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STRENGTH Of FOCUS



Svetlana Baklanova Has Found A Way To Connect Mind, Body And Soul **BY JUDY COLE**

SVETLANA BAKLANOVA IS TALKING A MILE A MINUTE. HER BROWN EYES CONVEY A SENSE OF magnetic energy and enthusiasm that is contagious. A native of St. Petersburg, Russia, by the time she was 19, Baklanova had three separate business enterprises under her belt. A major accomplishment for one so young, but not surprising when you get to know her. Baklanova is a painter, a fashion designer, a poet, a singer, a mother, a wife and a practitioner of HoraNova, a discipline akin to yoga, that she has brought to America from her native Russia.

As a child, Baklanova showed early signs of things to come. “I had different talents. The first one my family noted was my singing, but because my mom was raising me on her own, she really couldn’t do anything to help me pursue it. Then I started drawing pencil portraits when I was 6 or 7. I wasn’t a very good-looking child, so I was trying to get attention,” she says with a laugh.

While Baklanova soon graduated to painting — a passion she pursues to this day — her next venture was sewing. At the age of 12, she began to make her own clothes. “I didn’t use patterns or books,” she explains. “I believed that by thinking about it on my own, I could figure it out. I started doing leather, suede and fur — because it’s *cold* in Russia.”

Eventually, Baklanova parlayed her talents into a fledgling fashion career, although in Russia, that was easier said than done. “It was a tricky thing,” Baklanova recalls. “I made friends with the managers of some secondhand stores, and I would ask them to hold some of the leather pieces until the prices came down as low as possible. Then I’d buy them, cut them up, and put them back together.”

When Baklanova’s mother realized the budding designer had such potential, she arranged for her daughter to study fashion design. Baklanova attended technical school in St. Petersburg for three years, then started working in a fashion house there. “I loved it, but the salary was so low, I needed to find a



From left: Heather Harvey, Svetlana Baklanova and Olga Muller model Baklanova’s fashions.

way to earn more money to keep making leather clothes,” she says. “It had become like a company. People were coming to me with ideas. I would sketch them, take all the measurements and sew the garments.”

Then Baklanova hit a wall. “At the time I was trying to expand the business and have a collection made, there was a *putsch* (revolution),” she says. And that was that. When the political climate settled, Baklanova launched her second business, a tourist service for foreign students and their families who wanted to study Russian culture. “I organized everything. I had people who were working with me, and it was very successful — until the next *putsch*,” she says.

Chapters Two And Three

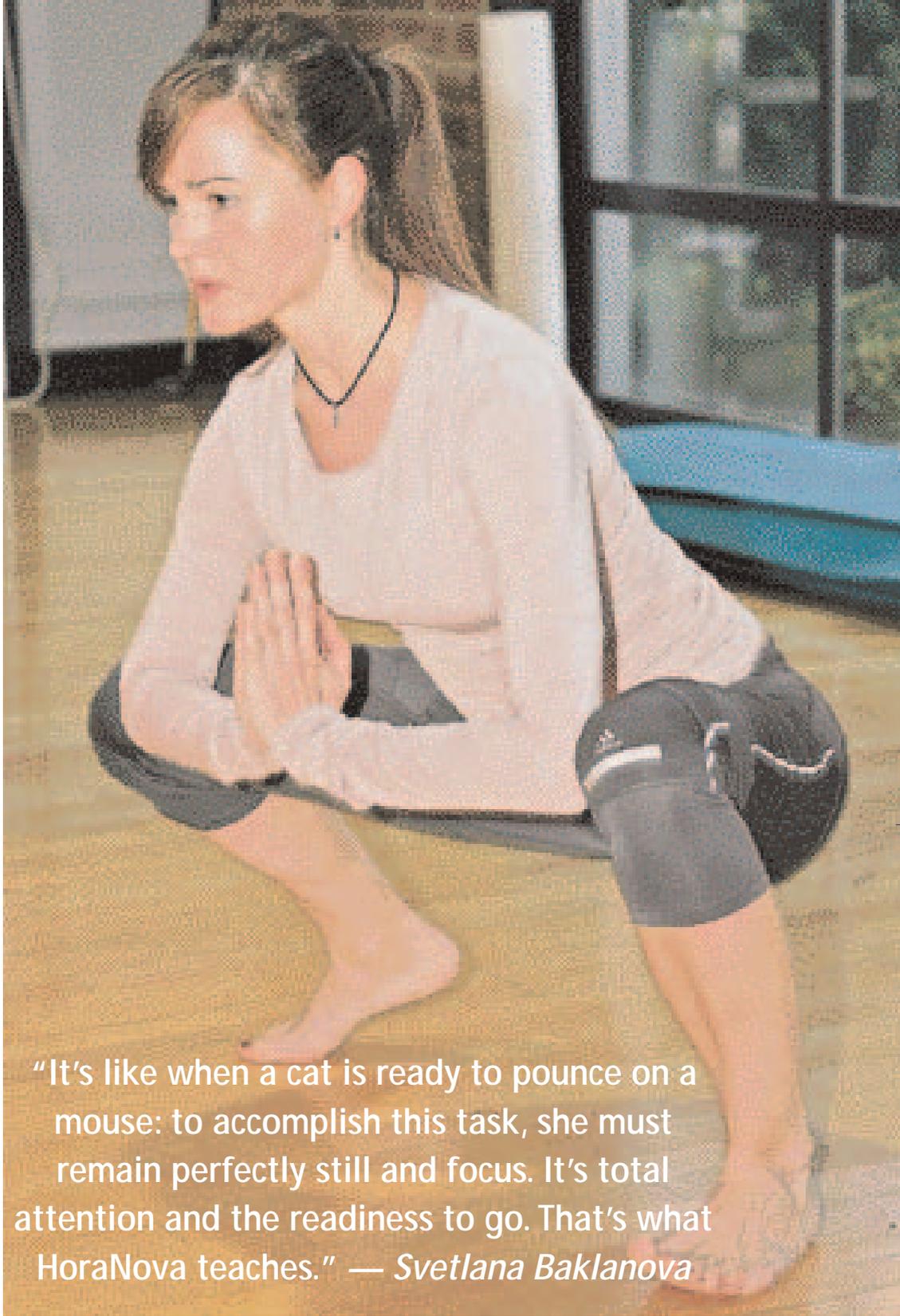
With her mother and sister to support, Baklanova next joined friends who traveled to and from Finland importing cars to Russia. “Russian-made cars just weren’t that good. Anything from Europe or Japan — even used — was in high demand,” she says.

