

A Teacher's Warm-Up

The pre-class ritual that could make or break you

BY ANDREA MARKS

While teaching jazz at Gus Giordano Dance, sometimes Lauren Giordano Curran forgets she's not a student. "You have to listen to your body. I have to know I can't do a full-out battement because I'm going to tear my hamstring," she says. "Teachers forget that and go right into it, and you find yourself, like, 'Ooh that didn't feel right. I shouldn't have done that.'"

Some dancers who retire from performing are surprised that teaching can be even more stressful on their bodies. "You're stopping and starting, jumping out of nowhere, not doing things on both sides," says Clarice Marshall, who teaches Pilates, injury prevention and Gyrotonic for dancers and company ballet class at Mark Morris Dance Group. "In a dance career, if you're lucky enough to be employed by a major company, your job is to take care of yourself. You have the time to go to class and work on things during the day." As a teacher, that isn't always an option. If you're devoting your full attention to students during class, it's important to make time to warm yourself up beforehand.

Marshall says no warm-up fits all bodies, so you have to do what works for you, getting your muscles limber and your blood flowing. The most important thing is that you *do it*. And the warm-up with students is not enough. Once class starts, it isn't about you anymore. "You need to be able to be there for the students and not yourself," she says.

Your routine, of course, will change

over the years. For example, Marshall used to include jumps in her personal warm-up, but now that she's in her 60s, she doesn't, because the impact is hard on her knees. "If you're constantly pushing your body beyond what it can do, you're going to get injured," she says. "As you age, your warm-up has to be more rigorous in areas that you could do less of when you were younger. You have to pay more attention to aerobic fitness. You need to do some weight lifting to keep up your weight-bearing strength if you're not jumping and running. It becomes harder as you age to maintain muscle tone."

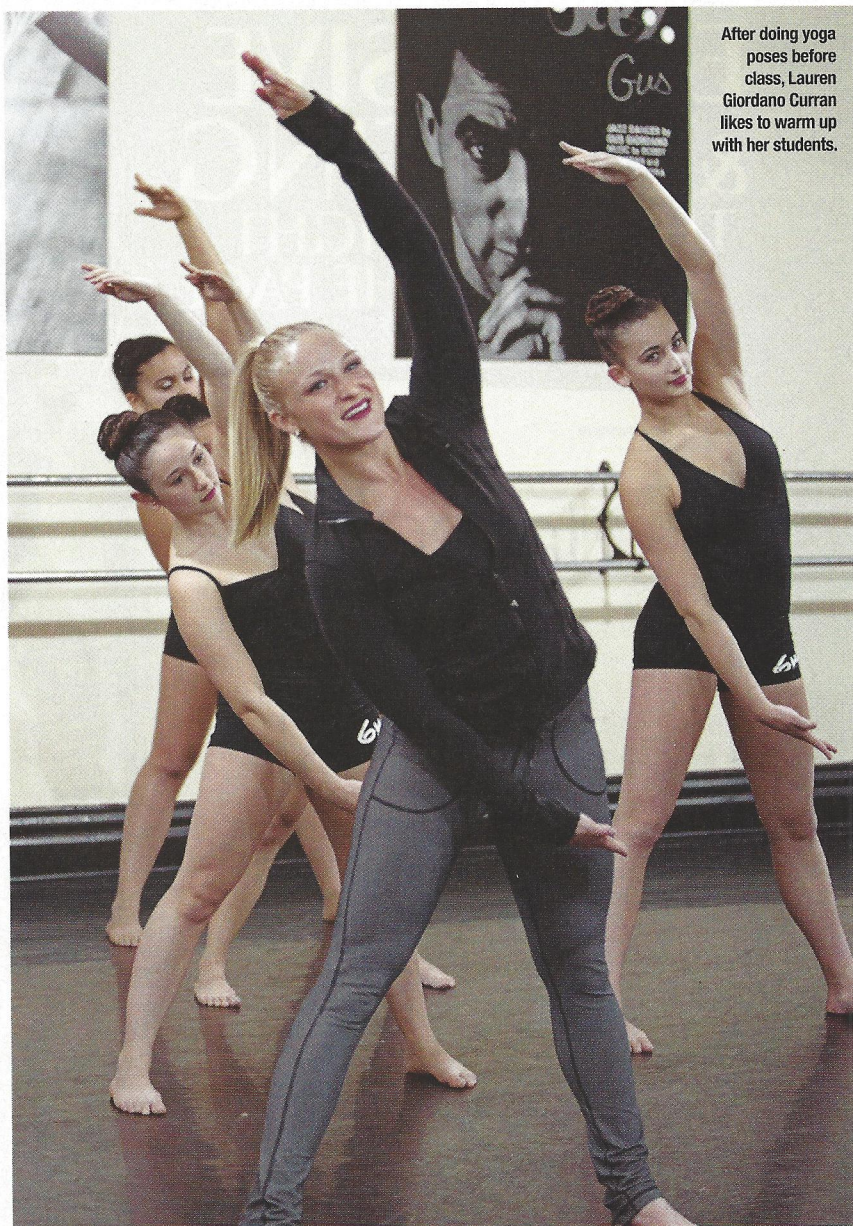
Here, Marshall, Curran and two other established teachers share their personal warm-up practices. Use them to inspire your own routine.

