



ICDF Networks

June 2018

Network for Dance Teachers

Greetings in Jesus' Name!

We are blessed this Newsletter, to have articles from two teachers on very different topics! The authors cover issues that are important to us as dancers and teachers. They are well worth the read! I hope that you will enjoy these and go to <http://www.icdf.com/en/networks/network-newsletters> for the full version of Anna's article. Thanks to Anna and Abiodun for their insights and stories. What a blessing it is to hear from you and to read what you are accomplishing! In addition I have compiled an article on stretching, based on the latest research found in the medical profession, which I trust will be helpful to many.

Please continue to send in articles that will inform, encourage and equip us as we teach!

God bless you all,
Sue Hodson, Assistant Network Coordinator



Teachers training seminar in Cape Town, South Africa.

The photo shows Beth Bluett-Spicer from Australia, training dance leaders in the Living Dance International syllabus. Beth is the Network leader for the ICDF Network for Dance Teachers.

To find out more about the Network <http://www.icdf.com/en/networks/dance-teachers>

To visit the Blogs <https://icdfnetworks.wordpress.com/category/dance-teachers/>

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Dance for Seniors

My journey into dance for older people really started in 2015 when I was asked if I would be interested in choreographing some movement for a short film, for the Pavilion Dance South West Joie de Vivre film competition. The theme of the competition was “dance for older people”. Up until this point I hadn’t given much thought to the specific idea of dance for older people but, since I had just turned 50 myself, I decided to embrace my new golden age and be part of this project. The finished film, Rise & Shine, (<https://3rdstagedance.com/screendance/>) did very well in the competition and was eventually screened at Sadler’s Wells in London alongside a performance from the wonderful Company of Elders (<https://www.sadlerswells.com/learning/learning-performing/company-of-elders/>). I had seen this company perform once before and was impressed by their theatrical vitality and quality of storytelling.



Photo of Anna Arnold taken by Malcolm Rae

As a Christian dancer, teacher and choreographer I was used to groups of mixed ages and accepted without thought or question that there would be people in their senior years attending workshops and dancing for the Lord. When we dance in praise and worship it is our spirit which governs our movement - we are not separated or measured by age or ability. This is not the case in the secular dance world, where sadly age and ability all too often restrict opportunities for older people to dance and perform. Professional dancers are deemed to be past their prime at 40 and community dancers are often left to migrate towards the back of the studio so they don’t get in the way of the younger, more energetic dancers. In the Company of Elders however I saw a group of dancers who embraced and championed their ages and this led me to consider what opportunities there were in my own city for older dancers.

I began, in partnership with the company I had worked with on the film project, to explore dance for older people in earnest, attending training and workshop days and gaining accreditation in teaching Dance for Parkinson’s. Armed with years of dance experience and this fresh insight into dance for older people, I soon discovered that having the desire and the skills to run classes is one thing but finding venues, availability, funding and advertising to actually launch a new class is much harder ... especially if that class is aimed at older people.

No matter how fit and supple we try and keep ourselves, the reality is that our bodies change as we get older and we have to be aware of the body’s increasing limitations and how we treat it. With both the Ballet Seniors class and the Dancercise class (where some of the participants are in this older category) that I teach, I aim to create exercises that will help improve physicality, mobility and balance, whilst keeping the above parameters in mind. As I teach, I try to explain what each part of the body should be doing and feeling and what areas we are trying to strengthen or stretch. The extent of the approach outlined here will of course depend on the ability and mobility of individual participants.

Whilst it is important to keep everyone safe, we should not underestimate what can be achieved with good teaching and encouragement. Older dancers want to be challenged just as much as their younger counterparts and will enjoy the opportunity to try new things. As participants have continued with these classes I have witnessed an improvement in balance, posture, strength and grace. I love to see these older people grow and blossom in their dance and it has given me great joy to watch their progress. You may even have seen one of my dancers in a short film that went viral last year: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WkMMv7LuI7g> As you can see we have a lot of fun too!

