

Why Pilates for Dressage? by Janice Dulak

As a professional dancer, I spent many more hours in dance classes practicing than I ever did on stage. When working for a choreographer, I had to be sure that my abilities to dance would match what was needed for me to perform. Often, I was put in a role to perform a duet with another dancer. There were partners who “clicked” with me, and others, who were not as skilled, were rather difficult to find that “oneness” that I loved when I was dancing with someone who really knew what they were doing.

In dressage, I am finding it is the same. When my mare and I didn’t “click” I thought it was because she wasn’t a good enough horse to do dressage. However that thought was dashed quickly when a professional would climb aboard and “dance” with her two levels above what I could do with her! I began to understand that as in dance, dressage takes two to tango.

By this I mean that it is often the rider’s issues, not the horse’s, that stymie progress. And if I had problems learning to ride dressage as a professional dancer, then how much harder was it going to be for an average mover to learn to ride, especially as an adult. That is when I realized that although good dressage teachers could take me so far, the real problem was that I needed another body of information that was not readily available for me to understand how to ride correctly.

I found this body of information directly from my mare and my profession. As a dancer, I could move and isolate each part of my body. I could stabilize one part and move another. I could feel many different qualities of movement, from soft and loose, to supple and strong, from tense to strong, from weak to easy. This is the training a dancer goes through for the art of dance, which is after all, non-verbal communication. When I was asked to stand on stage and lift an arm, it wasn’t just lifting the arm. The choreographer would indicate the “feeling” of the lift. It could be an impassioned plea for help, it could be a soft sorrowful gesture of despair, or it could be raised with the lightness of hope and joy. All of my body was trained to deliver the art of the non-verbal in order to communicate.

Now I realized, all I had to do is ask my mare questions while I rode her. But, which part of my body and how? It became a game as I tried this and that, and waited for her response. She was my ultimate teacher, finally dropping down on the bit, softening in her back and moving freely forward and back as I began to communicate more clearly with her with the vast verbiage of the non-verbal!

This is Pilates for Dressage®. I bring you, the aspiring rider, the powerful language of the non-verbal.