Lauren Giordano Curran

Specializes in jazz for students of all ages at Gus Giordano Dance

Age: in her 20s

► Before class I do basic back-opening, spine-strengthening yoga poses like cat-cow and thread the needle, just to relax the side of my face on the floor and find an opening on the front side body and the back. I also



After doing yoga poses before class, Lauren Giordano Curran likes to warm up with her students.

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“As my body ages, the age of the students stays the same. I get older and freshmen stay 18. My classes can’t be about what my body can do.”

—Amy Chavasse

do eagle pose or sometimes just eagle arms. I’ll round over and gaze up at the ceiling for a few moments. I feel so much release.

► Then I’ll **warm up with the kids** as much as I can. I’ll make sure to get my heart rate up within the first five to seven minutes. Then by the end of the warm-up—half hour, 45 minutes—we’re all dripping sweat and ready to go across the floor. Once they’ve memorized the warm-up, I spend more time walking around the room, observing and correcting, so I’ll give myself the warm-up before class. It includes contractions and releases, isolations, cardio—like jumping jacks—pliés, tendus, dégagés, ronds de jambe and stretching.

Amy Chavasse

Teaches contemporary and improvisation to dance BFA and MFA students at University of Michigan

Age: in her 50s

► The first thing I do when I get up is go for an **hour-long dog walk**. I think about my day ahead and what I’ve been doing in my classes. It gets me intellectually and physically prepared for the day.

► I would love to have 45 minutes to warm up before class, but I don’t always get it. If I can get into the studio, I’ll improvise for a bit, going through different ranges of motion. I usually do a few **sun salutations**, some **warrior poses** and **side angle bends** to feel spaciousness inside and resistance to the floor. Sometimes I’ll use a foam roller to actively roll out my quads.

► If I’m not feeling particularly creative, I’ll use the **elliptical machine** in our performance



lab. It’s a remarkably good way to get my blood flowing for half an hour.

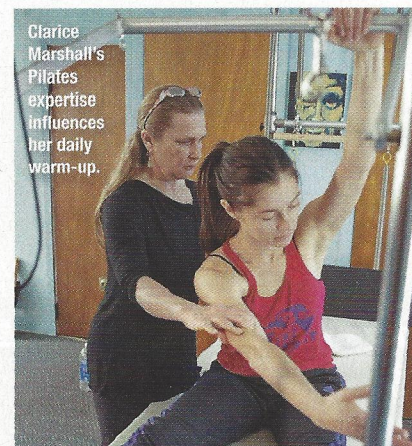
Clarice Marshall

Teaches company ballet class at Mark Morris Dance Group

Age: in her 60s

► I do an hour-and-15-minute warm-up of exercises on the floor, followed by a ballet barre and 30 minutes of cardio, like swimming. It varies day to day how long I spend on each. I just decide in the moment what needs more time that day.

► The floor exercises are based on Pilates and yoga for dancers. I do core stabilizers, like planks, and stabilizers on my back and all fours. I do some spinal articulations like cat-cow, hip mobilizations, Pilates knee folds and doming for foot-strengthening.



Clarice Marshall’s Pilates expertise influences her daily warm-up.

Amy Chavasse often uses improvisation to warm herself up.



Suki Schorer

Teaches pre-professional ballet to teens at *School of American Ballet*

Age: in her 70s

► I usually teach at 10:30 so I get up at 7. I **stretch on the floor** and do exercises for 15 to 20 minutes, including leg lifts with weights on my ankles, push-ups and free weights. I also stretch and lengthen my back, growing on the floor as long as I can—reaching with my feet and my arms—lengthening the waist. Then I exercise the muscles that tighten up my butt and strengthen my hips.

► After the floor exercises I used to give myself a ballet barre, but now I'll do about 20 or 25 minutes on the reformer. (I bought a reformer in 1995, after I had my left hip replaced.) **DT**

Suki Schorer prepares to teach ballet by doing a series of exercises on the floor and reformer.



Photos (clockwise from top): by Carlos Funn, courtesy of Chavasse; by Rosalie O'Connor, courtesy of School of American Ballet; by Jim Lafferty for Dance Magazine

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