

Cross-training: Benefiting from Pilates

“The first time I experienced Pilates was when I was visiting friends in Los Angeles almost 30 years ago,” explains Artistic Director Karen Kain. “I had heard that dancers from New York were doing Pilates, but no one knew about it or was teaching in Canada at the time.”

“Today I encourage dancers to explore how Pilates can help them physically and mentally for their career,” she continues. “Pilates is an ideal form of complete body conditioning as the focus is on strengthening the deep support muscles and balancing all muscle groups around the joints of the entire body.”

For dancers, Pilates is beneficial for turnout and increases strength and power. “By re-balancing muscular groups,” explains STOTT PILATES® co-founder Moira Merrithew, “dancers increase range of movement and flexibility while also increasing strength and control throughout this greater range of movement.”

After an accomplished career with the City Ballet of Toronto and the Atlantic Ballet Company, Moira Merrithew went on to retrain and certify as a Pilates instructor under the tutelage of Romana Kryzanowska at the original studio founded by the late Joseph H. Pilates. Ms. Merrithew and President and CEO Lindsay G. Merrithew, in collaboration with physical therapists and sports medicine professionals, spent more than a decade updating the original exercise method to include modern exercise science and spinal rehabilitation principles to optimize safety and effectiveness.

Created by Lindsay G. Merrithew, the V2 Max Plus™ Reformer’s vertical frame pulley system and exclusive retractable rope system replicates the multi-dimensional movements of daily life. More specifically, overhead movements can be done in order to focus on balance, ankle, knee, hip, shoulder and spinal stability.



Je-an Salas, former Soloist and qualified Fletcher pilates teacher, was trained by STOTT PILATES® to instruct dancers on the V2 Max Plus™ Reformer; she works with approximately 6-12 dancers per week. “In ballet variations and corps de ballet work, one dances the combination only on one side, either all to the left or all to the right,” explains Ms. Salas. “This develops muscle imbalances.”

“Pilates helps with the awareness of the body, improves balance and symmetry, and develops strong, stretched and lengthened muscles and a functional spine. I cross-trained in Pilates for 10 years, experiencing the benefits first-hand. I want to share this skill with other dancers.” ■

— Kerrie Lee Brown, STOTT PILATES



Je-an Salas on the V2 Max Plus™ Reformer.

Making Dancer Wellness a Top Priority



A dancer in prime health will be a better performer and can lead a more balanced personal life. They are more likely to be physically and mentally stronger.

— Dr. Darrell Ogilvie-Harris



Top: Lisa Robinson. Bottom: Dr. Ogilvie-Harris. Photos by Sian Richards and Louise Tremblay.

Did you know that when the National Ballet dancers return to the studios after their summer break one of the first things they do is get their annual health assessment? This is part of regular dancer wellness screening, a top priority for the National Ballet since Karen Kain was appointed Artistic Director.

This official health programme for the dancers is designed to prevent injury and health problems, improve performance and endurance and contribute to a longer, more productive dance career.

“The National Ballet’s Dancer Wellness Programme includes extensive physical testing resulting in a health plan of action customized for each individual dancer,” explains Dr. Darrell Ogilvie-Harris, long-time Consulting Orthopaedic Specialist for The National Ballet of Canada. “An individualized plan may consist of cross training, specific exercises such as Pilates or physiotherapy, nutritional counselling and psychological support. The idea is to provide the dancer with the means to be their best.”

The Dancer Wellness programme also includes a series of seminars every year on healthy living specific for professional dancers, given by recognized experts in the field. Last April, for example, Richard Gibbs, MD – former dancer and Supervising Physician for San Francisco Ballet – was invited to Toronto to give a talk about his model facility: the San Francisco Ballet’s new Dancer Wellness Center, an innovative building that provides a full gym, whirlpool and a medical team at the workplace for the dancers.

“Hopefully the future of this programme at the National Ballet will lead to more focus on the optimal health of each individual, with a huge gain to the group as a whole,” continues Dr. Ogilvie-Harris. “Healthy dancers are more creative and spectacular for audiences.” ■