By the grace of God and his immense love and kindness towards me I have found that through this venture he has given me my heart’s desire to both dance and serve Him. What a loving Father we have.

Anna Arnold

Anna is a member of the Christian Dance Fellowship of Britain. She teaches a wide range of dance styles in secular and religious communities including her own developed classes of Dancercise and Ballet for Seniors.

Teaching Praise Dance - a testimony from Nigeria

Dance teaching for me transformed from being an activity to a ministry. I teach basically in schools, mostly primary schools and a few secondary schools. In our developing world, discoveries have shown that kids love to dance or to be engaged in activities that enhance performance or showcasing, e.g Music and Drama. This was one of the motivations that encouraged me to teach in schools and work out dance presentations for them to display during school events. Teaching the youngsters dance instils in them some element of discipline, endurance, flexibility, self esteem and creativity.

For a very long time, my best period ever were the times I spent teaching children dance class. No wonder Jesus restricted the adult from chasing them from him. They have a receiving heart and are willing to learn new things. Besides teaching in schools, I also teach in churches. I'm the dance ministry coordinator in the teenagers arm of my church where we teach them how to minister effectively through dance, how to create choreography to songs, etc. My involvement with youth ministries like Youth For Christ has also given me chance to train lots of youth and young adults in dance ministry.

My dance career started when I was a teenager. I really love movement art and demonstrations, that led me to join martial art class and I took classes in karate and taekwondo but thanks to God that reordered my steps by granting me a greater vision. He saw my likes and created something better for me in the dance ministry. To all dance teachers and choreographers I would like us to know that our ministry goes beyond the physical, its not a mere physical activity but a spiritual activity for the Bible says bodily exercise profit little.



Photo: Taken at a recent conference in Nigeria

Listed below are few things choreography helps us to achieve:

1. It helps to understand the lyrics of songs
2. It helps to arrest people's attention
3. It helps in understanding the message of the sound track
4. It is used as a bait to bring people to Christ
5. It creates opportunity for young people to serve in the ministry
6. It lifts the spirit of people and opens one's imagination
7. It stimulates meditation and enhances creativity

So it's a great tool in the hands of God Almighty.

I teach a wide range of dance like contemporary, Hip hop, Salsa, African dances, Wazobia dance, Liturgical dance, Interpretative dance, etc. Recently I and a group member started working on Gospel Pop. Gospel Pop is a form of dance culture that embodies different aspects of fast movement in accordance to beat and rhythm - normally danced to gospel high and upbeat. Its an energetic bodily expression to music and used as a form of orthodox praise. All the dances have their target audience but the unique thing is that its all encompassing.

Dance is biblical, social and has some health benefits. The spiritual health benefit is also of importance as it allows the body to flow in line with the spirit, most especially during a spontaneous section thereby the body is brought under subjection.

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Abiodun Babalola

Stretching For Dancers

Stretching is one of those subjects where the content seems to continually change. If you are over 50, then you will remember the 80's where 'bounce, bounce, bounce' was the norm. Then in the 90's we were told that sustained stretching was the best for dancers. I decided to find out what 2018's research has found. The following is a summary of the latest information regarding stretching. I have found it to be middle of the road, encompassing much of what we know and adding some information that is new to me. I hope that you will find the information useful to your teaching and usable for your dancers.

Sue Hodson

Ballistic stretch: A brief, bouncing, swinging stretch

Advantage – useful for coordination

Disadvantage – high risk of injury

Ballistic stretch consists of repetitive bouncing, or using the swinging momentum of the trunk or limb, to provide a stretch force. The end position of the stretch is not held. For example, a grand battement (*a movement in which both legs are kept straight and one leg is kicked outwards from the body and in again*) involves a ballistic stretch of the hamstrings. Similarly, swinging the trunk toward the front of the thighs and then bouncing to touch the floor is also ballistic stretching of the hamstrings.

