

A dance may need to have considerable strength and flexibility, briefly explain why both of these elements are important to a dancer. From your studio experience, and with consideration for safe practise, describe and discuss an appropriate training programme to develop flexibility and strength.

Both flexibility and strength are needed to perform a dance to its full potential, and a dancer should always be trying to improve their own flexibility and strength. Flexibility involves increasing muscular elasticity so that the range of mobility from a joint will increase. Individual structural differences like the shape of the bone will affect the range of motion/flexibility. Strength is the capacity to exert a muscle contraction against resistance. Contraction is the opposite muscle action to that of stretching. A strong body moves freely, efficiently and above all safely. The aim is all round strength, not the overdevelopment of certain muscle groups. As you can see from these definitions, both of these elements are needed for a good dancer. As Mary Wigman said on strength, 'The dynamic force of movement wherein lies the life force of dance.'

Flexibility may come naturally to a dancer through inheritance, or they may have to work on their flexibility, either way they could both reach the same level of flexibility. There are however, other factors which may influence flexibility, a few are, gender, age, body temperature and training. Advantages of muscular flexibility are,

- Protects joints
- Increases the range of possible skills
- Improves the quality of action
- Maintains a healthy musculature
- Prevents injury.

All of the above things make a good dancer which is why flexibility is a very important factor of dance.

Strength can also come naturally to a dancer but is easier to improve than flexibility if it does not come naturally. As flexibility, there are other factors that affect muscular strength and these are, age, gender, fatigue, motivation and drugs. Advantages of muscular strength are,

- Prevents injury
- Increases explosive qualities
- Allows a wider range of movements
- Increases the quality of movements

All of these things are important to a dancer, and when mixed with other skills such as good flexibility, the dancer becomes very good and may be recognised for this.

The only way to improve both flexibility and strength is through practice, and this can be done in the form of a training programme. Before the training programme can be carried out, the place where it is going to be done needs to be checked to see if the area is a safe environment to dance and carry out the training programme. Things that need to be checked are,

- Smooth surface
- Non-slippery surface
- Should be sprung
- Big enough (tall enough)

- Temperature = 21 degrees
- Constant temperature
- Adequate lighting

If all of these are checked and they are in order, it is fine to carry out the training programme but always with care just in case.

Flexibility Training Programme:

Always begin with a warm-up before even attempting to stretch out. As we are improving flexibility, this warm-up should include flexion, extension, abduction, adduction, rotation and circumduction of as many joints as possible. This will allow the joints to warm-up, and so when it comes to stretching, they will be able to go further as the joints are warmed up. The next thing to do is to stretch which will increase flexibility. This action lengthens the muscle along the direction of the fibres. These stretches should be held for at least 8-10 seconds each as this will affect the joint and muscle working and should be repeated a few times each. To increase all round flexibility, which is what a dancer needs, all the muscles and joints should be stretched out. It can help to use another person to help, or a prop, for example a wall to resist against. A few examples of stretching exercises are,

- Sitting in box splits against the wall with someone behind you pushing you into the wall.
- Sitting in splits.
- Both arms held behind back and held up as far as possible with someone resisting you coming down.
- Lying on the floor with one leg up and pushed back as far as possible by a person.

Strength Training Programme:

Once again always begin with a warm-up which will loosen the muscles and joints which will increase the effectiveness of the programme on the muscles. This warm-up should include using every muscle in the body as it all needs to be warmed up. One way of increasing strength is to devise a weight training programme. This would consist of using a gym and the equipment there to increase the muscular strength. Most weight training, is isotonic which means the muscle is shortening (moving) to produce movement. Another way is to use, for example a wall and use it to resist against. This would be isometric training, which is where the muscle is resisting and increasing strength, but not actually moving. The best way for a dancer to train, is to use a bit of both of these methods. This is because a dancer needs all round strength and using both of these would do that.