



Chelydra

"Dancer With An Attitude"

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Arm Movement: Think Hot Fudge Sauce

My students are never sure that they want to come to class the week after I have attended a dance seminar. Why, you ask? Shouldn't I come back from a seminar refreshed, rejuvenated, and creatively inspired?

Well, you are right: I return refreshed, rejuvenated, inspired - and suffering from NMSS ("Not My Students" Syndrome). An attack of NMSS always beings on an intensive class in technique to ensure that my students will never (not if I can help it!) display the particular technique flaw whose frequent appearance in class or show caused me great distress and frustration.

Breathing, walking, emoting, executing a pivot turn without bouncing: all of these and more have received intense attention over the years.

This time it was arm movement. Arm movements should have depth, breadth, control, and fluidity. These four elements can be achieved if you just relax and let your body do what comes naturally. I use the term "arm movement" for a reason - I want you to take the "work" out of it.

The most important building block of beautiful, fluid arm movement is the shoulder roll. Without the shoulder roll, your arm movements will remain shallow and two-dimensional.

Start with the basic arm ripple, undulation, or snake. Relax your arms down at your sides and roll your shoulders - really big shoulder rolls. Notice that you will get a small, but natural, arm ripple (shoulder, elbow, wrist, hand). The same thing happens when you hold your arms out to the sides, just below shoulder level. As you roll your shoulder forward, up, back, and center, notice that your elbow rolls naturally with it, causing your wrist to roll, and your hand to ripple. The size of the shoulder roll controls the size of the arm movement.

When you are raising or lowering your arms, the shoulder roll is less obvious, but still present in the expansion and contraction of your shoulder blades.

To add depth to your arm movements, use appropriate breathing technique. The simplest application of this technique is to breathe in when you are lifting or opening your arms, and breathe out when you are lowering or closing your arms. The natural expansion and contraction of your chest as you inhale and exhale adds an extra dimension to the movement. It can also add an element of control, since you will tend to slow your arm movement down to match your breath rate. Don't overdo it, however, and hyperventilate!

You can add the fourth element, control, to your arm movements through visualization. In honor of my good friend, Brihana, imagine yourself in a big vat of thick, gooey, hot fudge sauce. Notice that when you try to move your arms, the fudge sauce resists the motion, causing your movements to become slower and more rounded. You absolutely, positively, cannot thrash your arms when you're enveloped in hot fudge sauce. The laws of physics simply will not allow it. Whenever you practice, replace the air with hot fudge sauce, and you will develop control. (If you have difficulty with the hot fudge sauce method, visualize that you are dancing in a swimming pool. Water has the same effect, but isn't nearly as much fun.)

And there you have it: the secret to beautiful arm movement, as easy as 1-2-3. Roll your shoulders, breathe, and dance in hot fudge sauce.