Ballistic stretching can increase flexibility in the short-term, but generally, it does not. However, the problem with ballistic stretching is that it is not well controlled, so it is easy to exceed the extensibility limit of the soft tissue. These movements should only be performed when the dancer is well warmed up or they could potentially cause an injury to muscle tissue, tendon or muscle connective tissue.



Photo: Provided by Lisa Wilson

Dynamic stretch: Controlled, dance-like movements that prepare the body for activity

Advantage – improves coordination without risk of injury

Disadvantage – not as effective as static stretch in producing long-term gains in flexibility

Dynamic stretch is a controlled stretching exercise that uses dance-specific movements to prepare the body for activity. These stretches emphasize the movement requirements of rehearsals, classes and performances. As an example of dynamic stretching, a controlled développé (*a movement where the dancer's working leg is drawn up to the knee of the supporting leg and extended to an open position*) to the front or side dynamically stretches the hamstrings as it reaches maximal height.

Dynamic stretching should be performed only after a proper warm-up (elevated body core temperature indicated by a light sweat). Dynamic stretching should start slowly and gradually increase in the speed and power of the movement

Static stretch: Held for 30 seconds

Advantage – useful in maintaining flexibility

Disadvantage – needs to be regular to produce long-term gains in flexibility

Static stretch involves elongating the muscle to its tolerance. Once in the stretch position, remain in that position for 30 seconds, then relax. Each stretch should be repeated three to four times. Static stretches should never create a sharp or painful feeling. As one relaxes into the stretch, there may be a very slight lengthening of the muscle (stress-relaxation), but there is no rapid limb movement as in ballistic stretch.

Prolonged stretch: Held for 20 minutes or more

Prolonged stretch is very similar to static stretch, in that the stretch is held without moving. However, it is held for a significantly longer period of time, several minutes instead of seconds. Dancers frequently use these stretches (either intentionally or unintentionally) when they sit on the floor between classes or while doing homework, maintaining their legs in various stretch positions for long periods of time. For example, lying forward while in second position (an open position in which the legs are spread apart and are at right angles to the direction of the body, the toes pointing out) for extended periods places undue compression of the hip labrum, potentially contributing to future injury.

These stretches are used by medical professionals for very specific and serious medical pathologies and are not appropriate for dancers.

PNF (Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation)

Advantage – effective in producing long-term flexibility over time

Disadvantage – needs professional guidance to avoid risk of injury

When to stretch

DO stretch after class when muscles are warm

DO NOT stretch preceding performance or a major rehearsal, due to detrimental effects on jumping

What to stretch

DO stretch muscles and their connective tissue (fascia)

DO NOT elongate ligaments and joint capsules

How long to stretch

Three to five bouts of 30 seconds static stretches are sufficient to stretch muscle tissue

How much to stretch

Depends on your body. "Tight" dancers need to stretch more than "loose" dancers.

Increasing "loose" dancers' hyper-mobility can reduce their joint stability. Every dancer's body is different. Some dancers are inherently less flexible. Dancers with "tight" bodies are built for stability, with dense connective tissues. Their muscles are less extensible. Conversely, some dancers are innately more flexible. The hyper-mobile physique has an increased risk of injury. They have a larger joint range of motion, but they are also more vulnerable to serious ligament sprains. Hence "loose" dancers should spend less time stretching than "tight" dancers. Loose dancers should spend that time on strengthening exercises instead. It is important to avoid comparing the flexibility of one dancer with that of other dancers. Instead, work on what each individual dancer needs – strengthening/stabilizing exercise for the loose dancer, stretching/flexibility for the tight dancer. When stretching, it is vital to not push the body too hard. Pushing stretches too hard may cause a muscle strain (tear), so is important to be cautious. Stretches should be held to a point of mild discomfort, not pain.

7 Things You Need to Know About Proper Stretching Techniques

Always warm up first. "To improve range of motion and avoid injury, you do need to stretch, but don't ever do it when muscles are cold," warns orthopaedic surgeon William Levine, MD, director of sports medicine at Columbia University Medical Center in New York City. "Always start with some mild aerobic warm-ups to get blood to the tissue before doing any stretching."

