

Mobilise



Mobilisation of the tissues that allow the leg to be beautifully placed is essential in getting the effortless float that we all desire in a développé devant. This section goes far beyond regular static stretching, which I usually consider to be the slowest and most dangerous way of attempting to get more flexible.

Even if you have fantastic range, I encourage you to incorporate the following mobilisation techniques into your training over the next few weeks, to open out your entire fascial system.

Thoracic Mobilisers

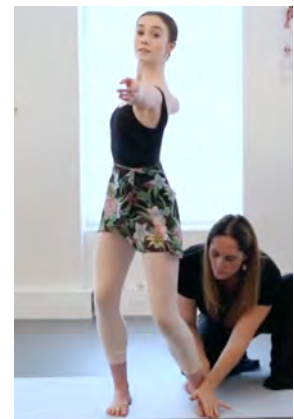
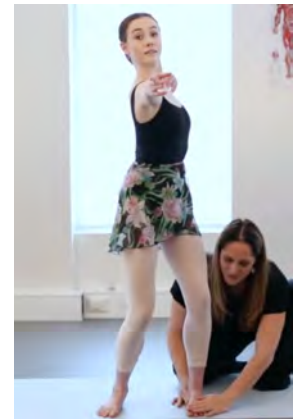
This Thoracic Mobilisation sequence is great for helping to free up the muscles and fascia around your ribcage to allow you to breathe a little more easily. It's also amazing how much this sequence affects your general flexibility into a forward bend, an arabesque, and especially the mobility of your hamstrings when mounting the leg to the front. This is due to its effect on all of the fascial lines in your body that cross the ribcage. This is a really nice set of exercises to use as part of your warm up before going into any dance class, and is also good to do in detail before you start moving onto the other parts of the program.

Note: If you feel any pulling or numbness into your hands with this exercise, this may indicate a restriction in the sliding of the nerves in your arms. Simply relax the wrist and elbow as you go into the reaches, but still perform the rib cage movements. If this is slow to resolve, we recommend consulting a local Physiotherapist or Osteopath who works with neural mobility issues to get some specific hands on treatment to help restore your range.

1. Forward Reaches

Start in a wide second position in parallel with your knees slightly bent. Reach forward with the right arm, feeling energy lengthening forward through your fingers, and also back through the opposite elbow, then repeat to the other side. While this may look like an upper body exercise, you also need to think about what is happening in the rest of your body as well.

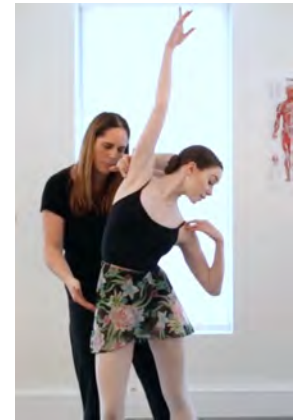
- Allow the ribcage and pelvis to rotate around a central axis, rather than leaning forward too much, and let this rotation spiral all the way down to the legs and feet.
- The same foot as the arm reaching forward will pronate (flatten/roll in), and the opposite foot will supinate (arch up).
- A lot of people are very rigid through their feet, so this might take some practise, and some dancers will need to do some gentle massage techniques to allow more foot mobility.
- Allowing the feet to move really helps make this a whole body mobilisation and can transform your flexibility in many areas.
- We suggest doing between 4-8 of these reaches in each direction. Keep focused on maintaining fluidity through the entire movement, rather than just hitting the end position.



2. Upward Reaches

Place your left hand on your shoulder and reach the right arm up and over to the ceiling. Soften the right knee as the right arm reaches to the ceiling and let the pelvis tilt.

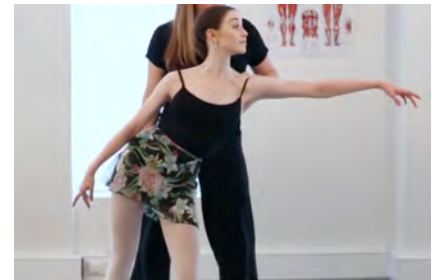
- You want to create the longest line between your armpit and hip, really lengthening out between your ribs.
- Some dancers really struggle with this at first, so if this is you, then practice the hip tilt on its own first, before adding the arm reach.



3. The Octopus

This variation creates a really lovely feeling of openness in one side of the ribcage, while compressing the other.

