
PILATES PROGRAM EXPANDS AT SAB

When she was 13 and enrolled in SAB's Children's Division, Miriam Rowan began attending weekly Pilates classes at a Manhattan studio far from SAB. Four years later, Miriam has progressed to the Advanced Division and is still devoted to Pilates. But now, she simply hops into the Rose Building elevator twice a week after ballet class and travels from the fifth floor to the fourth floor for personalized instruction in SAB's own Pilates room, which opened in September 2000, thanks largely to a \$50,000 grant from the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation.

The exercise regimen known as Pilates (pronounced pul-LAH-teez) was developed by the German-born Joseph H. Pilates in the early 1900s. To overcome chronic childhood illnesses, Pilates embraced bodybuilding and gymnastics, but those pursuits hindered his flexibility and resulted in bulky muscle mass. He then studied yoga, martial arts and dance and gradually developed new exercises that unified the ancient Eastern emphasis on mental concentration and controlled movement with the West's emphasis on athletic physical activity. While interned in a British work camp during World War I, Pilates began to design ingenious exercise machines using old hospital beds and bedsprings to allow patients to exercise while lying down; and, with that, the core elements of what would come to be known as the Pilates Method were in place.

The original Pilates machines have evolved into sleek pieces of equipment with names like Reformer and Wunda Chair. They are the centerpieces for a series of exercises that use resistance against tensioned springs in order to isolate and develop specific muscle groups. Control, smoothness and flow of motion, precision of movement, proper breathing and relaxation are hallmarks of the innovative Pilates exercise technique.

As the Pilates Method offers dancers a way to recover from injuries, lengthen muscles and strengthen technique, it wasn't long after the arrival of Joseph Pilates in

America in 1923 that the exercise methodology became popular within the dance community. Not surprisingly, many New York City Ballet dancers—ranging from budding corps members to seasoned principals—have embraced Pilates over the years.

Among those dancers were SAB faculty members Kay Mazzo, Suki Schorer and Susan Pilarre. All three used a Pilates regimen while dancing with New York City Ballet to recover from injuries, and all three maintained their Pilates routines late into their respective pregnancies. Schorer is so devoted to the benefits of Pilates that she purchased a portable Reformer six years ago and uses it regularly. Mazzo, Schorer and Pilarre, in turn, often counsel their SAB students to take up Pilates.

The faculty's belief in Pilates, along with the School's desire to provide increased health and fitness services for its students, led naturally to the notion of creating an in-house Pilates program. With the Goldsmith Foundation grant in hand, the School remodeled a storage room on the Rose Building's fourth floor and furnished it with top-of-the-line Pilates equipment, including two Reformers, a Wunda Chair, a ½ Cadillac, mats and Magic Circles. And most importantly, SAB hired Phoebe Higgins, a certified Pilates instructor with over 20 years of experience.

Higgins, who trained at SAB for five years as a child, launched optional, one-on-one sessions for students from SAB's Advanced Division in September 2000. While she initially staffed the Pilates room for just nine hours per week, it was soon clear that student demand exceeded the available session time. For the current Winter Term, a new grant from the Goldsmith Foundation has made it possible for Higgins to offer Pilates training for 18 hours per week, with advanced students each allotted up to two, one-hour visits weekly. And, as of the 2001 Summer Course, all summer students are now introduced to the benefits of Pilates through required, weekly mat classes

that feature a repertoire of Pilates exercises in the ballet studio.

A visitor to SAB's Pilates room will find Phoebe Higgins cheerfully guiding up to four SAB students through an array of exercises with names like Elephant and Running. The small group setting allows Higgins to tailor the sessions to the individual needs and conditioning goals of each student. Quiet, relaxed exchanges between Higgins and her charges are deceiving; the work is gut crunching and intense. But the dividends, according to both teacher and students, are tremendous.

Higgins believes that the Pilates Method's emphasis on movement that connects mind and body results in dancers who are more fit and less prone to injury with leaner muscles and an improved range of motion. Suki

Schorer notes that Pilates strengthens ankles and improves turnout, making it an excellent adjunct to ballet. Longtime Pilates devotee Miriam Rowan attests, It makes me stronger. My ballet teachers are always telling me to stretch, so I go to Pilates to stretch. It definitely helps my flexibility, extension, turnout and strength. I've never really had a major injury, and I credit that to the Pilates I've done.

Even newcomers to the Pilates Method see immediate benefits. Tyler Angle, a native of Altoona, Pennsylvania, attended SAB Summer Courses in 2000 and 2001 before enrolling for the current Winter Term. His exposure to Pilates before arriving at SAB was minimal, but he's been a regular in the Pilates room since last September. And, after just a few weeks, my extension got higher. I noticed it just like that, he reports. ❖

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