While in Finland, Baklanova made valuable contacts, and, at 19, embarked on her third enterprise. “I’d met people at a Finnish company who asked if I would like to try my hand at interior design. They couldn’t afford someone expensive, and they thought I had a good vision. The project went very well. I was in and out of Finland for a year-and-a-half.” Then the Russian government put on the brakes. “They stopped the flow of foreign cars because no one was buying Russian cars,” Baklanova says.

Back in Russia, Baklanova set about reinventing herself once again. “With all the *putsches* and business crashes, I desperately needed to move on,” she says, “but there were not many things I could do in Russia — especially as a woman. Men do not take women seriously. If you don’t have someone powerful — a father or a husband — to back you, you can pretty much forget it.”

A New Beginning

For the first time, Baklanova found herself spinning her wheels. “All of my friends were telling me I would have to leave Russia



“It’s like when a cat is ready to pounce on a mouse: to accomplish this task, she must remain perfectly still and focus. It’s total attention and the readiness to go. That’s what HoraNova teaches.” — Svetlana Baklanova

to move on,” she says. Although she hadn’t planned to come to the United States — much less stay — Baklanova arranged to spend time with an aunt and uncle in Texas. “My uncle had a company in Houston,” she recalls. “He and my aunt had a big house to take care of and a young child. We made an agreement that I would stay with them, go back to school, and help around the house.”

The fact that she spoke no English did not deter Baklanova. With nothing more than a backpack and a Russian/English dictionary, she set off to seek her fortune. “My mother told me to pay attention to words that were big and red >

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because they were probably important," she says with a laugh. "The first word I looked up when I got to America was 'EXIT.'"

Baklanova was soon fluent enough to enroll at Houston Community College as a student of fashion design. At the same time, in an effort to further improve her language skills, she took a job at Houston's Galleria Mall. "I'd been advised that to learn the language, I'd have to meet people here and work with them," Baklanova recalls. "I got a job at a clothing shop as a salesperson. When I walked into the store my first day of work, there was a guy standing at the counter. He asked me, 'Are you Russian?' When he found out I was, he said, 'How come I don't know you?' So I asked him, 'Do you know every Russian in the Houston area?' We went out for coffee and have been together ever since."

The Cookie Crumbles

After completing her courses at HCC, Baklanova launched a small manufacturing firm, producing everything from interior design items and lingerie to evening clothes and wedding dresses. Eventually, she started her own line. "I went to the Dallas market and had my own collection," she says. "Then I decided to expand to Russia. I wanted to bring the work home. I had lots of shows there, and a lot of media attention."

Baklanova and her beau were riding high. "He got a job with Enron right out of college," she says wryly. "Then he proposed, and I got pregnant. Seven months later, we lost everything. Thank God his parents were in town and we were able to stay with them."

