

The Role of Dance in Lifelong Wellness

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The session is aimed at dance and healthcare practitioners interested in the integration of research into dance practice

The next decades will see the broadening role of adapted dance practices for health. The typically held notion and association of dance with physical suffering and the 'no pain, no gain' maxim will be replaced by an understanding of the life affirming benefits natural to dance. The scientific community from education and sports specialists to anti-aging and Alzheimer researchers are avidly searching the transformative potential of dance practice through all stages of life from young, adult to senior dancers.

The workshop will explore some of the lesser known benefits of dance, such as that it: strengthens the development of academic skills – mathematics, geometry, physics in children; enhances brain function¹ and brain hardware, developing cognitive reserve and new brain synaptic connections at any age², calms and regulates the functioning of the immune system – the cause of so many of today's increasing auto-immune dysfunctions, allergic reactions and food intolerances³; it reduces the effects of stress in burned out executives – promoting deep sleep and cell renewal and as a lifelong practice, it helps maintain physical and mental autonomy, mitigating the socio-psychological impact of age and promoting longevity and quality of life.

Experience first-hand techniques to promote an Alpha brain state through dance; engage optimal external attentional focus⁴ with all its health and performance enhancing benefits and adopt teaching strategies that support the wellbeing of the 'dancer'⁵.

Dance has a direct and unifying impact on the intricate inner choreography, the dynamic balance that is our health and has a key role to play in the coming years. Armed with evidence based research and complementary knowledge, dance teachers are well placed to promote and deliver the life-enhancing benefits in this growing market.

Short biography of the first author:

Clare Guss-West's work integrates the latest scientific research on Optimal Focus complementary to Eastern somatic techniques in order to deliver a holistic, effective approach to classical training. Techniques are translated into practical complementary tools, integrated directly into the ballet class to produce an immediate, palpable impact on precision, consistency, balance and fluidity of movement. Clare Guss-West taught for The Royal Ballet, Finnish National Ballet, Houston Ballet and the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) "Professional Dancers' Postgraduate Teaching Certificate" (PDPTC) at Staatsballett Berlin.

¹ Brown, S, Parsons, LM. The neuroscience of dance. *Sci Am.* 2008; 299(3):78-83.

² Powers, R. Use it or lose it: Dancing makes you smarter. Stanford Dance, 2010. Available at: <http://socialdance.stanford.edu/syllabi/smarter.htm>.

³ Liponis, M. *Ultra-longevity*. New York: Little, Brown & Company, 2007.

⁴ Wulf G. Attentional focus and motor learning: A review of 15 years. *Int Rev Sport Exerc Psychol.* 2013; 6:77-104.

⁵ Wulf G, Lewthwaite R. Optimizing performance through intrinsic motivation and attention for learning: the OPTIMAL theory of motor learning. *Psychon Bull Rev.* January 29, 2016; <http://dx.doi.org/10.3758/s13423-015-0999-9>