

Yoga for Dancers—Love Your Hips and They’ll Love You Back

by Anna Rain

Most of us notice some tightness in the hips as our dancing lives evolve. Keeping the hips open and flexible is beneficial for the hips themselves, but working the hips also protects the knees (See *CDSS News*, Summer 2009, “Ease of the Knees”) and the ankles. Here are some poses to encourage the hips to release, first by softening the inner groins and then by externally rotating the thighs.

Lying Cross-Legged

Sit on the floor with the shins crossed. (You’ll find you have a different opening in the



hips depending on whether you cross the ankles or the shins; start with a shin cross and explore whether you have a more satisfying challenge in the inner groins and in the hips



with the shins or the ankles crossed.) On the first side (see above photo), bring the right shin in first and then the left. Lie back on your elbows and adjust your buttock flesh away from your waist. Lie all the way down and take your arms overhead, fingernails on the floor (photo). If your arms are not comfortable



o v e r h e a d , stretch them out to the side, level with your shoulders, palms up (photo). Roll the front tips of your shoulders toward the floor and draw your shoulder blades as flat on the floor as you can. See that the back of your neck is long and that your chin and jaw release gently toward your throat (and that your chin doesn’t point to the ceiling). If you can’t rest comfortably with your head on the floor, fold a firm blanket and place it under your head.

Actively engage the arms, either overhead or out to the side. When the arms are fully stretched, your spine receives the action and is able to extend. Let the legs drop toward the floor, right thigh to the right, left thigh to the left.

If the sensation in your hips or groins is too intense, use a prop—a rolled towel; a blanket; a book—under each outer thigh to give the legs something to release into (photo).

Rest here and notice the difference in your body when you engage the arms and when you release them. See that you are not holding the thighs up, but instead are letting them drop toward the floor or into the support.

To come up, bring your knees together and put your feet on the floor. Either roll to the side and press yourself up with your elbow and hand



(photo: head comes up last! Don’t lift the head first!), OR



swing your knees to your chest and roll up to sit. On the second side, bring the left shin in first and then the right. Repeat all actions, staying in the pose for an equal amount of time.

To summarize:

- Cross right shin in first, then left (reverse for second side)
- Adjust buttock flesh away from waist
- Lie down with arms overhead or out to side, level with shoulders
- Engage arms actively, with palms up and fingernails on floor
- Drop thighs toward floor or into support
- Roll to side to come up, or bring knees together and swing them to chest to roll up
- Repeat, crossing left shin in first

Foot on Wall/Leg Cross Hip Opener

Lie on the floor with your feet on the wall and your thigh and shin making a right angle. *(photo)*. Cross right ankle over left thigh, keeping left thigh vertical (don't let it cave in toward the right). The right thigh



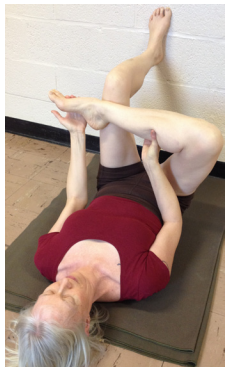
has two actions: it externally rotates from deep in the hip socket, rolling from the inner thigh to the outer thigh, *AND* it presses away from the waist, toward the wall. Use your right hand to rotate the thigh toward the outer hip (in the direction of my fingers in the photo) and to press the root of the thigh (near the hip socket) toward the wall.



If you can reach your right foot with your left hand, hold the right foot, from underneath, holding the metatarsals. Allow the foot to relax and to sickle; let your heel turn toward the ceiling and your toenails turn toward the wall. If you can't reach your foot, catch the foot with a strap and hold both ends of the strap. See that that foot is relaxed (not flexed) and that the lower leg rotates from the underside of the calf toward you then toward the front shin (follow the direction of my right thumb in the photo). Rolling the shin in that direction, move the shin toward the body *(photos left)*.



To access the correct action of the hip, the angle between the right thigh and shin must be closer to a right angle and *NOT* an acute angle. If you aren't feeling any opening in the hip, check the angle of the right thigh and right shin. If the shin is too close to the thigh, the hip will not receive the action and you won't feel anything.



Combine the actions: right thigh externally rotates and moves away from the body *WHILE* shin externally rotates and moves toward the body. These two actions combined optimize

opening of the hip while protecting the knee. See that the sensations you feel are in the hip. If you feel a pulling in the knee, ease up. See that the hip and the shin are both rotating in the correct direction. Then (and I swear this works): tell the sensation to go to the hip. Let the hip be where the opening and pulling happens and not the knee.

Take the right foot back to the wall and repeat on the other side, with the left ankle crossing over the right thigh.

To summarize:

- Lie on floor, feet on wall, knees at right angle
- Cross right ankle over left shin and see that right thigh/shin makes a right angle
- Externally rotate right thigh and press away from waist
- Externally rotate right shin (toenails to wall is correct direction) and draw ankle/foot toward body
- See that sensation is in right hip (and not right knee)
- Repeat all actions on left side, with left ankle crossed over right thigh



Look at the picture of me sitting and observe the way the thighs roll out and the calves and soles of the feet turn toward the ceiling. This is correct action of the hip socket and it protects the knee. Spending time in these hip openers (extra points for

regularly! and frequent!) will gradually access more rotation in your hips, which is good for your hips, your knees and your ankles. Keeping joints fluid and juicy can address (and possibly prevent) restrictive conditions like arthritis. Give your hips some love and they'll love you back by not hurting!

Anna Rain is a certified Iyengar yoga instructor. She'll lead English country dancing and contra at FolkMADness Music and Dance in Socorro, NM over Memorial Day Weekend and at English Scottish Contra Week at Pinewoods, July 6-10. At CDSS's Early Music Week at Pinewoods, August 15-22, she'll lead English country dance and teach a yoga for dancers and musicians class. Accordion players are her latest crush.