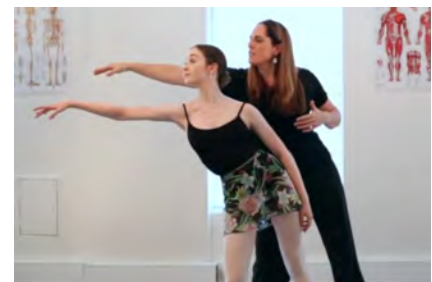
- Stand with the feet in a slightly wider second position.
- Shift the ribs off to the left and reach out with the left arm, reaching as far as you can towards the side wall.
- Keep a gentle awareness of your deep core, and try not to hyperextend the low back.
- If you feel any pain, discomfort or instability in the low or mid back, reduce the magnitude of the mobiliser, until you have been working on the exercises in the Isolation section for a few weeks.
- Repeat 8 times to each side, trying to soften 2mm deeper each time.



4. Backward Reaches

Reaching to the back can really help restore your rotation, and free up your thoracic spine. However, take care with this movement, as many people are very stiff in this direction due to the fact that they just don't do it on a regular basis!

- Place your right fingertips on your right shoulder and reach for the back wall with your left hand, whilst reaching forward with the right elbow.
- Maintain softness in the knees and look back at your extended hand, allowing the right foot to pronate and the left foot to supinate.
- Try to spiral around a central axis, rather than going into a back bend.



5. Spartacus

I like to call this exercise Spartacus, and always imagine Carlos Acosta performing for some reason!

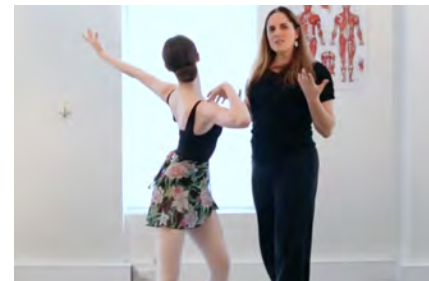
- Keep your right fingertips on the right shoulder, and sweep the left arm up to the top front corner of the room.
- Your arm should be angled at around 45 degrees up to the front,
- Feel equal energy down and back through the right elbow, as well as up and forward through the left hand to feel a nice spiral through the ribcage.



6. Shelf Reaches

Even more people are restricted in this direction, as most of us restrict our movement patterns to what is in front of us on a day to day basis.

- With your left hand, reach back and up to the opposite back corner.
- This really helps open out the chest area, especially if you tend to breathe into the top of your chest, or spend too much time on your phone!



7. Flexed Forward Reach

You also can do a couple of different variations to mobilise all aspects of the head of the ribs.

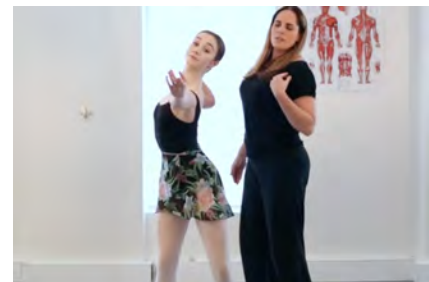
- Reach forward with the left arm and flex and rotate the ribcage a little. Really round out through the rib cage, breathing in to enhance the expansion in the back of the lungs.
- Repeat to the other side, really curling forward each time.



8. Extended Forward Reach

Finally, repeat the same forward reach with a little extension of the upper back.

- This really helps to unwind all of the arm lines and the upper back.
- Aim to feel a high release in the upper back, rather than sinking into the low back.
- You should not feel any numbness or tingling into the hands or fingers.



Hip Flexor Mobilisers

A lot of dancers do very strong hip flexor stretches especially if they are feeling tight in the hips, however strong static stretching can actually do more harm than good, by inhibiting and irritating the muscles you need to lift your legs to the front. These subtle hip flexor mobilisers are aimed at hydrating and mobilising the fascia rather than stretching the muscles and are a much better way to gently release tension and improve range in the front of the hip. The aim is to gently traction the tissues and release the stretch to allow fluid into the area. This helps lubricate and nourish the area, hydrating the fascia to make it more extensible.

Note: You never want to feel any sharp pain in the front of your hips. Aim for a slow, juicy mobiliser and a general awareness of lengthening in the tissues over an extended area, rather than a strong or painful stretch just in one place.

Starting Position

Place one foot forward and the other foot behind, keeping the body vertical. Stay high on your demi-pointe with the back foot, and place your hands on your hips. If you have any issues with the mobility of your big toe, you may place a folded towel under the back foot, under toes 2,3,4 and 5 to offload the big toe joint.



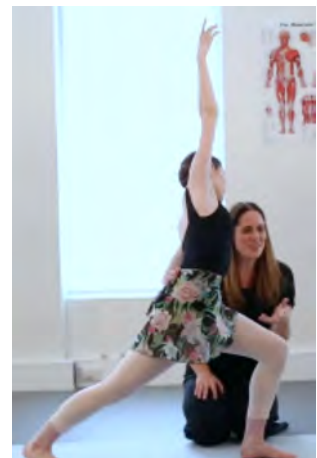
Basic Version:

Keeping the spine vertical gently press the heel back behind you and let the front knee come forward. This movement is more of a split than a lunge. You should start to feel a gentle opening in the front of the hip and upper thigh. Glide into position until you feel a subtle stretch and then back out of it. Keep the back knee straight, pelvis vertical, and focus on consciously opening the front of the hip. Do about 4 - 5 repetitions and then repeat on the other side.