Baklanova's husband spent the next 12 months looking for a job. "He got an offer here, so we came to Charlotte," she says. Unable to reconcile long-distance commerce with new motherhood, Baklanova closed her Texas concern. For a while, she concentrated mainly on her painting, but another door soon opened where the last one had closed. A trip home to Russia provided an opportunity to complete a circle in Baklanova's life begun years earlier.

Full Circle

"When I was growing up, my good friend's mother had breast cancer," Baklanova says. "She went through chemotherapy, but eventually, the doctors told her that she would not survive more than another month or two, and that she might as well look for alternative treatments because that was really all that was left. We were all trying to find something to help her, but she just got worse and worse. By happenstance, she heard of HoraNova. She started going to classes, and she began to get better. It was a long process, but she survived."

During their trip, Baklanova and her husband were visiting the sister of the cancer survivor. This woman was now leading the HoraNova practice. While in her home, the couple happened to see a video of the master Hora performing what looked like martial arts. Baklanova's husband was mesmerized. "My father-in-law was a karate instructor," she says. "My husband was just amazed. He thought it was trick photography, but the woman told us the video

had been taken with a hidden camera. I had no reason not to believe her because I had known her all my life.”

Baklanova’s husband had to return to America, but he urged her to attend a HoraNova class to find out if what he’d seen could be real. Baklanova agreed. While intrigued, Baklanova had no immediate epiphany. “I didn’t understand much of what the instructor was saying,” she recalls. “It was interesting, but I didn’t really get it.” After returning several times, however, she started to notice things. “We all have thinking processes that run in our heads over and over, and wear us out,” Baklanova says. “There’s something you must deal with, but you can’t come to a conclusion. You want to get to the answer faster, but you don’t know how. I realized that if I came to class needing to make a decision, by the time class was over, I had made one — and every decision I made seemed to be correct. Then I noticed I started to have more energy. Nothing seems to wear me out anymore.”

From Student To Teacher

For Baklanova, the next step was organic. She began bringing people from the United States to Russia to experience what she was experiencing. “It wasn’t something you could find anywhere else,” she says. “I’d always exercised, but nothing else in my life had ever given me such a full understanding.” Eventually, Baklanova became so deeply involved in the program that the master Hora invited her to train as a teacher. >

HoraNova At A Glance

PINNING AN EXACT DEFINITION ON WHAT HORANOVA ENTAILS IS DIFFICULT. PART yoga, part healing touch, the discipline was founded on a tradition that goes back for centuries. “It is a set of exercises that works to focus attention on understanding what’s going on in your body,” says Baklanova. “It’s not really a conscious process, it’s an intuitive process.”

Developed in Europe by the master Hora (translated from the original Armenian, *khora* meaning “depth”) sometime in the ‘80s, the practice began as “the use of psychological and physical influence over individuals through martial arts.” In the process of teaching Europeans, the master Hora discovered the Western mindset was at odds with the Eastern principals he sought to impart, and was compelled to redesign the practice to be more attuned to a rational Western mentality. The result: HoraNova.

The practice of HoraNova has been credited with being able to rid the body of a number of ailments, both physical and mental, however, there is no current medical data to support those claims. Baklanova is the first to take HoraNova out of Russia, and one of only nine students trained to teach the discipline worldwide. While HoraNova may be of benefit, those with medical conditions are advised not to suspend any conventional treatment without first consulting a physician.

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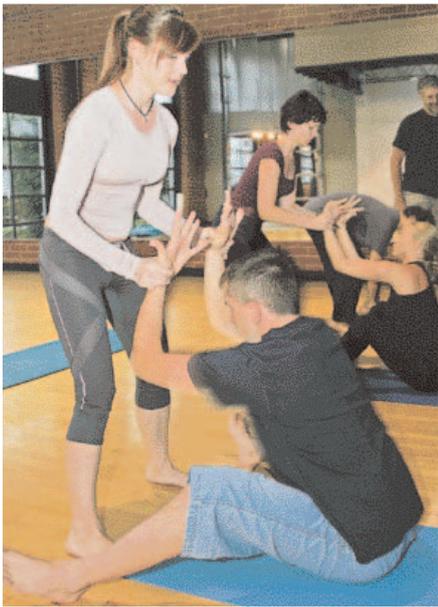


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HoraNova is a hands-on practice aimed at unblocking inner energy.

