

# Dancing the 5Rhythms®

Caroline Sherwood meets the Somerset dancers and teachers of the uplifting, therapeutic 5Rhythms dance movement

**G**abrielle Roth, founder of the 5Rhythms dance movement, was born in 1941 and grew up on the East Coast of the US. She describes herself as a “dancer with a starving poet’s body”. As a child, she was fascinated by the apparent polarity between body and spirit. At seven she glimpsed a ballerina through the window of a dance school and decided to devote her life to this. Though she was taught by nuns at her Roman Catholic school, on Sundays she hid in bushes outside the local Fundamentalist Church, revelling in the animated rhythms of preacher and singers. During college years, a knee injury curtailed her dancing.

Escaping to California, she became a masseuse at the Esalen Institute. Among the luminaries to emerge from that creative cauldron of human potential

development work, was Fritz Perls, the founding father of Gestalt therapy. He invited Gabrielle to teach movement to his students to liberate them from their cerebral fixations. One day, despite her injury, Gabrielle danced till she was drenched in sweat. When she stopped, she found her knee was cured.

Prompted by a friend’s comment about how much she had done, and how little she had documented, Gabrielle decided to “go more deeply into things. Instead of just being aware of the patterns of movement that seemed to connect us all, I named them and created specific ways to enter their fields.” She named the five rhythms through which improvising dancers characteristically moved: flowing, staccato, chaos, lyrical and stillness – and so the ‘wave’ was born.

“Mine is the art of inspiring people to turn themselves inside out, transform their suffering into art, their art into awareness and their awareness into action,” she says. “Prayer is like letting go of everything that impedes the inner silence. Each of the five rhythms represents a state of being, and being is the language of existence. Movement, then, is our medicine and our path to ecstasy. So The Wave is how I pray.”

5Rhythms is one of the movement forms that attracts as many male participants as it does women. Mike attends classes in Glastonbury and says: “I so look forward to 5R classes. The music captures my being in an instant! I

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find that 5R provides for me a limitless space to move with ease and effortless fluidity. What may unfold are deep emotions and glimmers of associated locked-away memories... it tunes me into the various shapes of who I am and can be. After each class I emerge with more spring in my step and readiness to dance forth to the beat and challenges of life.”

When Agate, a full-time mum, first danced 5Rhythms, “...it was an absolutely fantastic experience! I felt my body back. These parts I forgot I have.”

Hannah is a nurse and has been dancing for several years: “I am a very different person to the self-conscious, shy one who first stepped onto the dance floor. It has helped my confidence and improved my self-esteem, as well as my connection with others. It’s like therapy

without words and is fun!”

Sue Kuhn teaches 5Rhythms in Bath and Frome and is “passionate about the connection of body, mind and soul, about people, movement and this enquiry into life.” An impressively qualified artist (Camberwell School of Art and the Slade) Sue has exhibited in London.

Like Gabrielle Roth, with whom she trained, Sue was also involved in the human potential movement of the 1970s. Later she worked as an international workshop leader, counsellor and psychotherapist and has incorporated 5Rhythms into work in hospitals, rehab centres and schools. “The Rhythms have helped me through challenging times,”

Sue reflects, “through heartbreak, desolation and joy. They have given me more flexibility, more breath, more love and a way home to myself.”

Jean Rankin has been teaching a weekly class in Glastonbury since 2009. A linguist and professional interpreter, Jean later trained as a magician and ceremonialist within the Sweet Medicine SunDance Path and began dancing the 5Rhythms in 2000. “This was mainly for fun and enjoyment,” she says, and she was surprised when the idea to train with Gabrielle Roth, in order to teach 5Rhythms, suddenly occurred to her.

“I would like to take 5Rhythms out of the ‘new age’ ghetto, where it was never intended to stay,” Jean says, “and introduce it to different groups in the community – anywhere there is a need for a new and effective form of health creation and stress release/relief and people are open-minded and brave enough to try something different.” □

**Classes in Somerset**

Bath and Frome: [suekuhndance.com](http://suekuhndance.com)

Bristol: [shapeshift.co.uk](http://shapeshift.co.uk);

[in-rhythm.com](http://in-rhythm.com)

Glastonbury: [jeanrankin.com](http://jeanrankin.com)

Tell us what kind of dance style you are passionate about at [somerset.greatbritishlife.co.uk](http://somerset.greatbritishlife.co.uk)



**Above left** Gabrielle Roth  
**Above** 5Rhythms dancers  
**Left** Jean Rankin, a teacher of 5Rhythms in Glastonbury  
**Right** Sue Kuhn, teacher of 5Rhythms in Bath and Frome  
**Below left** A class at Glastonbury Town Hall  
**Below right** 5Rhythms dancers



PHOTOS: CAROLINE WHYMAN