

The Warm Up is Everything!

When I first began taking dance classes at BalletMet (Columbus, OH) I desperately wanted to learn the warm-up from my teacher as it looked like the most beautiful, controlled movement a group of dancers could do. They were all doing it the same, but so very differently – within their own timing – as if their body told them when to move next. The older dancers in the class looked so refined as they stretched their limbs, and I was just more than happy to show them I could stretch a straddle, and kick my face.

It wasn't until I grew older that I realized that the warm-up was the foundation of the entire class. Maybe it had to do with age, or finally being in a setting with professionals, but I learned that the most important thing you do as a dancer *is* warm-up. My favorite song when I was little was "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes". I still use this today when I teach, as proper body alignment is everything for a dancer. You can watch any dancer and wonder how they stretch off their center, or rotate five pirouettes; it's all due to their warm-up! Remember coaches, discovering a good warm-up for your team is just as important as song choice, costumes, and which competitions you will be competing in for the season.

Your job is to come up with a 30-45 minute warm-up that enables your dancers to give you the best possible version of themselves while dancing. Think about starting at the top of the body and working your way down to the tips of the toes. If you want your dancer to kick higher, make sure the stretches and conditioning you are doing during the warm up enables the lengthening of the muscles needed. If you are looking for your dancers to be on center, make sure you have core work built into that warm-up. Your warm-up should be a partnership that marries your choreography and technical needs.

One of the most memorable auditions I went to in Los Angeles was about the warm-up. I went to the studio, signed in, received my number and went in to prepare my body to dance for the choreographer. I wanted to be the best dancer in that room. Some dancers stood around talking about who they knew, looking at each other and showcasing their best assets. Little did anyone know, the choreographer was in the room the entire time....watching! After 20 minutes past the hour he made first cuts. The choreographer cut those that were not there preparing their bodies for his choreography. I am happy I got to the point in my dance career with the understanding that the warm-up is everything. You have the opportunity to train your dancers for a lifetime of performing! Keep dancing and always "touch your toes!"