

## Dance Tips - Stretching

Always stretch after classes and performances. It also is good to stretch during class between exercises. Here are three leg stretches that are good to do between exercises.

### Calf Stretch

*purpose:* To stretch the achilles tendon, calf muscle, and back of the leg (hamstring) and to prevent strain.

*position:* Stand at arm's length from the barre with the body inclined forward. Extend the leg to be stretched backward with the foot flat on the floor, toes pointing straight ahead. The front leg should be bent and the back leg straight.

*execution:* 1) Allow the body to fall forward slowly, keeping the foot flat at all times. To stretch the soleus muscle, slide back foot in slightly, bend both knees and allow the body to fall forward. 2) Hold for a few seconds and repeat on each leg.

### Hamstring Stretch

*purpose:* To stretch the hamstring muscle group and the upper attachment of the calf muscle.

*position:* 1) Assume the long sitting position (sitting with legs extended out in front of you), bend forward from the waist and reach as far forward as possible with your hands. 2) First, stretch with your toes pointed (plantar flexion), placing emphasis on the hamstring muscle group. Then, with the foot pulled back as far as possible (dorsiflexion), emphasize stretching the upper attachment of the calf muscle. Remember to stretch only to the point of mild discomfort. This should not hurt. 3) Hold for about thirty seconds, then repeat two or three times.

*variation:* Stretch as above but progressively widen the distance between your legs.

### Stork Stretch

*purpose:* To stretch the quadriceps muscle group, specifically the rectus femoris muscle, which, besides helping to extend the lower leg, acts as a hip flexor, and the iliopsoas muscle, a primary hip flexor; also assists in remediation of lumbar lordosis.

*position:* Standing in good postural alignment, bend your lower leg and grasp your ankle with the hand on the same side, the other hand resting on the barre.

*execution:* Keeping your thigh in the same alignment as your supporting leg, pull the heel of your foot toward the buttocks and then pull your upper leg backward as far as (comfortably) possible without overly arching your lower back.

**CAUTION:** To avoid placing stress on the lower back, the body must always be maintained in good alignment without arching the lower back.

Some things to remember:

- Never stretch a cold muscle--make sure you are properly warmed up before trying to stretch.
- Don't put weight on the leg you are stretching.
- Don't stretch those knee ligaments. Don't stretch those knee tendons. Stretch the thigh muscles only.
- Deadly position for your knees: Sitting with your bottom flat on the floor, legs bent at the knees and inverted (the thighs are rotated inward 90 degrees so that the inside of the thigh, knee and ankle are resting on the ground). Don't sit like this! It is terrible for your knees, even if it is comfortable. It stretches knee ligaments and tendons, which is exactly what you don't want to do.
- Remember that form is crucial when stretching. You can go from flexibility to injury simply by arching your back. Stay focused while stretching.