

Foot Articulation

By Richard Fiore

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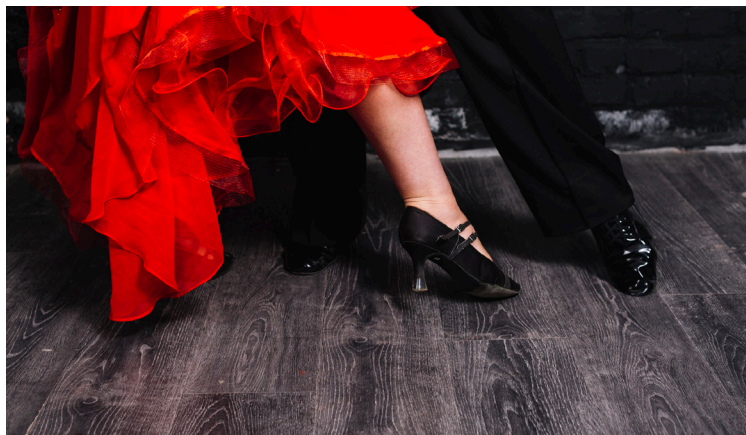


The word articulate in speech means to express an idea or emotion fluently and coherently. In the context of dance, foot articulation is a physical element that relies on the ability to stretch or articulate smoothly through the feet, ankles and legs while dancing. Both footwork and positions of the feet are best achieved through good foot articulation. This is a skill that gives dancers the appearance of being light on their feet while maintaining a good connection with the floor, thereby adding a dimension of creative expression to the dance.

According to the American Ballet Theatre's dictionary, the ballet leg line is the outline of the legs the ballet dancer presents while performing steps. Stretching through the feet with shaped arches and pointed toes adds elegance to the ballet dancer's leg line. While foot articulation is most highlighted in ballet, it has practical application in all dance styles. Dancers always need to be able to articulate through their feet over a dynamic movement range while supporting the body's weight in a smooth balanced fashion. The range of movement or amount of foot articulation needs to be consistent with the particular dance style. This requires conditioning and strengthening of the legs, ankles and feet to cultivate smooth and balanced leg and foot movements. Dancers need to be mindful of how to control the muscles in the feet to ensure precise placement of weight over each step. There is a clear relationship between footwork, foot positions and foot articulation.

It is always beneficial to stretch before dancing. The foot is a complex body part with many muscles, tendons, ligaments and joints. For this reason, it is especially important to use a variety of exercises that stretch and strengthen the feet. This is a good way to condition the feet, ankles and legs before dancing. This also helps to prevent injuries. These exercises help to build foot and ankle strength while enhancing balance. Foot articulation exercises involve stretching, i.e., extending the foot outward and away from the ankle followed by flexing the foot back in toward the ankle. It is beneficial to do these exercises slowly in order to feel the muscles in the feet working. One of the exercise sequences that I like to use at the beginning of a dance session is highlighted below. This exercise will create an increased awareness of how to articulate through the feet while maintaining good balance.

To begin, shift your weight to one side and settle it through the corresponding hip. It is important that the shoulder line remains parallel to the floor during this exercise for balance purposes. Straighten the free



leg and move it diagonally outward and in front of the body while pointing the toes straight out and away from the ankle. Lift the foot several inches above the floor while balancing on the opposite side. The arch of the foot will become more defined during this stretch. You should feel the stretch working through the leg, ankle and foot. Stretching in this manner requires using muscles in the entire foot including heels and arches, so as to drive a pointing motion toward the tips of the toes. This articulated, i.e., stretched foot position is held and then followed by flexing the foot in toward the ankle. These extension and flexion stretches are held for about ten seconds each and then repeated. In the next part of this exercise, the foot is held in the same manner and then slowly and smoothly rotated about the ankle joint in a circular clockwise direction for about ten seconds. This is followed by slowly and smoothly rotating the foot in the counterclockwise direction for about ten seconds. The same set of exercises is then repeated on the opposite side. The ten second hold is only an average. This will need to be gauged according to one's own ability to hold this balanced pose over a given amount of time. The holding time can be increased for additional benefit in foot strength and balance. It is beneficial to do several sets of these exercises as it will serve to improve foot strength, foot flexibility and balance over time.

Dance styles such as East Coast Swing and Salsa, for example, in which the feet are picked up off the floor and then placed back down on the floor, will be more expressive when danced with well-articulated feet. The difference between steps taken with shallow ball-flat footwork as opposed to well-articulated ball-flat footwork is clearly evident. There will always be cleaner leg and body lines when articulating through the feet over each step. This creates a more aesthetically pleasing appearance.

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Time: 7pm - 8:30pm

Candidate Dances: Foxtrot, Rumba, Waltz, Cha Cha, Swing, Salsa/Mambo, Bachata, Tango & Meringue

Instructor: Richard Fiore – Dual Licentiate, Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing

Location: Adelphi University, One South Ave., Garden City, NY 11530 - Woodruff Hall Dance Studio

To Register: \$125/person for general admission. **Registration with a partner is recommended.** Call Noreen DeNicola at (516) 877-4260 or email ndenicola@adelphi.edu

For more info visit: www.adelphi.edu/ce-course/series/ballroom-dancing