

# ***FUNctional Anatomy for Dancers Level 3***

## Your Body in Dance

### **An Exploration of the Foundational Movements in Dance**

#### **Overview –**

An in depth analysis of the movements and anatomy involved in

Proper starting positions

Demi Plié

Relevé

Grand Plié

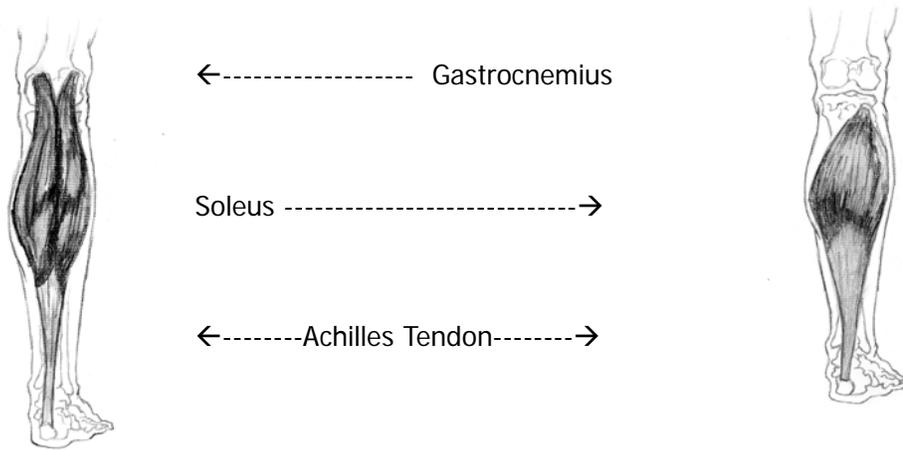
24 Lessons, several that would benefit from being repeated over successive classes that use movement explorations to educate dancers on proper bio mechanical patterns for their individual bodies

24 Student Reference Sheets to coordinate with the lessons above. The sheets are designed to remind, reinforce, note individual analysis and record progress

The following pages include a sample of the Teacher's Guide background information and a Movement Exploration.

## *Deepening the plié*

Balance between the front and the back of the leg becomes very important when you focus on deepening the demi plié. The soleus muscle attaches on the tibia and joins with the gastrocnemius to form the Achilles tendon.<sup>1</sup> [See diagram] In a demi plié the ability of the soleus muscle to lengthen determines the depth of the movement and keep the weight grounded. Very often this muscle is found to be both tight and weak in dancers.



When a dancer has a tight soleus muscle they will shift forward when standing in first or parallel. When executing the demi plié a tight soleus will limit the depth of the demi plié or cause the heels to release.

Some dancers will release the pelvis backwards at the bottom of the demi plié to compensate for a tight soleus muscle in order to keep their heels down and increase the depth of their plié. This is commonly seen with the younger, beginner dancer. The older dancer who has developed more detailed compensations may combine several patterns such as tucking the pelvis under while lifting the heels slightly at the bottom of the plié, and overworking the muscles at the front of the ankle.

Note: Dancers who have tight calf muscles and who wear flip-flops and/or shoes with a heel need to change their shoe wear at least temporarily. Wearing high heels or flip-flops creates chronic tension in the calf muscles that need to release to deepen the plié.

## *Toe gripping*

Some dancers who grip their toes while doing demi plié may have simply shifted their weight too far forward over their feet – but more commonly they are trying to lift their arches. Gripping their toes while lifting their



arches may also shift their weight towards the outside of their feet. Gripping of toes always encourages tension in muscles in the front of the calf, which increases the potential for shin splints. If dancers are gripping their toes to lift their arches to compensate for rolling in, reevaluate their turnout. They may be more turned out at their feet as compared to their hip joint. Decrease the width of their first position to see if maintaining correct weight distribution on their feet will solve the toe gripping. If they are still having problems, encourage them to strengthen the intrinsic foot muscles as described in **FAD Level 2, Lesson 5**.

<sup>1</sup> See **FAD Level 2, lesson 7** for more information

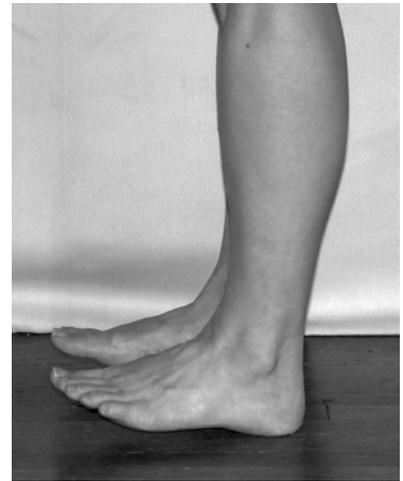
## Lesson 12 Weight Bearing and the Foot

This lesson is designed to provide the dancer with awareness of the role of the feet in weight bearing. The feet need to be more active than just resting on the floor to be effective as weight bearers. The goal in movement is to be able to maintain efficient weight distribution in the feet during dynamic situations. In a relevé the weight is placed along the shelf created at the joint of the toes and metatarsals. The center of the weight in relevé will be between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> toes. Maintaining an even weight distribution keeps the dancer from moving into pronation or supination.



Have the dancers stand with their legs parallel and hip width apart. Remind them to find the even tripod of weight distribution before continuing. Have the dancers shift their weight forward and relevé, finding their balance on the shelf of the metatarsal pads at the top of the relevé. Remind them to control the descent back to their starting position, finding their tripod.

Next shift the weight backward onto the heels and allow the toes to leave the floor. Return to the starting position finding the tripod of weight distribution. Repeat this 3 more times



Turn the legs and feet out into a turned out first position with a little bit of space between the heels. Repeat the exercise above 4 times. Note the different challenges that are present with the legs turned out versus parallel. Is rolling to the inside or outside more prevalent in parallel or turned out? Do both feet move through relevé in the same way? Do you feel more weight on one foot over the other? Is the weight distribution the same in the rise and lowering of relevé?

Encourage the dancers to work slowly to allow time to concentrate on the sensations and any feedback. This exercise is beneficial to do on a regular basis. As they become more consistent with the tracking of their feet, begin to speed the movements up to create more challenge.

