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Ballerina Interview

Lisa Sunstrom, former principal dancer for the Pennsylvania Ballet and I were asked to assist with the first Annual Benefit Dance Concert for the AIDS Foundation of Philadelphia, which was produced at the Academy of Music. I treated some of the dancers and Lisa performed at the event.

She is a strong proponent for good health and chiropractic. Here are some of her thoughts you may find interesting.

DR. SARACINO: Would you tell us about your dance background?

LISA: I started dancing at age five, one class a week; at about twelve, two to three a week then almost everyday at age fourteen. At fifteen I went to California and trained with a regional company in Los Angeles, where I received a lot of good training and performing experience. Then I went to New York.

At what age did you move to New York?

Sixteen. I was given a scholarship with twelve other students chosen from around the country. It only lasted a year, but we danced two technical classes once a day including partnering and point (special hard-toe shoes for dancing on one's toes). Jazz and modern dance were taught and we even had to take kinesiology (the study of the body's movement) and music.

So, you learned Jazz, modern, music and kinesiology. Sounds like dancer's cross-training?

Yes, and it is beneficial to learn more than one kind of dance in the beginning, especially now, with modern dance so intertwined with classical ballet. You know from working with the Parsons Dance Company (a New York modern dance company with whom I work). A lot of the new ballet pieces are extremely modern even for women on point. The study of music is necessary because you need to understand timing to dance.

Have you ever received Chiropractic manipulations?

Yes. It is essential for dancers to have good alignment. I have received Chiropractic treatments and I think they have been very necessary. I don't feel the need to go often because I have been injury free and have had good basic training. Many dancers go regularly.

How is your diet?

I try throughout the year to have a good, balanced diet. I really don't eat a lot, but I do eat foods that give me energy, like carbs. I eat a light breakfast because I can't go to class with a lot in my stomach. I usually eat a piece of fruit between breakfast and lunch during one of our breaks. Then it's a sandwich or a cup of soup for lunch. For dinner I'll eat a turkey sandwich. I don't eat a lot of red meats. I also like to drink a lot of water. It is really good for the muscles, especially when performing, because you sweat a lot under the lights. I also eat a lot of pasta during performance weeks. Tofu, poultry, and fish are favorites too. My weekend eating is not as good because I like junk food, hamburgers and fries!

Oh, great, can't wait to tell my patients!

Oh no, are you going to print that?

(laughter)

Have you ever been injured?

I have been lucky and never had a major injury. It is because I have a very flexible body and have good basic training so my alignment is good. I try to concentrate on alignment in class and avoid bad habits such as forced turnouts (incorrect outward leg rotation).

Do audiences affect you?

There have been many times when I have felt energy from the audience and it makes you want to give more. You feel their appreciation and it makes you want to work harder. At times, I don't know why, the audience is more reserved. It can affect you.

What would you like to say to your audience, that you never had the opportunity to say before?

That is an interesting question. Let's see... If you have never seen a ballet, go.

'The Nutcracker' is the most popular introduction for many. Do you recommend it?

It really depends on the person because some people tend to like modern dance and other like the beauty and elaborate production of classical ballet, like Nutcracker. Some people come to see a modern piece and love it while others hate it. Even if you don't like ballet, just listen to the music, it's so beautiful. Try to return a few times because ballet is like fine wine, you can acquire a taste for it.

What advice can you give to us who exercise a few days a week?

It is important for everybody to exercise, even on weekends, and have a good diet. You will live longer with a healthy body.

In Health,

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