

## Gyrotonic

Even Madonna is doing it—Gyrotonic, the exercise system that stretches and strengthens famous muscles and ligaments.

**S**andra Foa had never enjoyed exercise until she tried Gyrotonic. "With Gyrotonic I finally found a form of movement that I enjoyed," Foa says. Gyrotonic is an exercise system designed to simultaneously stretch and strengthen the muscles and ligaments in the body. It was developed in the '70s by Julius Horvath, an injured dancer, to facilitate the dance rehabilitation process. Today Gyrotonic is practiced by dancers and is popular in Europe, where it is a primary component in physical therapy practices. It is becoming known in the US for its use in rehabilitation and athletic conditioning.

Gyrotonic is generally taught in private training sessions using an apparatus that has a tower with pulleys and weights. Gyrokinesis, a form of movement, is done without equipment in group classes but uses the same principles of Gyrotonic.

Foa, who trains with Deborah McBride at bodySpan Studio in Boulder, was drawn to Gyrotonic because she was looking for a remedy for the stiffness in her shoulders and arms. She had been given steroids by her doctor and was told that she would need to have surgery if the problem got worse. Gyrotonic has proved to be the real solution: Foa's range of motion and strength has improved tremendously. "I can move my arms and not feel pain," Foa says, adding that she is even pain-free when she unpacks boxes during her volunteer shift at the hospital.

McBride describes the form as a combination of dancing, swimming, yoga, tai chi, and Pilates. Horvath called it "yoga for dancers."

"All the movements work in spirals and mirror the way that energy travels through the body," McBride explains. "You are never working a part of the body in isolation."

Instead, there is always opposition. When exercising one part of the body, it is always connected to other parts that are working as well. For example, when McBride performs a shoulder exercise on the Tower, she uses two cranks on the apparatus to make circular motions with her arms and shoulders, while simultaneously working her abdominals, back, and inner thighs, stretching her pelvis and hips, and elongating her spine. The full movements are intricate, and use the entire body. This is complicated for beginners. These movements are often broken down into smaller, easier movements to facilitate learning.

Brooke Parkin, who takes Gyrotonic ses-

sions from McBride, has a background in Pilates and yoga. She found that doing Gyrotonic has helped her to strengthen her core. "In Pilates I had something of a chronic problem of using just my arms and legs and not engaging my core," Parker says. "Deb's system helps you connect to the core and learn how to use it."

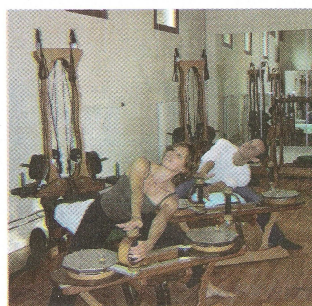
Engaging the core of the body is truly what Gyrotonic is all about. The moves cannot be done properly unless the abdominals, spine, hips, and pelvis (essentially the core of the body) are engaged. If McBride is doing an arm exercise, she uses the Tower and does the moves on both sides of her body at once, while opening her hips and pelvis as she sits on the Tower's bench. She uses a spiral motion that proceeds from her pelvis area, through her abdominals to her upper back, neck, and head to synchronize the exercise with both of her arms.

McBride is fluid, graceful, and all of her movements are connected. A dance teacher and choreographer before she learned Gyrotonic, she appears to be dancing as she demonstrates different exercises on the Tower. In fact, Gyrotonic incorporates many movements from dance and is often practiced by dancers to help strengthen weak muscles and improve technique.

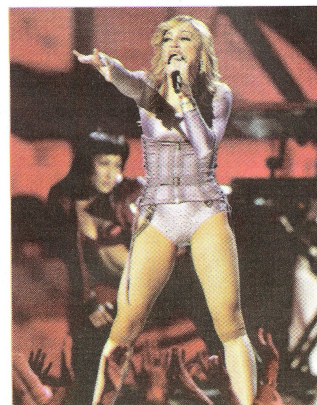
Emily McNeely, 13, is a serious ballet dancer who started doing Gyrotonic at bodySpan about a year ago in the hope that it would

improve her dancing. Not only has it helped her to gain flexibility, but McNeely says that with McBride's help she has been able to identify weak muscles that need strengthening. Additional benefits for McNeely include improved balance and a good feeling after each session. "My muscles always feel stretched and warm after doing Gyrotonic," McNeely says. "It has helped me with dancing and just everyday movements like walking around."

Despite being developed by dancers, Gyrotonic is not strictly for those who are rhythmically inclined. It can be helpful for hard-core athletes, people who just want to be healthy and stay in shape, and for those with chronic pain



or who are recovering from an injury. McBride says that in Europe Gyrotonic is more common and is, in fact, a key to the health and therapeutic community. For example, the studio where



MADONNASHOTS.COM

McBride trained in Germany was actually part of a health clinic and hospital. "Physical therapists in Europe have generally been trained in and incorporate Gyrotonic into treatments," McBride says. "It is very hooked into the medical community there."

Additionally, Gyrotonic is often recommended for the elderly because it is low-impact and has rehabilitative and rebalancing effects on the muscles. Gyrokinesis, the free form that is done without the use of the Tower or other equipment, is practiced seated on a chair. It's ideal for people who are not able to do vigorous motions. It gently works the joints and muscles through rhythmic and circular exercises.

McBride, who teaches a Gyrokinesis class at Frasier Meadows Retirement Community in Boulder, says that her students benefit because it improves circulation and is energetically beneficial to the body. Gyrokinesis works the body at not only the muscular level, but stimulates the nervous system as well. For example, when doing a shoulder exercise, McBride describes a tingling sensation of the nerve line that extends from her shoulder to her wrist and fingertips.

A person on her way to becoming a professional ballet dancer, recovering from a long competition season, or who would like to try Gyrotonic for the general health benefits, should not be discouraged by the lack of accessibility of this newer form of body work. While it is not yet a common offering at health clubs and gyms, McBride will be teaching a class through the Lifelong Learning program of the Boulder Valley School District in February 2007. ■

### Laanna Carrasco

has an MA in journalism from the University of Colorado. She has a passion for sports and animals, and is an avid runner.