Arm Reach

Using the same placement as the first variation, glide into position, while simultaneously reaching up and over with the same arm as the back leg. Keep lifted through the front of the pelvis, but it is ok to let the hip of the rear leg drop a little to lengthen the side waist. Aim for a real reach, not a classical ballet arm for this exercise.



Tucks and Tilts Sequence

This Tucks and Tilts sequence really helps to develop subtle pelvic stability and spinal control. It's a great exercise to do when you warm up before class as it helps you restore optimal range of motion to your pelvis and spine before you start training. For example, if you've been doing a certain variation the day before that has lots of extensions you may be feeling a little tight when arching your back. If you've been doing a contemporary piece that is very flexion based you may be feeling more restricted in a different direction.

This exercise helps your brain connect with the muscles responsible for very subtle movements of your spine and pelvis. When performing any adage, you need to be able to subtly control your pelvis in multiple different directions. To explain this I often use the metaphor of learning a new language. When you learn a new language you'll usually learn simple words like hello, goodbye, yes, no, please and thank-you. As you become more articulate you begin to have more words in your vocabulary so you can explain what you want a little more. As you learn more subtle control of the pelvis you can give your pelvis much more subtle corrections you can be a lot more artistic with your gesture leg rather than being really rigid through the pelvis.

1. Forward and Back

- Start by placing your finger tips on the hip bones, making sure your back is in a neutral position and your big back muscles are off.
- Using as little muscle tension as possible, slowly roll the pelvis back so that the lower back flattens into the floor.
- Make sure that the front of the hips and the abdominals are relaxed.
- Then reverse the movement, arching the lower back.
- Note any points of tension and whether you are tighter in one direction.
- If there is a restriction in either direction, whether that is due to pain, stiffness or simply lack of control, use the opposite direction and movement to treat it. I.e. If there is restriction in extension (arching your back) go into flexion, and do 10 slow side to side movements with the pelvis.
- Then go back to the original movement to retest.
- Your aim is to be able to do ten slow movements forward and back with no pain



2. Side To Side

- Keeping the front of the pelvis horizontal with the floor, slowly pull the right hip up towards the right lower ribs. Focus on contracting the right side muscles and lengthening out the left side.
- Repeat on the left, noticing any restriction, pain or difficulties in coordinating the movement.
- If there is pain or restriction in lifting one side (i.e. right hip hitch), use the opposite direction (left hip hitch) and the opposite movement (flexion and extension / tuck and tilt) to fix it.



3. Rotation

- Try rotating the pelvis from side to side, by feeling one hip heavy and falling back to the floor, allowing the other to float to the ceiling
- Both knees should stay pointing at the ceiling.
- Often this movement is uncoordinated rather than painful so simply practice the movement slowly.
- However, if one side is markedly restricted compared to the other, and then use the opposite direction, opposite movement rule.



4. Figure 8

- Once you can perform all directions effectively without any pain or restriction, you can combine them all by moving the pelvis in a figure 8 movement.
- This movement may take a while to master, but it is an excellent way to get all of the small muscles in the low back and pelvis working naturally together.
- Start in neutral, feeling weight through the centre of the sacrum. Roll up the sacrum, flattening the low back to the floor. Rotate the pelvis to the right, feeling the point of pressure move over the top of the right buttock, then down the outer side of the buttocks, underneath the buttocks, to come to the tip of the sacrum with the back slightly arched. Roll up the sacrum and repeat to the left.
- Perform eight figure 8's in each direction.



Trigger Point Releases with a Ball

Using a tennis ball to release trigger points in the Gluteals and Turnout Muscles can really help improve the mobility of your hamstrings and range into turnout, allowing the leg to be placed much more easily in your développé devant. Once you are aware of which muscles have increased tone you can use your conscious mind to deliberately relax the muscle you're working on.

- Start lying on your back with the feet flat to the floor, knees bent. Place the ball underneath one side of your pelvis, in the meaty part of your bottom. Place the other hand, held in a fist, under the other side of the pelvis to help keep it level
- Gently tuck and tilt the pelvis to find a tight point of tension ideally close to the point where you felt a stretch when testing turnout devant.
- Adjust your pressure until you feel about a 3/10 in intensity.
- Close your eyes and focus on breathing. As you breathe in experience the tension there and as you breathe out see if you can relax the whole bottom.
- If the sensation does not release, use less pressure.
- You don't want to feel any pins and needles coming down your leg, just a little muscle tension that you can release after 2-3 breaths.
- Keep in mind that this exercise is about internally letting go of your subconscious hold of that muscle, rather than massaging the muscle.



