

YOGA[®] MAGAZINE

yogamagazine.com

NOVEMBER 2013

GET UP AND GO

HOME YOGA WORKOUT
TO BOOST YOUR
ENERGY LEVELS

MASTERING ARM BALANCES

EXPERT TIPS TO GIVE
YOUR BALANCE A
HELPING HAND

BEYOND THE PHYSICAL

YOGA AS
EMOTIONAL
THERAPY

COMPETITION

WIN
A BREAK IN
SPAIN
WORTH OVER
£1200



AN AUTUMN MIND DETOX

FEEL BRIGHTER, LIGHTER AND MORE POSITIVE

UK £3.95

USA \$4.99 BELGIUM FRANCE CYPRUS ITALY
AUSTRIA MALTA LUXEMBOURG NETHERLANDS €6.50
PORTUGAL €4.99 SPAIN €5.99 JAPAN ¥880 UAE AED30



9 771478 967034



WU TAO DANCE

A BEAUTIFUL, MEDITATIVE
PRACTICE THAT UNITES
BODY AND MIND

It's Monday morning. A group of tired, bleary-eyed women gather, not quite ready for the week ahead. The heater flicks on and the room warms-up. We start with stretches, gentle moves to wake aching, post-weekend muscles, sending blood where it's needed and moving stagnant energy - chi as it's known in Traditional Chinese Medicine, or TCM.

We laugh, we gossip and then we dance: simple choreographies based on the Chinese five elements of metal (air for Wu Tao), water, wood, fire and earth. Sharing the moves creates a safe boundary, a sense of unity - no dance-offs here! Like yin and yang energy itself, some dances are slow, nurturing, introverted almost, whilst some are earthy, bold, open, joyful. There is space for free expression as well, once we've warmed up and feel totally comfortable with our fellow dances - and ourselves.

As well as an element, each of the dances connects to a life-stage, a physical organ, an emotion and a season: so fire is the heart, joyous adulthood, high summer. This profound connection between Earth, body and mind is one of TCM's central tenets and Wu Tao Dance (pronounced Dao and meaning 'The Dancing Way') reflects this.

"Wu Tao Dance engages with our lived experience through the seasons: summer, winter, autumn, spring and through our emotions: anger, fear, joy, sadness and so on," explains editor and Wu Tao Instructor Catherine McCredie. "In doing this, in a very gentle repetitive way, it helps restore us to ourselves. In terms of balance it's more akin to floating on a body of water, as opposed to finding a fixed stable spot."

Back to our Monday morning session, and the choreography is slow and balletic at first: The Air Dance. Arms stretch up and backwards in graceful circles, we are waking the lung and large-intestine meridians, or energy channels, which run down the inside of our arms.

These organs are powerful detoxifiers removing stagnant air and food respectively. As we fling our arms back we wave goodbye to toxins in our body, and to powerful, often long-held grief and sadness - there's that mind-body connection again. Then, as we stretch upwards, expanding our lungs, we flood our muscles with fresh oxygen, blood and chi, opening to the possibility of joy and excitement.

"Water protects and nourishes us, helping us face our fears and reach our potential."



Detoxed and rejuvenated, we literally and metaphorically dive down onto the floor ready for The Water Dance.

So what is Wu Tao? Its roots are deeply grounded in TCM and therefore Chinese Taoism, but the dances and meditations were created in 2000 by Michelle Locke, a former dancer with the Western Australia Ballet Company and founder of the first school of shiatsu massage in Australia. Popular in Michelle's homeland, and recently launched in New York, Wu Tao is new to British shores.

In simple terms, it is an opportunity to dance - a rare thing for many of us once adult responsibilities and inhibitions kick-in. Studies on dancing's beneficial effects are numerous, according to recent research it reduces the risk of dementia by 76%.*

But honestly, who needs a study to prove that dancing does us good? As Samuel Beckett once said: "Dance first. Think Later. It's the natural order."

The more you dance Wu Tao's choreographies, the more you peel away its subtle layers. The simple moves ease a host of physical and mental ailments: from fertility problems to depression, via fatigue and back issues, one student even reported an improvement in her eyesight!

Going deeper, the dances become physical and visual meditations - birds for air, seeds for water (more on this later) - which can create profound psychological and spiritual shifts for the dancer.

TCM has used knowledge of our energy systems to effectively treat patients for thousands of years. It is slowly gaining currency in the West, a recent study by Harvard Medical School, for example, showed that acupuncture is an effective treatment for anxiety and depression.**

The NHS also makes limited use of this practice, mostly for physical back problems that incidentally Wu Tao can help as well. The dances stimulate bladder points, which in turn activate the spine; they also gently move the back in all directions, increasing blood-flow, and therefore vital nutrients, to the spinal cord.

Elsewhere, The Nursing Times recently published a report on the specific benefits of Wu Tao Dance for dementia patients. Instructors use an adapted version of the dances, called Wu Tao Wisdom. Wu Tao Express for children is also available.



“The dance is a powerful metaphor for real-life growth...”

Back to our Monday group, having ‘flown’ down from the air we lie on our backs and immerse ourselves in the watery music. Water protects and nourishes us, helping us face our fears and reach our potential. The dance is a powerful metaphor for real-life growth, letting us unblock issues we face along the way, whilst also stimulating the kidney point, which builds the energy we need to launch new projects, or even to conceive.

We are tiny seeds at the bottom of the ocean, plunged into darkness, freezing, afraid, but full of potential and totally supported and nourished by the mineral rich seawaters - in fact, sea water is thought to have a similar composition to blood.

Deeply visceral, the dance mirrors our growth from a seed-like embryo rocked by the ocean’s currents, to the development of our central nervous system, bones and marrow, to our first splash; our first experience of stretching our arms upwards to the surface sunshine.

And so we stand, launching into the funky, bassy wood dance, our teenage years, which celebrates our creativity but helps us dissipate anger; then onto joyful, uplifting fire where we imagine dancing around flames and finally earth - grounding ourselves back into our daily reality, knowing we are truly supported by the Earth and that she does literally provide everything we need - including the paper or rare earth minerals that, whether in print or digital, let you read these words.

REFERENCES

* A 21-year study on senior citizens, 75 and older, led by the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, NYC, and published in the New England Journal of Medicine.

** www.healthcni.com/acupuncturist-news-online/778-pmsaxiety

WRITTEN BY

MARY MALYON

MARY IS THE ONLY WU TAO DANCE TEACHER IN THE UK. AFTER TRAINING IN MELBOURNE WITH FOUNDER, MICHELLE LOCKE, SHE NOW RUNS COUNTRY WIDE WORKSHOPS AND TEACHES ONLINE AT POWHOW.COM/CLASSES/MARYS-DANCE-STUDIO MARY ALSO WRITES FOR PUBLICATIONS INCLUDING THE NATURAL PARENT NZ, THE GUARDIAN AND WANDERLUST. AND CAN BE FOUND TWEETING @MARYMALYON. FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT MARYMALYON.COM OR VISIT FACEBOOK.COM/WUTAODANCEUK