

Backstage Coach Productions

Dance Education

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EXERCISE FOR THE ALIGNMENT OF THE KNEES, ANKLES, AND FEET

by
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In the book *Inside Ballet Technique*, author Valerie Grieg emphasizes that the knee depends on the correct alignment of both the pelvis and the foot for its stability, and at all times the knee should be aligned over the foot. She advises, "Correct placement of weight through the ankle and into the foot is also essential" (83). The focus here is to share one anatomical teaching practice that guides the student in performing with the proper alignment of the knees, ankles, and feet.

This plié/relevé exercise may be executed in parallel and in turn-out to help students experience the correct alignment of the knees, ankles, and feet. The exercise is first performed at the barre until the student gains the strength and balance needed in order to move to the center. Variations of the exercise may include a plié/relevé on one leg for more advanced students.

Of importance is for students to begin the exercise with the entire foot making contact with the floor versus (inversion) raising the inner side of the foot or (eversion) raising the outer side of the foot (Grieg 107). I use the kinetic imagery of an inverted triangle to teach students to evenly distribute weight throughout the entire foot. Imagine that there are three points of weight bearing contact: the heel bone (calcaneus), and the big and little toes (digits) (Grieg 102). Grieg suggests for the weight to be placed slightly further over the toes for ballet students (27).

Most alignment concerns involve the knees moving inward during the plié which may affect the placement of the ankles as well. Students who are lacking strength in the ankles often begin to wobble and lose balance, and as a result find difficulty performing a secure relevé which is needed for multiple turns. Strengthening the ankles and feet can correct this.

As the dancer yields into the plié, the knees should open in alignment over the feet. Grieg uses visual imagery to describe how to align the knees, ankles, and feet. She points out, "A straight line can be drawn vertically through the center of the knee and the center of the ankle, and on into the second toe" (Grieg 102). I believe this imaginary line is helpful in making a connection between the joints.

In turn-out the rotation should be consistent and equal in relationship to the hips and continuing through the knees and feet. If one body part is more turned-out than others it may cause stress on that particular joint as well as cause misalignment in other areas of the body. I believe the following exercise provides the student with safe practices in which to become more aware of the proper alignment, balance, and strength needed as a foundation for many other movements.

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THE EXERCISE:

Begin by facing the barre with feet in parallel first position:

Part A:

Plié 12
Roll through the feet remaining in plié 34
Relevé 56
Lower Heels 78
Reverse beginning in relevé X4

Part B:

Plié/Relevé X4
Balance in Relevé

Part C:

Stretch the gastrocnemius:
Support yourself with both hands on the barre
Align feet and legs in parallel 4th pressing the back heel to the floor
Hinge forward at the waist for a deeper stretch

Part A may also be performed with turn-out, in relevé on one leg, and ending in a balance with the working leg held in the desired position.

Suggested Resources:

Grieg, Valerie. *Inside Ballet Technique: Separating Anatomical Fact from Fiction in the Ballet*

Class. New Jersey: Princeton Book Company, 1994

Sawyer, Gina. *The Performance Dictionary.* Dallas: Backstage Coach Productions, 2005.