Note:

- This may take a bit of practice!
- You can try close to your tailbone or up and around the top of your buttocks.
- If you think of a nice rounded M shape from your tailbone up and over the buttocks.
- We suggest you buy a good quality branded tennis ball as the cheaper ones you buy from the dollar store often break when you sit on them.

Cupping for Upper and Lower Legs

Cupping is a great technique for helping mobilise and hydrate the layers of fascia in your upper and lower legs. This technique aims to traction out the layers of fascia, improving hydration, blood flow, extensibility and removing any adhesions between layers. This can be safely done by young dancers at home, and is a wonderful adjunct to their flexibility work. Many dancers find this a very effective way to release the tissues that are causing tension in their hips and legs, allowing you to lift your leg more easier in a développé devant.

What is Cupping? Cupping therapy has a long history of application in several asian cultures. Traditionally, a flammable substance, such as alcohol, herbs, or paper, is placed in a cup made of glass, metal, wood, or bamboo. The material inside the cup was set on fire to create a vacuum. As the fire goes out, the cup is placed upside down on the body in specific points to treat various health conditions according to traditional Chinese medicine. Cupping in this form often leaves large bruises on the skin.



We use a totally different approach to cupping, which uses a plastic cup, and a small suction gun, to create a gentle vacuum inside the cup. Lotion is applied to the area to be treated, a small vacuum created, and then the cup is moved slowly and consistently up and down and across the fascial lines. There should never be any bruising after doing this technique.



- Start with putting some massage cream on your leg.
- Place a cup on your leg and use a half squeeze of the cupping gun to gently create traction in the top layers of skin.
- The skin should never draw up past the lowest black lines on the cup, and always keep the cup mobile to avoid bruising.
- Move the cup gently up and down the leg, noting any areas of restriction where the cup moves more slowly.
- You should be able to move the cup easily with two fingers.
- Visualise fluid coming into area to create more space.
- Try working on the outer side of your lower legs, your hamstrings, quadriceps and the muscular parts of your hips and bottom.

Hamstring Mobilisation Sequence

The last mobiliser to do before getting started with all of the strengthening exercises is a Hamstring Mobilisation Sequence. These are not strong hamstring stretches, but are more dynamic mobilisers designed to increase hydration in all the tissues that surround the hamstrings. When doing these mobilisers, please make sure that the tension is felt around the back of the thigh, rather than down into the calf. If you do feel anything down in the calf, and especially if there is any sharpness or tingling to the quality of restriction, it may be a neural restriction rather than a fascial pull. If you do feel this, try going back to the trigger point releases through the bottom or more cupping along the back line or the base of the calf to release.

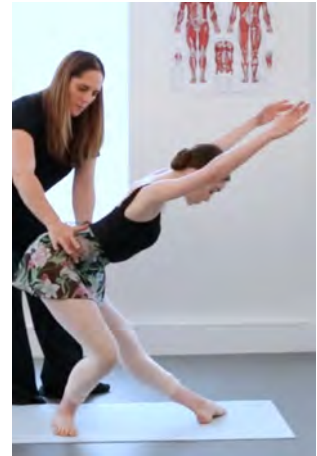
1. Hamstring Mobilisers in Parallel

- Start standing in parallel with your hands on your hips.
- Place one foot back, keeping both feet in parallel.
- Slowly fold at the hips, dropping the sit bones back to the wall behind you, bending the supporting leg, while keeping the front leg straight.
- Fold forward with the spine in neutral, keeping your hips square.
- Make sure not to flatten the low back, or overly arch the upper back
- You should feel a nice gentle stretch into back of the upper thigh.
- Once you have mastered the positioning of the spine, try deepening the mobiliser by reaching the arms forward in front of you, remembering to keep the hips square.



2. Turned Out

- Standing in first position, place one foot behind and drop the hips back, leaving the front foot in place.
- Try and keep the hips nice and square to the front, as it is very easy for them to twist in this variation.
- Remember to go just until the first point of restriction. You may not have as much range as you expect initially, but it will soon improve.
- This mobiliser helps improve your flexibility in rotation that you need for your extensions devant.



3. Turned In

- Start in standing with the feet turned in, in a 'pigeon toed' position.
- Step back with one leg as in the previous versions, keeping the hips square and leaning forward with the spine in neutral.
- This variation really helps target the medial hamstrings which are often neglected
- Repeat 8 times on each leg
- You should not feel any pain in the inside of the knee of the back leg. If you do, keep the back leg in parallel and just turn the front leg in.

