

2 the fitness routines

the dancer's warm-up

THE MAIN OBJECTIVE of warming-up is to increase the muscles' oxygen intake and to elevate the heart rate a couple of notches up to training speed. There are various ways in which to warm up.

Some are categorized as passive. For example, stretching the hamstring muscles by placing one foot on a surface that is at least calf height, then bending the torso over toward the leg, is referred to as a passive static stretch.

Other warm-ups are categorized as dynamic. For example, the combination of reaching out with the arms, circling them, and bending the knees into a squat is a series of dynamic movements in which various muscle groups contract to produce the action, while other muscle groups (antagonists) expand in order to stabilize the action.

Most dancers warm up before and cool down after a performance. Most performing-art dances—ballet, jazz, modern—start with a warm-up period. Any warm-up period should consist of movements or exercises that are specific to the type of physical activity the body is about to be subjected to.

For example, if you are going for a jog, starting with a fast-paced walk that progresses into a slow run and then into a jogging pace is the ideal way to get started, especially if you haven't jogged in a couple of days. If you are weight training and are about to start a bench press, doing a few reps with a light weight is a good idea before you start packing on the weight plates.

Because dance involves moving many muscle groups and joints in a variety of ways, a dance warm-up generally consists of various movements that strengthen muscles and increase range of motion (flexibility).

The Dancer's Warm-up that follows consists of individual movements and movement sequences designed to blend and flow in and out of one another. Start slow until you memorize each of the movements and are able to link them into a routine that should last no more than seven or eight minutes. It's also a great routine to start your morning or end your day with.

exercise 1: salutation stretch

This exercise is fashioned after a sequence created by one of the most famous dance teachers of Broadway musical stars of all time, “Luigi,” and is performed by dancers all over the world. It’s a sequence of four different movements that combine rib cage, hip, and spine isolations that get opposing sides of the body moving and stretching at the same time. There’s no area of the body that’s left untouched by this combination.

first movement



*Starting position:
Stand with your feet
wide apart and with
your arms reaching
upward above
your head. Keep
your core muscles
firmly held and your
shoulders down.*

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Bow and Arrow stretch:

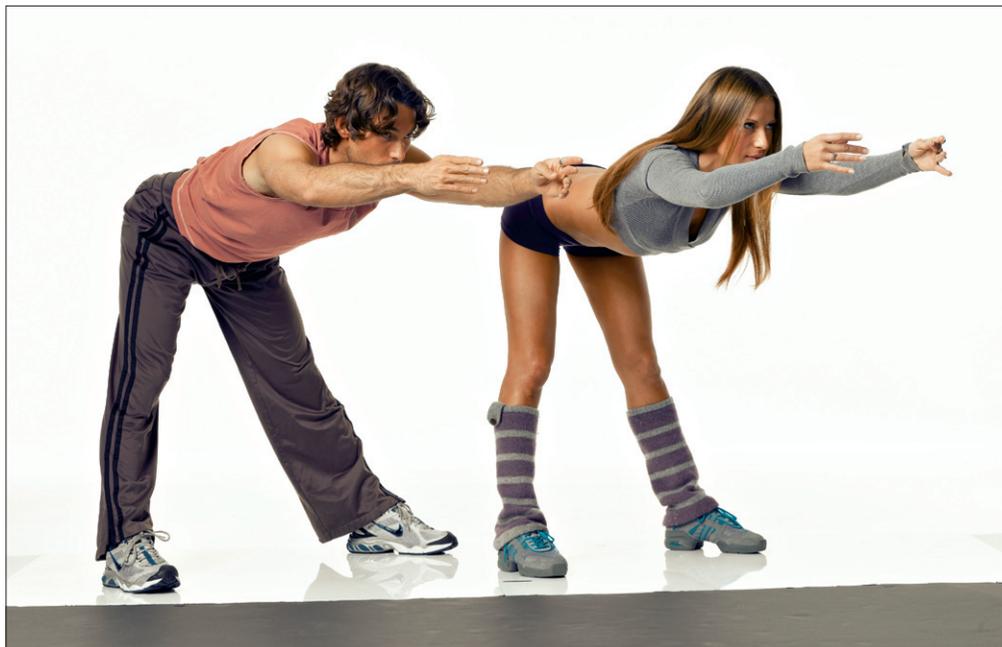
1. Reach up with your right hand as high as you can, allowing your right shoulder and the right side of your rib cage to stretch upward. Bend your left arm at the elbow.

2. At the same time, let your right knee bend over the right toes and your left hip move sideways to the left. This movement feels like pointing a bow upward and holding it with one hand high above the head, while the other hand is pulling down on the arrow.



Alternate right and left sides four times.

second movement



Forward Bend: Bend forward at the waist, keeping your knees slightly bent—never locked. Keep your abdominal muscles firm. The feel of this movement should be one of elongation. As your torso reaches a horizontal position parallel to the floor, you should feel as if your hands, neck, and shoulders are reaching forward while your tailbone is reaching out back.

third movement

The Rag Doll: Let your knees continue to bend in the direction of the toes as you continue bending down from the waist toward the floor. Let your arms hang freely from each shoulder, and bring your chin in toward your chest.



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fourth movement



Rising Tower:

1. As you straighten your legs, start rolling upward from your lower spine. Take your time and focus on each vertebra, visualizing each one being placed on top of the others until you are standing straight.

2. Then continue the movement by taking the arms back to the same position you started the entire combination with.

Repeat the entire combination two to four times.



exercise 2: upper body stretch

This is both a warm-up and a great releaser of stress for the shoulders, upper back, and chest.



Starting position: Stand with your legs apart and arms to the sides. Feel as if your arms are reaching out to the left and right corners of the wall you are facing instead of to the walls that are to the left and to the right of you. Your shoulder blades should feel as far apart from each other as possible rather than pinned toward each other. Take a deep breath.

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first movement

Bend your knees slightly. Pull your belly button in toward your spine. Bring your arms to the front, rounding your back and bringing your chin in toward your chest. Exhale.

second movement

Return to your standing position, bringing both arms around to the sides and out behind you with the palms of both hands facing each other. Pin your shoulder blades together, allowing your chest to stretch and expand. Keep your core muscles firm to avoid arching your lower back.

Exhale.

Repeat contraction and extension two to four times.