After warming up, do dynamic (not static) stretches. Dynamic stretching means slow, controlled movements rather than remaining still and holding a stretch. They may include simple movements like arm circles and hip rotations, flowing movements as in yoga, or walking or jogging exercises like those mentioned below. While studies have not clearly proven this, increasing numbers of experts agree that dynamic stretching is the best stretching routine before a workout or competition. Levine warns, however, that proper technique is key. "Poor technique that is not anatomically correct puts you at higher risk for injury."



Photo: Provided by Abiodun Babalola

Holcomb recommends three all-purpose dynamic stretches for your lower body:

Goose-step march: Slowly lift your leg straight out in front of you, alternating as you walk with your normal stride length. While others may think you're doing a Monty Python skit, it is an effective hamstring stretch.

Knee lifts: As you're jogging or walking, bring knees up toward your chest. For a variation, as your right knee comes up, twist the lifted leg gently to the left and your upper body gently to the right for a spinal twist. Repeat on each side as you jog or walk (warning: you may be mistaken for a Rockette).

Butt-kick: As you jog or walk, bend one knee and lift it behind you as if you were trying to kick yourself in the butt. It's not punishment; it stretches the quadriceps.

Do several repetitions of 30 seconds each at your own pace. The point is to do the movements in a controlled way. Stop if you get tired so you still have energy for your workout.

How Often to Stretch

The benefits gained from a single bout of stretching last for a brief period of time, approximately five minutes. In contrast to a single bout, a multi-week program of stretching creates benefits that last for several weeks after stretching is discontinued.

Stretching just once a week is sufficient to maintain current flexibility. Other research showed that increasing the frequency of stretch from once per day to three times per day did not increase range of motion. Some additional benefits can be gained by doing up to 4 repetitions within a bout of stretching. However, doing more than 4 repetitions of stretch per bout doesn't appear to improve the flexibility of the dancer.

Even when warm, it is not advisable to do major stretching before a demanding class, performance or rehearsal. Stretching has been shown to impair subsequent performance parameters, such as strength, power, endurance, balance, grip strength, sprint time, jumping height, reaction time and movement time.

After your workout or competition, then do static stretches. "Too many people do static stretching before and then nothing after," says Holcomb. "That's the most common mistake I see." This is where you'll lengthen muscles and improve your flexibility. Hold static stretches for about 30 seconds.

Never stretch to the point of pain. Forget the phrase "no pain, no gain." "You do not want pain when you're doing dynamic stretching," says Holcomb. "It should be gentle to start and then progress." When you're doing your static stretching afterward, you should go to the point of slight discomfort and intensity, he says, to improve your flexibility. But if you're making a face, your muscle is contracting to protect itself, which is counterproductive.

Stretch to de-stress. These are stressed-out times, and stretching can help. "As you know, your mind affects your body, and your body affects your mind," says Dean Ornish, MD, founder of the Preventive Medicine Research Institute in Sausalito, Calif., and author of *The Spectrum*. "During times of emotional stress, the muscles in your body contract. This is an adaptive response to acute stress, as it fortifies your 'body armor' so that in times of danger, if you get hit, for example, your muscles help to protect you.

"However, in times of chronic stress, these same mechanisms that have evolved to protect us can create problems -- chronically tensed muscles, especially those in the back and neck, predispose to chronic pain or injury. Thus, stress management techniques can help prevent this. Also, gentle stretching of chronically tensed muscles provide relaxation to the mind as well as the body."

1) Julie Bain, "New Ideas on Proper Stretching Techniques," WebMD Feature Archive, accessed 26 June 2018: <https://www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/features/new-ideas-on-proper-stretching-techniques#1>

2) Brenda Critchfield, "Stretching for Dancers," International Association for Dance Medicine and Science, published 19 February 2012: https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iadms.org/resource/resmgr/resource_papers/stretching.pdf



Photo: Provided by Sandra Godde