

## WORKSHOP

### SPACE AND EFFORT WARM-UP

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This text corresponds to the description of the workshop given by the author. It contains the basic information on what the Space and Effort warm-up consists of, how it was created and how it has evolved. The text ends with some frequently asked questions that are related to the warm-up's purpose.

In 1986 the late Janet Hamburg, CMA and sports movement specialist, published a series of movement patterns that were the basis of what she called a "pre-warm-up routine for the thinking athlete" (9). A few years later I came across the article. By that time I was a certified body awareness instructor, had been at the Laban Centre doing the MA in Dance Studies, was teaching actors, opera singers and dancers, and was searching for a general warm-up routine for my students.

Hamburg's idea was to connect mind and body and to "apply our intelligence to performing movement tasks" (9); mine was to have a general warm-up that was logical from a kinesiological point of view and that would reinforce the choreological relation between intention and result. In other words, I wanted to have a general warm-up that consisted of something other than simply jogging, jumping or stretching for five minutes because these activities are not necessarily conducive to a better performance in a dance class, rehearsal, or performance. Besides, from a choreological perspective, I think that well warmed-up bodies and minds are not the only things dancers need: they have to be prepared to move in different directions, levels and planes, and be ready to display a wide range of dynamic variations in their movements.

Hamburg's justification for designing such a routine was that the best preparation for doing sports-specific warm-ups or drills was moving the whole body, changing directions and visualizing the body as it moves through space. My argument for using her routine is that it fulfills the requirements of a general warm-up, it is easy

to teach and easy to learn, it prepares not only the dancers' body and mind but also their spatial and dynamic awareness, and everybody can do it (besides teaching it to the students mentioned above, I have taught it to pregnant women, athletes, basketball players, 4-6 years old children, and mixed abilities groups).

Another of my concerns was that one of the main reasons why dancers injure themselves is because they do not warm up properly. And they do not warm up, because some still think it is not important to do so, others do not know how to warm up, or they confuse doing a general warm-up with taking a class or with conditioning or stretching.

The Space and Effort warm-up is a general warm-up that lasts not more than five minutes. It is divided into four sections: a) walking (forward and backward), b) stepping to the sides, c) diagonal reaching, and d) yielding/resisting roll down. The first three sections correspond to the original routine devised by Janet Hamburg; I added the fourth section. Since 2003 I have integrated this routine into all my movement classes and rehearsals.

Because I have made some slight changes to Hamburg's original version, I will describe each section:

a) **Walking.** Hamburg says: "Stride eight steps forward, then eight steps backward. Swing your arms, making sure they actively reach forward and backward in natural opposition" (9). If I am working in a large space I do not count the mentioned eight steps, but rather walk through the whole space without any specific count so as to get a sense of the size of the place.

b) **Stepping to the sides.** Hamburg says: "Stand with your legs comfortably apart, with your left arm at your side and your right arm reaching out, parallel to the ground. Turn your head to the right and focus on an imaginary point several feet in front of your right hand. Now, leading with your right foot, take four long, sliding steps to the right. Quickly change to the left side, raising left arm, lowering right arm and sliding four steps to the left, with head turned left and eye focused beyond the left hand. Repeat the pattern again, except drop to three slides. Next, two; then, one. Now repeat the entire sequence again, only don't turn your head. Keep your eyes focused in front of you" (9). I changed three elements in this section. First, in order to have a longer sequence, I changed the counts: I do two sets of 8 counts, two sets of 4 counts, four sets of 2 counts, and eight sets of 1 count. Then, I do not "slide," I "step." And I repeat the whole section, moving slightly faster the second time.

c) **Diagonal reaching.** Hamburg says: "...with feet comfortably apart, reach high with your left hand across to 'snag' a ball to your right. Focus your eyes on each 'catch'. Now reach high with your right hand across to your left. Continue this

crisscross pattern, gradually working lower to the ground” (10). Instead of starting high, I start at the bottom and work the crisscross pattern up beginning with the right hand. I also emphasize moving on the horizontal plane at five specific levels: feet, knee, waist, shoulder and above the head, making sure that one tries to reach the back diagonals.

d) **Yielding/resisting roll down.** Starting with the head, you flex your trunk, rolling down and slightly flexing your knees till you can put your palms on the floor, keeping your head flexed. Then you roll up to return to the starting position, making sure your head is the last segment to straighten up. The first roll down and up is done as a floating movement (flexible, light, and sustained) and then the next three are done as punches (direct, strong, and sudden). This sequence is repeated two or three times as needed.

Finally, I include some frequently asked questions that are related to the purpose of the Space and Effort warm-up.

*Why is doing a general warm-up important?*

Because a well-devised and well-done general warm-up helps prevent injuries, prepares body and mind for the physical demands of the activities that follow, and enhances performance.

*How does a general warm-up work?*

As the intensity of the physical activity increases, there is an increased rate of fuel consumption and the body temperature rises. The heart rate is increased and the arteries and capillaries are opened with a resultant increase in the volume of the blood flowing to the muscles. This brings about an equal response in the nervous system to remove metabolic waste quickly. As the blood flow is increased, the muscle temperature rises and the muscle fibers become relaxed and elongated. There is an increased rate of neuromuscular transmission and of recruitment of fibers. Neuromuscular memory is activated and there is an increased production of synovial fluid in the joints.

*How can a “good” general warm-up be identified?*

It lasts no more than 5 minutes, it consists of whole body movements, it is simple to do, and its easily observable effects are: the heart rate increases, the body temperature increases, the muscles and joints feel relaxed and pliant, and the person feels alert and focused. From a choreological point of view, a “good” general warm-up should include movements in different directions, levels and planes, and it should include at least the extreme basic effort actions in which all elements yield and resist: float and punch.

*What is the difference between a general warm-up, a specific warm-up, a conditioning session and a class?*

A general warm-up is the activity that immediately precedes a specific warm-up, a conditioning session, a class, a rehearsal, or a performance; its main purpose is to reduce the risk of injury as it prepares the dancer to meet the demands of the activity that follows. A specific warm-up is an exercise routine that is done after the general warm-up and focuses on preparing the body and mind to meet the physical and psychological demands of a specific technique or activity that will follow. A conditioning session is an exercise routine based on postural reeducation, the general improvement of the body's abilities and the acquisition of the basic physical skills of a specific technique so as to be able to meet the demands of a technical training. A dance class is a systematized and progressive set of exercise routines made of a technical and artistic selection of certain joint movements that are expected to be mastered in time till they become the medium for artistic expression.

#### REFERENCE CITED

HAMBURG, Janet. 1986. "The Pre-Warm-Up for the Thinking Athlete." *Movement Studies* Spring (Sport and Fitness): 9-10.