

Jami Liverman, the buff pastry buff

BY SUSAN SCHWARTZ, THE GAZETTE MARCH 9, 2012



Pastry chef and caterer Jami Liverman teaches a spin class at the MAA and occasionally bakes for the riders. On this recent day, it was vanilla cupcakes.

Photograph by: Vincenzo D'Alto, The Gazette

MONTREAL - High-intensity spin classes and high-calorie cupcakes: except for the word “high,” they would seem to have little connection.

But to Jami Liverman, one is as much a part of his world as the other. Indeed, both featured during a recent midday spin class in a studio at the downtown Club Sportif MAA – together.

The buff Montreal pastry chef and caterer was there to lead riders on an intensive 45-minute competitive ride, as he does each week, through drills, sprints and a climb. On the podium not far from his bike was a large footed milk-glass cake stand bearing two dozen large vanilla cupcakes.

To Liverman, 33, his culinary efforts and those he makes in spin class “are intertwined – different as they are. I go into that same meditative state, whether I am spinning or kneading dough with my hands or doing something else with food,” he said.

He took his first spin class a dozen years ago and continued spinning after moving to New York City, where he completed both the cooking and pastry programs at the Institute of Culinary Education and lived and worked for four years. He worked at restaurants including the Harrison in Tribeca and Union Square Café, catered private dinner parties, worked for a catering company and sold desserts to pastry

shops. On his return home, he spent three years as pastry chef at Olive + Gourmando, then left the happening Old Montreal bakery and café in 2009 to branch out into other catering and other ventures. But he has continued to spin – and qualified at the MAA as an instructor.

“Catering is my livelihood,” he said. “Spinning is my love, my passion.”

He calls his style “more edgy” than that of many spin instructors. To him, spin class is about cardiovascular exercise – and then some. “You can come in and do the class to get fit and then leave – or you can go to a deeper place in yourself and recognize that and open yourself to it ... allow your mind to go somewhere you normally don’t go.”

Spin class did that for Liverman, helped him to go to that deeper place, and he says that one goal in giving the weekly class at the MAA is to return the favour. He relies a good deal on music to connect with people, to help them “to go into a meditative state, a hypnotic state. I do the class for that aspect. There are people coming in who are struggling with issues: here you are able to release and forget them.”

The music on his iPod, everything from vocal house to Latin to disco, is intended to help take riders to that meditative state so that “hopefully, they will be able to leave the class feeling either more spiritual or just simply refreshed.”

Music is important to him; at home, the music is always on when he’s working. The other day, for instance, he put Tom Jones on because he was in the mood for something peppy; other times, he likes calm and soothing music. “What I listen to depends on what I am cooking – and on where the light is,” he said. When it is dark out, for instance, he might turn to music by Yasmin Levy, an Israeli singer and songwriter who brings a modern interpretation to medieval Judeo-Spanish song.

That Wednesday at the MAA, he started the spin class warm-up with upbeat music. “I like international, Latin and Middle Eastern music,” he said. During the drills, there was some disco, including the Glorias – Gaynor and Estefan. Later, as the climb began, he pulled down the blinds to darken the room and help the riders to focus. “Tap into your senses ... no judgment,” he called out. “Think about whatever you want! Let it flow! Don’t hold things in!”

The Pet Shop Boys played We All Feel Better in the Dark for the seated portion of the climb as the riders pedalled – and sweated. At Liverman’s call, they upped the resistance on their bikes for the standing portion of the climb, carried out to Middle Eastern and vocal house music.

It’s an imaginary competition, of course, the riders against themselves: they determine just how much they exert themselves, the workout influenced by such factors as how quickly they pedal, the resistance of the spinning bike’s adjustable flywheel, and whether they’re seated or standing. But it’s a competition nonetheless. And it’s intense.

At the end of the class, they stepped off their bikes and wiped them down with disinfectant spray, thanked Liverman – and some left with a cupcake. He seemed pleased by the reaction – on both

fronts. Having braved the spin class, my first ever, I felt entitled to take one away with me, too: it was an amazing cupcake, spread with

salted vanilla frosting.

Liverman has an interesting take on the now-ubiquitous sweet. Except for vanilla, he believes that “cupcakes are so over. ... The vanilla cupcakes are the only ones I do; to me, they are classic – like a navy blue blazer or a pair of Levis.”

The cupcakes are available at Café Vasco da Gama, on Peel St., along with his caramelized brownies and other treats; the vanilla cupcakes are also at Zone Orange on St. Pierre St. in Old Montreal.

In addition to furnishing baked goods to local establishments, Liverman works as a personal chef and a caterer. He offers party planning services in which he assumes responsibility for every aspect of an event, including music and flowers as well as food: to that end, he calls himself a party architect. As well, he and Montreal personal chef and caterer Nicolina Servello have collaborated on projects including Table, a pop-up restaurant in which they take care of the food and wine pairings as well as the other elements of the evening, including decor, music and ambience.

On the baking front, one of Liverman’s latest efforts is the naked wedding cake – a tiered cake that’s nearly free of icing: there’s some between the layers to keep them together, but that’s it. “Fondant is so 10 years ago,” he said. To him, the stiff icing can lend a contrived look to a wedding cake; his naked cakes, on the other hand, have what he considers an “authentic” look, one that “reminds everyone of childhood.”

And guests at Montreal dinner parties have tasted his almond, pistachio or chocolate financiers, divine two-bite sweets that taste like a cross between sponge cake and a moist teacake; he tops his with sweetened mascarpone cream and berries. Financiers are apparently so named because the pastry chef who first made them, in the late 19th century, had his shop near the Paris stock exchange.

Liverman occasionally indulges in his sweet creations himself: he enjoys eating well and he and his partner, architect and interior designer Carlos Miranda, love to entertain: the dining table in their Old Montreal loft seats 10 and the morning *The Gazette* was there, it was set in shades of white and dark blue for a dinner party that evening. There were financiers and a four-tiered naked cake on the menu for dessert.

But he is disciplined; he eats only when he is hungry, he said – and he exercises. In addition to the weekly class he leads at the MAA, he participates in classes and works out at the Peel St. fitness club. Liverman has run the New York City marathon twice and Boston once: his best time was an impressive 3:02.02.

*For more on **Jami Liverman**, go to www.jamiliverman.ca. Liverman and an eight-layer version of his naked cake, along with tasting samples, will be on hand at Bridal Boudoir Affair 2012 on Sunday, from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. at the Hyatt Regency Montreal, 1255 Jeanne Mance St., Level 4. Madeleine*

Kojakian, founder of Maddy K Weddings & Events Atelier, is the show's host and producer. Admission: \$20. Visit www.bridalboudoiraffair.com.

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Working on one of his barely-iced, or naked cakes, Montreal pastry chef and caterer said he considers the stripped-down cake to have an "authentic" look, one that "reminds everyone of childhood."

Photograph by: Dario Ayala/THE GAZETTE

