

When the Monkey Meets the Mermaid

The Pilates Phenomenon

BY JEAN SHEFF

The hundred. If what comes to mind is a schoolyard dash, you are seriously out of touch. Ditto with the teaser, no it's not an adolescent with a crush; the monkey, and you thought it was an animal; or the mermaid—Disney had it all wrong, there's nothing little about it.

This nomenclature has become coffee-house vernacular thanks to Pilates instructors who use the terms daily to coach their clients. Yet, this is not a fitness fad. In fact, there's nothing new about Pilates, named after its founder Joseph

Pilates, a German sportsman who was a gymnast, boxer and circus performer. Pilates immigrated to the U.S. in the late '20s, opened the Pilates Studio in New York City with his wife Clara and enjoyed immediate success, particularly among dancers. Martha Graham and George Balanchine were early converts.

What is Pilates?

Today, most people have heard of Pilates. "They know the term but are vague as to what it really is," said Simona Cipriani, owner of The Art of Control, a Pilates studio in Mt. Kisco. Let's start with what it is not. It's not a repackaging of any other discipline. "It is not a form of yoga," said Michael Feigin, setting straight a common misconception. Feigin and his wife Lawson Harris are the founders of Half Moon pilates which currently operates studios in Armonk, Briarcliff and Brooklyn.



Lesly Levy, owner of Mindful Moves Pilates Center, instructs Jamie Nicastrì (l) and Genevieve Boulanger on proper Pilates form.

"Pilates is a philosophy of movement. Once you learn the principals of Pilates it will stay with you," says Cipriani. Lesly Levy, owner of the Mt. Kisco Pilates studio, Mindful Moves, said that Pilates has six basic principles. They are concentration, control,

"People often come in concerned about their appearance but then begin to connect with their bodies, which is a whole new world."

Joy Puleo, owner of Body Wise, Chappaqua

centering (use of your core strength or powerhouse), precision (of movement), flow (linking one movement into the next) and breathing. "Pilates is poetry in motion, as you move you are aware of the muscles you are working and you connect with the experience," said Levy. The six principles allow that no part of your body is unimportant; no motion can be ignored, it is a full body approach.

"The aim of Pilates is to rebalance the body's strengths and weaknesses in order to create a

more well-rounded athlete," said Feigin. Levy said there is not one person who couldn't benefit from doing Pilates. "It offers you strength, stretch, stability and stamina," she added.

Working it Out

Once you decide to study Pilates, it's important to work with a certified instructor who is knowledgeable about the body. Experts agree that a professional certification program should include a series of tests including written, practical and case studies, and numerous hours of apprenticeship.

Chappaqua resident Lauren Karr, who was so captivated by the method she became certified in Pilates mat instruction, is often asked the basic question: But is it a good workout? "When I finish a Pilates session I am literally dripping, I can wring my shirt out," she



Simona Cipriani, owner of the Art of Control, helps Maria Petriello to lengthen and strengthen muscles.

said: "It's not a question of how many calories you burn, it goes beyond that," she said.

Monique van Grinsven who takes class at Pilates Connection in Pleasantville is a self-described "Pilates junkie." "I had back surgery about 12 years ago and Pilates has definitely made me stronger. It used to take me a long time to get going in the morning, now I jump right out of bed." Van Grinsven said she not only is she in better shape and has better posture but, also said that Pilates has "helped me not age." A benefit that appeals to the aging baby boomer generation.

Pilates Connection owners Elin Benson and Denise Miller

see clients of all ages. "People in their 30s, 40s and 50s have tried so many forms of exercise. But Pilates helps balance them mentally and physically. They find it refreshing." Pilates realigns the body

and reverses the effects of misusing the body," added Miller.

Joy Puleo, owner of Body Wise Pilates Studio in Chappaqua equates Pilates with health care. "People who do Pilates stay healthy longer," she said.

Not for Women Only

Pilates is not just women's exercise. Joseph Pilates first clients were male athletes and soldiers.

Chappaqua resident Philip Cuthbertson has been working out at the Art of Control for about four years. A very active golfer, tennis and squash player, he said Pilates "keeps me loose and more fit than I have any right to be." What he really likes is that it's a tough workout that has multiple benefits. "It keeps me injury free," says Cuthbertson.

Perhaps that's why professional male athletes do Pilates. The New England Patriots, Philadelphia Eagles and New York Jets all have Pilates coaches on staff, reported Feigin.

"One of the things I appreciate about Pilates is that the technique can be applied so many ways," said Puleo. "People often come in concerned about their appearance but then begin to connect with their bodies, which is a whole new world."

Chappaqua-based writer and editor **JEAN SHEFF** stays fit by teaching and practicing Pilates.

Pilates Around Town

The Art of Control

37 West Main Street
Mt. Kisco, NY
242-0234

Body Wise Pilates Studio

287 King Street
Chappaqua, NY
238-8397

Half Moon

512 Bedford Road
Armonk, NY
273-9750
541 North State Road
Briarcliff, NY
923-0474

Mindful Moves Pilates Center

293 Lexington Avenue
Mt. Kisco, NY
244-0199

Pilates Connection

106 Washington Avenue
Pleasantville, NY
747-4711



Joy Puleo, owner of Body Wise, assists Jill Vogel on the reformer, a Pilates apparatus.