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- today's paper
- archive

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local

Pilates comes home to NYC

Protégé of discipline's founder returns to city to give instruction

by amy zimmer / metro new york

AUG 4, 2006

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BATTERY PARK CITY — In 1941, Romana Kryzanowska, a prima ballerina in George Ballanchine's New York City ballet company, developed a painful bone growth in her ankle. Three doctors told her she needed surgery. But Ballanchine brought her to the studio of Josef Pilates, a German immigrant who developed a system of exercises to strengthen muscles and increase flexibility and joint mobility.



(Photo: Aharon Rothschild/Metro)

Kryzanowska, healed after five sessions, became a convert to the practice. Now 83-years-old, she continues to spread the legacy of Pilates around the world and brought her sixth annual Romana's Pilates Convention this week to New York for the first time. Tomorrow, the Pilates master — who has rarely let the general public watch her practice — is hosting her first open demonstration on basic Pilates techniques for standing, sitting, running and jumping.

"This is the art of control," Kryzanowska said, "control of every part of your body. Let's say you have a knee injury: you go to a doctor first and then you finish up with Pilates. There are doctors now sending clients to me because they know the importance of the exercises, some of which are very strong, some are light." The technique focuses mostly on strengthening the "core" muscles in the abdomen, buttocks and lower back.

"Now come in smooth, like putting butter on the bread," Kryzanowska told a participant reaching for her legs during yesterday's convention opener Pilates class. "It's all about rhythm."

Though Josef Pilates came to New York to help the famous boxer Max Schmeling train other boxers, he soon became the guru for injury-prone dancers. Many of the 235 Pilates instructors from around the world who came to the convention yesterday started out as dancers.

"I have people from Nebraska, a lot from Hollywood," Kryzanowska said.

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“I don’t know what they do in Hollywood though. I teach pure pilates.” As the practice has grown in popularity different forms have sprouted, like “water Pilates” or “yogalates” and mat Pilates classes that sometimes incorporate other techniques. But Kryzanowska preaches Josef’s style, one-on-one using a spring-and-string exercise contraption he designed.

“You have to work with a person and see what their body is like,” she said. “You teach them how to do the exercises themselves and how to carry themselves with that control all the time.”

Ana Restrepo, 35, flew in from Barcelona to attend. “The core of Pilates is here in New York with the main studio here and Romana developing her technique here,” Restrepo said, “It’s a very deep relationship when you practice, with the body, with the instructor. It can be spiritual, mental, emotional. It’s how you learn to move, and it can be profound, or it can be just how you work out.”

Around the bend

- Romana Kryzanowska will host a demonstration on Sat., Aug. 5, from 3 to 5 p.m. at the Grand Ballroom of the Ritz Carlton Hotel, 2 West St. Tickets are \$25. For info, visit truepilatesny.com.



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