—because you are deep in a pose or because Michelle is triggering you to think deep within a pose. I have taken late evening classes with Michelle that physically tested your strength yet concluded with a healing sequence of breathing and chanting. I have taken lunchtime classes that were effervescent yet sublime midday therapy. It is these perhaps these yin and yang qualities that draw me to Michelle's classes; her classes not being one thing or another, but a combination of principals that work the body, mind, and spirit.



Michelle-Goldstein-Doing-Yoga-II.jpg (30 KB) Viewed 377 times

L.A. Yoga—is that a bit of a dichotomy? A lot of people have this impression of L.A. as being superficial and full of ego; does yoga take on a different meaning in L.A.?
Just the contrary, it helps bring the whole city into balance, and L.A. is actually the epicenter of yoga. I moved here from the other side of the world to do yoga. Many of the most amazing teachers on the planet are here. Even though there is this impression of superficiality, there are also a lot of laid back, open-minded people on the west coast; active, health-conscious people.

What's it like being a yoga instructor in L.A.?

A real challenge because there are so many amazing teachers here. I hate to use the word “competition”, but there are so many options for people to choose from, especially with so many yoga studios with full schedules. Starting out as a newer teacher in L.A. is hard, but once you start connecting with people and building groups it's an amazing experience.

What is your goal as a yoga teacher? What are you hoping your students will get out of your class?

Ideally to create a space for people to come and explore their boundaries—discover their boundaries. I'm also a big proponent of heart opening; spreading the love. Vinyasa yoga in particular is a heart opening practice.

I've never been a huge activist or proponent of screaming out about the troubles of the world. I believe accessing through communities is the best way to make changes, and I believe that teaching is an opportunity to cultivate that change.

Let's talk about yoga versus the gym...do you get more, the same, or a different workout from pumping weights or doing cardio?

Two totally different things and the two can balance each other out. Going to the gym

and weight training can help strengthen your practice. And I love cardio, although I'm more of an outdoor cardio person—I love taking long hikes.

I believe *just* going to the gym doesn't penetrate the same levels of health as yoga. If you don't stretch, things are going to tighten up. Yoga increases your range of motion, and maintains a deep breathing practice which is essential for long term good health. Yoga can also turn into a spiritual experience.

There are different types of yoga practices? What is your preference and why?

I love Vinyasa because I love the experience of the flow and I love how it's such a perfect microcosm in the macrocosm of life. The flow of the yoga poses explore how we transition through life. Vinyasa emphasizes breath, which I believe to be extremely important for good health. There is something about the dynamics, the energetics of Vinyasa that leave me in a space of feeling amazing. I've done all different types of yoga, and they all have their benefits and limitations. Vinyasa really seems to work for me.

What has been your journey to teaching yoga?

It was something that I kept getting pushed into and resisting for many years. I didn't want to teach, I wanted to study and practice. When I was travelling through Turkey I had friends who told me I should teach, and I wanted to live in Turkey. I had never done any training, but two weeks later I was teaching in one of the top studios in Istanbul. I started to teach, it started to come out in me; it was very organic. I've heard this story from many yoga teachers—that it's a calling.

You have done yoga all over the world? Where did you have the most fulfilling or life-changing experience?

I had a particularly deep and profound savasana in Luxor, Egypt. I had an amazing meditation in Dharamsala, India where I felt my heart well open to the wonders of life in a huge profound way—that stands out as a major experience. And the countless beaches, patios, rooftops, and balconies that I practiced on all over the world. Each one is a tiny thing that becomes a part of you.

How important is music to your yoga experience?

I am very much into the music. Music can be used as a distraction but also as a vehicle to deepen the yoga experience, influence the flow. I am really interested in the effects of sound on our bodies—the vibration of sound is really powerful. I think it's important to take time everyday to celebrate life, and music has always been a part of that celebration for me. I think it adds this whole other perspective.

What is your advice for a first-time yoga practitioner?

Come into it with as open of a mind as possible and be gentle with yourself, especially if you're in a mixed level class. It's hard to start something new—it's a huge thing. And your first class is going to be your hardest. There are going to be all these people that are better; there's always going to be someone better, that's how we learn, that's how we teach, that's how we grow. An open mind is the most important thing. Open mind, open heart.

What is bliss to you?

Bliss is a space completely occupied by love. Where there is love, there is no fear, no worry, no anxiety, no anger, no sadness...it just is. It's all pervasive. To be in that space is just bliss.

Where can people find you? On the web? In what studio?

On the web at <http://www.michellegoldsteinyoga.com>; Rising Lotus in Sherman Oaks; Equinox in Woodland Hills; I teach a yoga and qi gong fusion class at White Tiger Kung Fu on Westwood blvd. My schedule and studio locations are on my website.

Thank-you Michelle, and namaste.

COPYRIGHT: DOROTA SKRZYPEK 2008.