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Ladies' Night

Going out with the girls is a time-honored ritual. And it's a blast.

BY OLIVIA GUNN

STAYIN' ALIVE

One of my very best friends from college is in town, and there's no better reason to be dancing at Bubba's Sulky Lounge. Marcus is the life of every party, and in his Michael Jackson *Bad* leather jacket, he's catching every eye on the floor. He's taking the girls out for the night, and I'm feeling like Bianca Jagger strolling into Studio 54.

We walk to Bubba's, not exactly knowing what we're in for. I've heard tales of a *Saturday Night Fever* light-



Out&About

Every Thursday is Ladies' Night at Margarita's on Brown Street.

up dance floor, but I hate to get my hopes up. Upon arrival, we're all checked for '80s gear—I'd settled on faded black jeans and a jean jacket—before being allowed to pass. Those who don't do throwback have to pay to enter Friday's '80s Night.

Inside, Bubba's could pass as a flea market. Antiques, music memorabilia, and Elvis surround the never-ending bar. If there is a theme, they lost it years ago. We order a round of cheap beers before heading to the—*Oh, my God, it's a light-up dance floor!* Marcus gasps before pulling me into the crowd and taking over the floor. He really makes quite the scene, and soon he has a circle of fans watching him. It was bound to happen. Marcus is a trained dancer/actor, and bringing him to Bubba's might as well have been giving him a starring role in a Broadway play.

He's on fire, and soon I've lost him to another. No hard feelings, because I'm drenched in sweat and could use a breather. I've had many full nights in Portland, but I must say, Bubba's has been the hottest by far.

SHAKE IT

I'm quite aware that not everyone would jump at the chance to take a belly dance class because, quite honestly, I wouldn't have, either. But my neighbor Audrey, who'd been taking ballet classes with local dance instructor Rosa Noreen, has invited me to a free belly dance class with Rosa.



Rosa Noreen leads a class at her India Street dance studio, and performs in belly dancing regalia (inset).

I'm hesitant at first, envisioning a room full of hard abs shimmying about as I try desperately to keep up. But, after some convincing and the promise of wine afterward, I decide. *Why not?*

Along with several other women, we arrive at Wildwood Medicine on India Street just in time for the evening class. It seems as if we've all just finished work for the day, and from the vibe of the room, I sense everyone is slightly nervous, not knowing what to expect.

Rosa, our warm, smiling leader, immedi-

ately introduces herself and offers dolmades as we wait. She sets up the music, and when it seems as if everyone has arrived, she instructs us to grab a hip scarf from her bag.

Once in our belly-dancing uniforms, we form a large circle, all admiring one another's wrap choice. Rosa starts us off with stretches before the basics and explaining to us that all of our bodies are beautiful and that we should never feel obligated to hide them.

It's not long before we're all in time, shimmying and popping. At one point Rosa has us write our names using our hips, and even though I really don't



Work up a thirst on the light-up dance floor at Bubba's.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY ROSA NOREEN; REBECCA WALDRON; MEREDITH PERDUE, MAPANDMENU.COM COURTESY BUBBA'S SULKY LOUNGE, PHOTOS BY AMY GAUTHIER(2)



know what I wrote, I finish with an exclamation point.

CORNER OF PINE & DIVINE

After our evening of belly dance, Audrey and I take a walk to the West End for Bonobo's Wood Fire Pizza. We order the Caspian, figuring the roasted tomatoes and basil keep it

healthy, and two glasses of red wine.

Tonight the pizzeria/cafe is uncommonly slow, and we sit at the bar with the server's beau and the owner. They talk about the new apartments being built across Brackett Street and looking forward to the customers they may bring.

Audrey and I sit talking art and debate whether or not one of the pieces depicts a cow or wolf. Talk about gallery snobs.

It's not the flashiest girls' night, but we've accomplished learning a new dance style and getting in our glass of red for the day with one of the best pizzas in town.

Bonobo's wood-fired pizza and a glass of red feels like health food after a workout on the dance floor.



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PORTLAND AFTER DARK

PERFORMANCE

There's nothing like an impromptu night out with a close friend, especially when you haven't seen one another since Christmas. After purchasing two tickets for the Lorem Ipsum show at Space Gallery, I reach out to Shannen, my go-to for anything last-minute.

Shannen is immediately up for a girl's night, and we plan to meet at Space early for drinks and catching up.

I've always kept an eye out for the parties, shows, and films Space offers throughout the year. Especially after being snowed in all winter, Space has the perfect events for anyone needing a little culture outside of Netflix.



The Great Balls of Fire ham it up in the lanes at Bayside Bowl.

We arrive a half hour before the show and make our way to the bar, ordering beers before taking our seats in front of the black box theater. The show tonight is a Caryl Churchill play, and Shannen and I can't help talking college, as we both studied theater. Soon, we're both inspired and planning our own productions. Good friends and theater will do that to you.

After the show we're left with plenty to discuss: money, power, and love. It's all out on the floor, and we're devouring it. Before we head our separate ways on State Street, we've planned out next outing, even though we both know the best nights can never be planned.

SET 'EM UP AND KNOCK 'EM DOWN

"We used to be a reading club," admits Debby, a member of the Casco Bay Bowling League. "We decided to do this be-

FIL KOTISHEVSKY

cause no one was good at it. It's hard to maintain a group with a focus. We have these great aspirations, and this has come the closest to working." She smooths her turquoise bowling shirt and heads to the lane, revealing her team's name: The Great Balls of Fire.

Debby, a close friend of the family, had mentioned her bowling team in passing before, so on this otherwise boring Monday night, I figured I'll finally join the girls.

I arrive to find them near the illuminated BOWLING sign near the back of Bay-side Bowl.

We approach seven women, all in matching shirts and bowling shoes to accent. As I introduce myself they all gather around, each with a zinger to outdo the next. "We thought she was lying," one of the women says of Debby's warning about my visit before ordering that the camera stay in the car.

As they make their way to their designated lane, I order a Brooklyn Lager and take a spot behind their team.

It's the league's season playoffs, and every lane is full. Some of the teams look much more experienced than others, but they all seem to be playing for fun.

As the waitress makes her way around the floor, one of Debby's teammates orders a glass of red wine—not your typical bowler's poison, but if you're playing as The Great Balls of Fire, you might as well do it with class.

It's not a lively game, I'll admit, and there are more gutter balls than not, but I have the most fun watching the teammates laughing among themselves. Their opponents, visibly younger, greet one another with daps (fist bumps) and sing along to the background music, but there's still no denying The Great Balls of Fire fit right in. Simply because they're having fun.

By 10 o'clock, I'm too tired to stay much longer, even though it looks as if the party's just getting started. I hug them goodbye and admit I can't keep up with them. As I leave the lane, it's as if I've never been there. They're back to their laughs and silly dance moves, never once fretting that their score on the board leaves something to be desired. ■

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