

Diving Into Joe's Work

Learning and discovering some of Joe Pilates' archival work is important. As the method continues to grow and develop, it's vital to keep a reverence and connection with the origins of the work and the man who created it. In doing so, it protects the work we do and prevents others from claiming ownership or preventing us from sharing our passion for it.

My real interest for discovering the original work and setting off in pursuit of Joe was ignited when studying with Lolita San Miguel.

It wasn't just the super fun and interesting stories that she would share with us from her time spent with Joe and Clara (although these were a definite highlight of my time learning from her), or the connection of training with someone who had been there and learned from the man himself. The real interest came from a more, let's say, 'contemporary' source.

Lolita loves creativity. So, each apparatus was introduced with her take on Joe's work with her progressions and choreography, but she would also challenge us to be creative too. We were to take our understanding of the method and see what adventures it could lead us on.

Wherever we stand on the Classical versus Contemporary view, one thing we can agree on is that creativity can be a lot of fun... and tricky to do, especially when the person challenging you has studied with Joe and knows his work.

The number of exercises we would create that were met with the words "No, that's just Joe's..." or "That's already been created by Joe, it's called..." was, well, a lot.

It was as I struggled to create something unique that I realized that Joe's body of work went way deeper than I realized.

How much more was there still to be discovered? Why was it not included in training manuals? Would my creative abilities be improved by wearing Joe's infamous tight, white hotpants and gymnastic shoes?

Many years since and I'm still enjoying trawling through old cine footage in search of a glimpse of the original Joe.

It's a rewarding experience. Firstly, through watching or learning about him and his lesser known or shared exercises, it feels as though we can get closer to this incredible and eccentric man. Watching him teach or demonstrate gives us an audio-less window into his character and personality, that definitely aligns with the stories shared by Lolita. Secondly, the work he created begins to reveal itself in a deeper way. The origins of more familiar exercises can be recognized through these archival versions, often revealing a sense of Joe's original intentions.

Understanding where exercises have developed from can bring renewed precision or relevance to their modern delivery, and it also feels like it allows me to utilize them with better understanding. It informs our teaching further and brings a new energy to both known and newly discovered exercises.

Additionally, the fact that so many exercises reveal a precision and physicality that attracted me to the classical work in the first place, brings renewed enthusiasm to my teaching and my passion for the method.

Discovering these 'new,' old movements and creating space for them in both my and my student's sessions brings a feeling of discovery that's like we're exploring for old treasures or have just discovered a secret that is known by only a few. A Pilates secret that, like all Pilates teachers, we immediately want to share!

Most of all though, it's a lot of fun!

I'm excited to share a few of these original gems from the Arm Springs series and the mysterious Neck Stretcher in my upcoming workshop. Join me for some archival fun where we unearth Pilates treasures and celebrate some of the lesser known work without the need for Joe's tight pants or gym shoes...

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