



HOW HAS MUSIC SHAPED THE FITNESS INDUSTRY?

We asked a number of innovative and esteemed fitness pioneers to share their views on how music has shaped the industry. The distinguished group included the following:

- **Ken Alan**, lecturer, department of kinesiology, California State University, Fullerton
- **Lawrence Biscontini, MA**, wellness and spa specialist
- **Jay Blahnik**, 1996 IDEA Fitness Instructor of the Year and 2006 Can-Fit-Pro Fitness Instructor of the Year
- **Shannon Griffiths Fable**, fitness educator and owner of Sunshine Fitness Resources
- **Gay Gasper**, fitness educator and group exercise director at Planet Image in Union, New Jersey
- **Maureen Hagan**, vice president of operations for GoodLife Fitness Clubs and director of education for Can-Fit-Pro
- **Petra Kolber**, 2001 IDEA Fitness Instructor of the Year
- **Sara Kooperman**, chief executive officer of SCW Fitness Education and founder of the MANIA fitness instructor training conventions
- **Angie Proctor**, executive director of the Aquatic Exercise Association
- **Julie See**, president of the Aquatic Exercise Association

Q: How has music evolved in the fitness industry over the last 20-plus years?

Alan: Pre-1985, workout music was available only on vinyl records. Organizing music required thoughtful preparation. To maintain group energy, you literally threw one record off and another one on the record player. This necessitated six to 12 breaks during class to change songs. The music didn't last long enough to build progressive combinations.

Biscontini: Music used to be primarily for background in all types of fitness classes. Today, although that still occurs, there is also another branch of fitness which weaves music . . . into the workouts. Instructors have found ways to use music to deepen a sense of awareness of self and promote an inward focus by choosing certain types of instruments, volume and orchestrations.

Blahnik: Years ago, classes were primarily dance exercise, so the music had to be mixed at specific speeds, depending on what you were teaching. With the expansion of group exercise into cycling, yoga, Pilates, sports-inspired workouts, treadmill classes and even rowing classes, the music variety has expanded beyond anything I could have ever imagined. Some classes still require the music to be mixed for best results, but other classes might only need music purchased directly from iTunes. We are not always "exercising to the beat" now, and that changes everything. Now I teach with an iPod and have hundreds of classes stored in a device that fits into the palm of my hand!

Proctor: Music has become one of the strongest motivators in exercise adherence and is largely responsible for the success of physical fitness activities, not only in group exercise settings, but also in personal cardio training and strength training.

Q: In what ways has the professional fitness music industry contributed to exercise?

Alan: There's no question fitness music companies have been an asset to instructors. They have made [the arduous task of] finding and selecting music less painful, less costly, less time-consuming and perhaps less stressful. They do [a lot of] the groundwork for you; they select songs, determine bpm, blend songs into a continuous mix, and remove extra music counts for consistent phrasing. Their catalogs also introduce new music to instructors.

Kolber: The quality, content and feel of the music have improved by leaps and bounds. The area [in which] I have seen the biggest improvement is vocals; these days it can be pretty hard to distinguish between the original version and the "sound-alike," which is so important when teaching.

Kooperman: There is a great deal of musical variety available now—different styles and techniques. This makes it easier to create, and succeed at developing, new programs.

See: Having 32-count phrasing makes program design and instructing so much easier and the outcome more professional. By recognizing the dynamic nature of fitness and constantly

evolving bpm, arrangements (e.g., circuit vs. continuous training vs. cycling) and music styles, the music industry has been an integral part of the continued success of group exercise. Having a wide selection of music choices prevents me, as well as my students, from getting bored with training—even after 25 years!

Q: Is music a vital part of classes and programs?

Blahnik: Music can help you execute movements at the proper speed, and it can even help you get through the toughest parts of a workout! Music can also have a calming effect for classes like yoga, and an "I want to kick, punch and jump" effect for classes like kickboxing and sports workouts. It can make you smile and lift your spirits!

Fable: Music showcases an instructor's personality and individualizes the exercise experience. The way an instructor works with the music can make magic, as it can [eliminate the need] to count repetitions or time exercises, thus providing quality motivation and cuing time. Music can calm and soothe and seal a workout; there is nothing better than finishing off a fabulous class with a well-thought-out, specifically chosen cool-down track that leaves students feeling amazing when they walk out the door!

Gasper: Music is one of the most important ingredients in group exercise classes. Music inspires us to move and keeps us together as a group. Music is the greatest motivation to move and work out.

Hagan: The number-one reason music has become such a vital component is that it motivates and inspires participants to move, express themselves, feel/explore rhythm and energy, and release stress/inhibitions. Exercisers of all ages are able to "lose themselves in the music" and reap more health benefits (including mindfulness) by being fully engaged in the workout, whether it be yoga, dance or weight training.

Kolber: Your music selection can make or break a class. It can add energy and excitement. [Choosing] your music well . . . makes your job easier. Music is the heartbeat of the class—constantly in the background but a vital part of the exercise experience.

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