

Spirited Movement Article for the Teachers Federation Health reTreat website
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(Feel free to use any of these pics)

Moving with awareness, joy and vitality – Spirited Movement Classes

Get ready to feel ALIVE again! The moment you walk into a Spirited Movement experience you become highly aware and conscious of the body that you live in. And this aliveness is not just physical, it's emotional, energetic, profound. It's not just about thrashing your body around until you feel exhausted or in pain. Instead you find yourself breathing, energizing, expressing and connecting with so much sensitivity and joy that the experience starts to heal you, while simultaneously you are increasing fitness, endurance and mobility. Never underestimate the power of movement, however subtle. For example, right now, slightly upturn the sides of your lips. Sense the shift that occurs in your body. Moving with awareness and joy stimulates happiness, sense of self, presence and clarity. This is the sort of energy that unites us all in a Spirited Movement class. Imagine that you are moving in harmony with a group of others to diverse and inspirational music. The space is accepting and non competitive and you are being invited to move as if for the first time. Everybody relaxed and present. All of you feeling the magnetic joy of movement together. Fitness is one aspect of these classes, but even here it is not defined by how much you hurt or how much better you are than anyone else. The measure is the experience itself and how much it enriches your life. In this way, Spirited Movement strongly reflects the childlike and spirited qualities of playtime where everything is innocent and fresh, unbiased and free. Often I will describe to the class that this is their 'movement playground'. It's time for the child within to awaken and express.

Class Structure

Each Spirited Movement class is built up of a moving meditation, an energetic workout and a strengthening practice ending with a lying Savasana where you rest your body quietly, allowing the blood and qi to circulate through your organs and limbs. The moving meditations are inspired by a number of practices including Sacred Dance, Osho's 'Dynamic Meditations' and my own Circle Dances and 'Body Check'. Sacred Dance offers the modern world an opportunity to soften and become more compassionate to ourselves and each other. It's history as a devotional and self-honouring practice is well known and cherished. What I love about this practice is that it acknowledges the magnitude of the universe, the oneness and the universal mind. Something that we lose touch with living in an intellectual world. The steps are not difficult, but may require balance and coordination skills, which you build up more and more as you do this sort of work. The pace of Sacred Dance is slow and rhythmic, thus very easy to follow and suitable for all age groups and fitness levels. Osho was a spiritual teacher, a mystic, who has changed the lives of many people just through his wisdom and embodiment teachings. His dynamic meditations can be anything from physical expression through to profound cathartic work. In a class like Spirited Movement, we shake and rattle the body in order to release pent up tension or agitation, relieving the body of the burden of suppressed stress. Breathwork is also an important part of the class, as it provides a direct link to the nervous system and spine. Su-lin's 'Body Check' is a meditation designed to be done in a group circle, where all parts of the body are addressed and invited to move whilst breathwork helps to open energy channels to create more flow in movement. This is the foundation of the Spirited Movement class, as all movement from hereon has a similar 'connected' feel to it.

The energetic workout in Spirited Movement classes is in fact a Nia Technique routine. Each routine fuses together nine movement forms: Tai Chi, Tae Kwan Do, Aikido, Jazz dance, Duncan dance, Modern dance, Yoga, Alexander Technique and Feldenkrais Method. The interplay of clever steps and stances, voice work and inspirational music makes for a pretty alive experience. This is where we work on agility, balance, flexibility and endurance. Raising the heart rate, breathing with more energy and moving with ultimate vitality are key. The routines are fun and always different. Nia is extraordinary in that no other movement technique I know of gives a person an opportunity to defuse and release suppressed emotions in such a creative way. Nia was developed by Carlos and Debbie Rosas over 20 years ago.

Apart from Pilates and Yoga there are not many options for strengthening work in Sydney, and for those who are building up their strength, the shorter 15 minute duration of postures in a Spirited Movement class is a much more manageable prospect. The poses are taken from the ancient Tibetan practice of Kum Nye, which is simple, non-competitive, will-building and amply challenging. What is fascinating about this practice is the obvious inspiration it has drawn from nature and the animal world. So it actually feels quite natural to hold these poses. Poses such as 'Lion's Roar' and 'Flying Drum' reflect this. Kum Nye builds strength in the abdomen, bones, legs, arms, lower and upper back, and ankles. Perfect for the modern day human!

Try a Spirited Movement Exercise

'Moving Meditation for The Base (Feet, Legs and Pelvis)' (5+ minutes)

Put on some music and create a nice space for yourself. The music should ideally have a slow beat, or no beat at all. Move barefoot in loose clothing. Stand with legs pelvic width apart. Soften your eyes and take a few deep breaths. As you breathe, start to isolate the body parts that feel stressed, rigid or locked up. Breathe into them with the intention of softening and opening. In your mind's eye see the rigid parts of your body loosening up, encouraging the same process to occur in your physical body. As you exhale, say 'Ahhhhh', sensing surrender and release. Feel your breath moving all the way down into the soles of your feet, and also feel the press of your body weight into the ground. Sense each part of your base in turn, and take enough time to do this so that your skin begins to tingle with awareness. Soften your knees and ankles as you breathe into them. Keep the breath consistent and deep. When you finally arrive at the pelvis feel your inhalation expanding your pelvic space, broadening the bones and bringing new life into this body part which symbolizes creativity. Let the pelvis sit atop your legs as a vast basin. Breathe into it and feel the breath bouncing around within its walls. Sense the whole base, pelvis, legs and feet as heavy, strong and resilient, like the base of a tree.

Begin to step, very slowly and with deep awareness of how you actually place your weight in your feet as you step. Practice the art of creating flow in your step, so that instead of jagged movement, your steps seem to be seamlessly connected one to the next in a single flowing movement. To do this, bend the knees slightly and use your breath to create more ease. Relax the pelvis. After walking for a period of time, you may start to dance. Do so with the sensation of again being 'bottom heavy', strong and supported by your base. Let your upper body be light and flowy. Enjoy the freedom that comes with a strong base. Enjoy your dance. Stay conscious and keep breathing and feeding your cells.

About Su-lin Sze

Su-lin currently teaches a range of weekly movement classes from the sublime to the energetic throughout Sydney, including regular workshops and corporate movement services. These include Spirited Movement, Nia Technique, Chakradancer, Movement Meditation and Specialty Workshops. Students use words such as inspirational, alive, grounded, expressive, non-judgemental, exciting and fun to describe their learning experience with Su-lin. Su-lin is a practising Naturopath and writer of the Herbs for Health column for www.purecalma.com. For more information about her herbal work and dance classes see www.herbalwell.com.au