

Yoga for Dancers—The Spaces In Between the Thoughts: Yoga Esoterica on the Dance Floor

by Anna Rain

Finding the Still Place

Many of us are buffeted these days by the happenings in the world, information delivered to our hands and eyes in a handful of words at a time. The activation to our nervous system saps our energy: absorbing daily tidings is wearying; our spirits are tired.

If you're reading this, likely you already use dance and music as healing balm to your soul. We lay down our concerns and focus instead on the music and the figures. To return weekly or monthly to the company of those in our chosen village (our rarified sub-culture!) gives us some stability.

Sometimes, however, the reflexive thoughts that arise in an evening of dance (concentrating on a skill we wish to acquire; irritation at our own or others' missteps) keep us from finding full communion with harmony inside ourselves.

Even those of us who gain energy from spending time with people benefit from stillness and quiet, ten minutes of which replenishes reserves so easily depleted by the relentless progression of thoughts and other distractions in our lives.

The concepts for the work in this column build on the structures we practiced in the previous column (from the Fall 2017 issue): Descend; Ascend; Broaden; Soften: Strengthen the Muscles that Lift Your Torso.

And for more details about the floating ribs, this may help (from the Fall 2016 issue): Float the Floating Ribs: An Altar for the Heart.

Sit backwards in the chair (see 1). Sitting backwards challenges the body to use muscles—*instead of the chair back*—to lift.

- Sit all the way to the edge, so that the



1

thighs are parallel and are supported by the chair seat

- If your legs are short, put a blanket under your feet; if your legs are long, put a blanket on the chair seat
- Lift the torso as you have practiced from the previous column



2

Adjust the spine thus:

- Buttock flesh descends
- Floating ribs lift (see 2)
- Top of chest lifts (see 3)
- Outer collarbones pull away from each other (see 4)



3

Sit tall. Relax the face and drop the jaw; keep the lips closed. Soften the muscles around the eyes. Look straight ahead, but recede the gaze toward the back of the skull: instead of projecting your gaze forward, draw it in.



4

As you sit, thoughts will come. That's what thoughts do. Let your only attention on them be to recognize their inevitability. Focus not on the thoughts, but instead on the spaces between the thoughts. At first, these spaces will be small, and thoughts will arise quickly. Guide your

attention to the moments between the movements of consciousness; linger in the stillness of those intervals and see if in that lingering the intervals lengthen.

Continue to renew the lift of the body. (Remember—building this capacity takes time. Be gentle with yourself as you acquire the habit.) As you are able to keep the torso lifted, the stabilized outer structure of your body will settle your inner space, and you will find that you can rest inside yourself for moments at a time, in a place of stillness, in between the thoughts.

As you are able:

- reserve critique of yourself: if you find yourself focusing on a thought, shift your attention instead to the space just after the thought ends
- acknowledge you are building stillness muscles, and increasing capacity takes practice and time
- recognize that a mere few minutes of sitting tall and being still inside is refreshing to your system

Taking the Stillness into Dance

How does this relate to dance, then? Think of all the concepts you process while learning and executing a dance: figures; phrasing; awareness of partner, neighbors, the floor; recovery. Our clever minds feed on the business of thought, and we easily assume that the dance is the thought processes we perform.

I propose that the dance is, actually, the spaces in between the conscious thoughts, the thing that happens when we're not thinking about the thing. These moments of drawing out the stillness we practice when sitting may very well open up the space between the thoughts. Our internal dialogues are often the confining conventions of how we think we are supposed to move, the crippling critiques of self and others that inevitably arise in an evening of dance. We are so accustomed to these thoughts—familiar distractions from the purity of dance—that we forget that not having them might be a possibility!

Give yourself the gift of some daily practice of sitting tall and spending time in the intervals between the rising thoughts. Linger in those moments, regardless of how long they last. And the next dance event you enjoy, see if you can take that practice onto the floor: notice the moments when you are in-between conscious thought of the elements of the dance. How long can you draw out those moments? In the same way that well-toned muscles can launch a body into the air or across the floor, the stillness cultivated inside creates a core of integrity from which other movements can blossom.

WEB EXTRAS: Find links to previous yoga articles mentioned in this article at www.cdss.org/news

Anna Rain is a Certified Iyengar Yoga Teacher and a Certified International Yoga Therapist. Phrasing a figure that uses the music perfectly and that matches her partner and other dancers on the floor is one of her favorite sensations. She also likes throwing a frisbee!



The Dancernot: A poem by Steve Green

Twas a frolic for
lissome girls
Their feet so nimble
without care

All eager were the merry boys
But let the wise beware

Do not the square dance anyone
With only eight and phrase untaught
Beware the patter call and shun
The scornful Dancernot

Likewise fear the dance aligned
The eyes that bite, the smiles that hold
Beware the pattern rigid bound
The frownious contra scold

Yet questing souls go oft agley
Long time the dancing goal you sought
So rested thee by the fiddle tree
And stood awhile in thought

As in ponsive thought you stood
The Dancernot with eyes that shame
Rose darkly from the floor of wood
Intent was it to maim

With your love for dance all new
The soulcut words did wound most deep
Unto the heart oh it was true
It joyed to see you weep

“Nevermore I’ll dance,” quoth thee
As ever thought foretold of doom
No smiles those eyes, no lift those feet
Your thoughts were all a gloom

Yet upon your ears the music played
And brought back life again forsooth
The feet did move and again glissade
The heart cried aloud its youth

Let no one heed the Dancernot
Whose only gift is joy lost sore
Raise thy voice in joyful shout
The floor for dance is yours!