

Nude Attitude: Aaron Star's Hot Nude Yoga

DVD Review By Alan Bennett Ilagan

What is the hottest piece of yoga apparel today? Your birthday suit. Bring your mat and towel, and leave the clothing and cologne behind. Aaron Star's Hot Nude Yoga program takes the ancient practice of yoga and strips it bare – quite literally. Since 1998, Mr. Star has been offering nude yoga sessions - from the beginner to the advanced yogi - and all are done sans clothing.

Whether you've packed on a few too many holiday pounds or started the season off over-stuffed, it's a new year, and a good time to move towards a healthier body. Though yoga might induce yawns from some, this is no ordinary yoga program. Hot Nude Yoga may change the way you've looked at the ancient practice, bringing with it a modern spirituality and cutting-edge sensuality that has been missing.

Yoga is basically about the body and breathing. Not coincidentally, so is sex. Rather than increasing the disparities between body and soul, Mr. Star's yoga program strives to unite the two. In so doing, the sensual aspect of our physical being can't help but be brought along for the ride. It also makes practical sense if you think about it: yoga is ideally done in loose-fitting clothing, so the body is not constricted. What could be looser than nothing at all?

"First of all, being nude in and of itself is so totally freeing!" Mr. Star claims. "And being nude just heightens anything that you are experiencing. One of the goals of Tantra is to become more aware sensually, and to increase one's own sensitivity. This is so we can tune into our body's energy and thus channel it to other areas. Some call this energy our latent potential, others call it erotic or sexual energy; I just call it energy."

Being naked is - hold your judgment - a natural extension of focusing on the basics. It's also a way of opening up completely, a way of extending one's vulnerability, and a way to self-awareness. Our clothing has become our armor, a way of distancing ourselves from others. Mr. Star's yoga method attempts to abolish that distance, and in that respect is surprisingly effective.

"There is a rawness which becomes exposed when we shed our clothing," he explains. "The process of yoga is a journey inward. How we get there is by shedding our ego. So many of our egos show up in how we dress and in what we wear. By taking off our clothes, we are taking off a part that defines who we think we are. I always say that in my

class you never know if someone is a starving artist or a Wall Street broker. In the end we are all the same. That in itself is so beautiful.”

Nudity as the great equalizer? Perhaps, but other concerns rear their heads at a nude yoga class. There’s always the possibility of an errant erection whenever a bunch of gay men get naked together. How does Mr. Star, for want of a better term, handle those situations?

“You don’t,” he says. “I mean, the erect penis should be celebrated, not beaten up. Besides, most people are so into what they are doing that they do not know what is going on around them.”

Mr. Star advises to focus on the breathing when Mr. Happy starts doing upward-facing dog. When questioned on whether or not he himself has ever raised an invisible puppet during class, he confesses, “No. I think I am too much in a teacher mode to get turned on in a class.”

A down-to-earth guy who enjoys Haagen Dazs coffee ice cream and wears 2xist briefs (when he’s wearing clothes), Mr. Star is, at the moment, surprisingly single. He attributes that to a certain restlessness, and his drive and need to keep on the go. When asked what he looks for in a mate, he replies, “Adventure, and someone that can keep up with me. I find that is a really hard thing to find. There are not many people who can. And I say that without any ego. It’s just true. I also look for someone who really has a strong sense of self because of what I do.”

Mr. Star started Hot Nude Yoga five years ago, and at the first class eighteen people showed up. The number doubled for the next class. Since then it has grown, and has included regular retreats to locales as varied as Costa Rica, Hawaii, and London.

Currently, Mr. Star is offering a set of four DVDs that allows those of us who can’t make it to a class or retreat (or are too shy to contemplate it), a chance to see what goes on in a nude yoga class.

The first DVD, appropriately entitled *Virgin*, is basically the beginner’s session, or for those who want to refocus on basics. The second, *Strength*, is faster-paced and relies on at least some basic background and knowledge of yoga. *Partner* is the third DVD, featuring practices meant to be done with another person. The final disc, *Tantra*, (available only as part of the box set), is the most sensuous of the series, ending with a clean-up shower scene. (Apparently a little sex goes a long way in selling self-improvement.)

In each of the DVDs, Mr. Star comes across as a soft-spoken gentleman, with an ever-ready smile and an eager laugh. He’s got the calm, easy-going manner of a yogi down

pat, and is a natural leader. His attitude brings a relaxing serenity to the sessions, setting students at ease. It doesn't hurt that he's not bad to look at either.

Technically speaking, the production (like its background soundtrack), is a curious cross between soft porn and new age spirituality. With the flattering lighting of a Chelsea loft and the way the cameras caress every body part in sight, there's a voyeuristic feel to the proceedings. Though the camera work is always interesting, it occasionally gets in the way of the instruction (sometimes you can't see the pose through the penis).

Like many yoga DVDs, this one could stand a little more focus on breathing practices - especially the beginner's course - though such instruction would probably not hold up well to repeated viewings. A basic background on yoga proves to be helpful, but not entirely necessary. Let's face it, the naked guys are what we all came for, and if people get a few yoga tricks out of it, so much the better.

The yoga program itself, once you manage to focus on it, is a substantial workout, particularly when you move beyond the beginner's course.

The focus here is definitely on the nude gentlemen and what is going on between them. Though touch is sometimes part of the exercises (particularly in the Partner and Tantra episodes), it is of a more spiritual nature rather than anything remotely carnal. According to Star, that is very much the intent:

"I always felt a lacking in the gay community. We go to bars, the gym, the back rooms, sex parties, hook up and have release. It's great, it's fast, and it's easy. Too easy. Regardless, when I came out at 18, I had a sense that this was not healthy. I also fantasized about just hanging out with a bunch of beautiful men in a naked environment and nurturing each other. Massaging, cuddling, etc., without sex. I think that as a gay community, we are losing our "spirits." I saw that very loosely, because it is a bit of an ambiguous term. But I have seen so many people be nurtured and healed so quickly in these sessions. They make gigantic leaps."

In a world of disconnect and distance, where most people arm themselves with detachment and suspicion, a nude yoga class is a way to strip away the barriers in a safe, accepting environment. That may explain some of its immense success in larger cities, where such protection is a way of life. And in the gay community on a broader scale, where it's still necessary to be somewhat guarded and careful about the way we live our lives, a few hours of unobstructed naked relief may be what many of us need.