Just what the practice entails is somewhat ephemeral. “I work around the spine. I work with energy,” says Baklanova, “but there’s no point in really ‘explaining’ because it isn’t really something you can see. Human

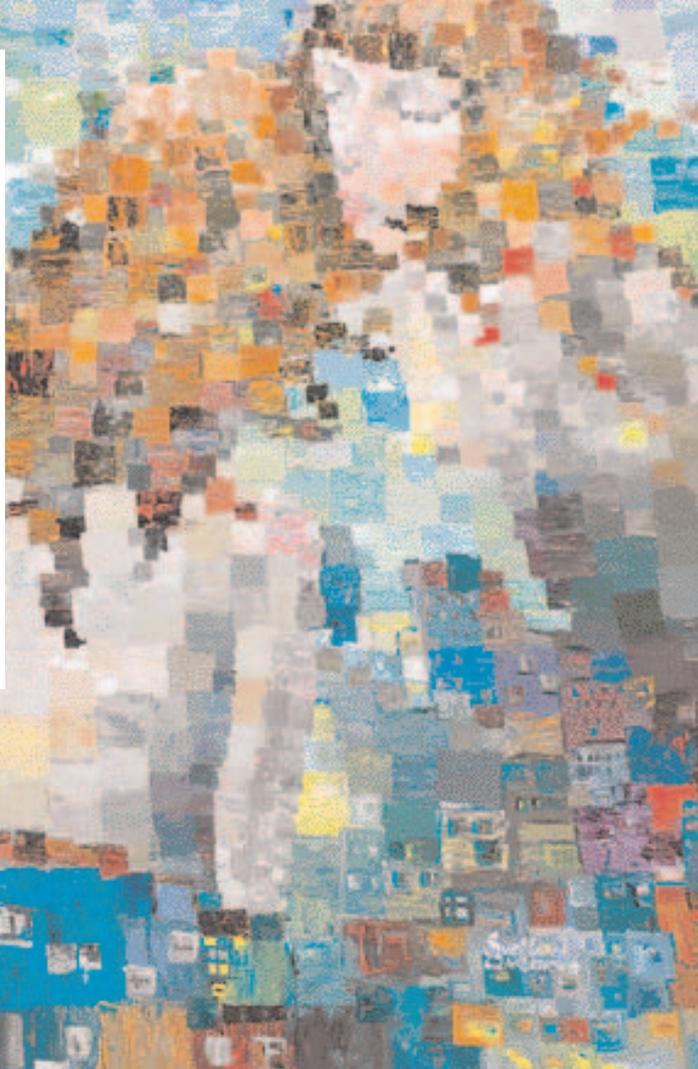
beings are made of water. We work as a process of energy. That’s just nature. We go from being one cell through all the evolutionary stages of existence in a nine-month period to become what we are. It’s a knowledge we all have within us, but we aren’t ‘thinking’ about it. If one cell knows, then all of our cells know. In each of us, there is a physical key to activate this memory. I am only placing people in the position to do that.”

Baklanova maintains that anyone can benefit from HoraNova, regardless of age, sex or physical condition. “All the exercises are either done standing, sitting, walking or lying down,” she explains. “After the initial cleansing, you work on strengthening focus. At first, it’s almost like teaching a baby. We show you the ‘how,’ and you simply repeat it. What you achieve comes as a result of that repetition.” However, HoraNova is not a quick fix or a magic bullet. “This is a practice that works over time,” she explains. “You will see benefits and changes as you go along, but when people ask me, ‘How much time do I have to put into this before it will work?’ I tell them it’s an ongoing process.”

While that may seem to fly in the face of our “have it all, have it now” mentality, Baklanova says that mindset is the very reason

WantToGo?

Svetlana Baklanova leads HoraNova classes at the Athletic Club South End, 2102 South Blvd. in Charlotte, Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6:30 to 8 p.m. and Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. For information, call 704/737-5353, or visit www.horausa.com.



An example of Baklanova’s “Pixelpointillism.”

HoraNova can offer so many positive benefits to those trying to balance career, family and the thousand details of everyday life. “We have so much information that we cannot possibly take it all in,” she says. “HoraNova helps

you speed up the absorption process, so you can take out of life what you really need. There will always be wants and needs, and because of that, there will always be choices. From little everyday things to big things, such as major corporate decisions. As you go through this process, you’ll learn to trust yourself and your instincts, and you will make more and more correct choices.”

“If one cell knows, then all of our cells know. In each of us, there is a physical key to activate this memory. I am only placing people in the position to do that.” — Svetlana Baklanova

Based on “feminine principals,” HoraNova, Baklanova believes, holds special benefits for women. “What kind of body you have, what kind of mind you have, what kind of soul you have — these cannot be divided,” she says. “It is a trinity. Only a woman can do a thousand things in an hour. That’s why we have intuition and so many abilities. What we need is to be able to organize our energy. It’s like when a cat is ready to pounce on a mouse: to accomplish this task, she must remain perfectly still and focus. It’s total attention and the readiness to go. That’s what HoraNova teaches.” **TCW**