

Beyond the Studio

By: Lauren Wingenroth
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Four dancers on the risks and rewards of their athletic hobbies

BY LAUREN WINGENROTH

A career in dance is so demanding—physically and otherwise—that it can be tempting for dancers to dance, dance and only dance. It's not uncommon to avoid other physical pursuits, whether out of fear of injury, lack of time or the now-debunked idea that certain activities build the wrong kinds of muscles.

And yet, many dancers who've found other outlets for movement—even beyond the traditionally "dancer-approved" ones like yoga and Pilates—have found them to have a symbiotic relationship with their dance practice, each informing and growing the other.

Dance Magazine spoke to four artists with unique physical practices about what they've learned from them, and how they balance them with dance.

CONSTANCE STAMATIOU, taekwondo ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER COMPANY MEMBER

How she got started: As a kid, Constance Stamatiou was always fascinated by martial arts, but it wasn't until the pandemic, when she had more time and was looking for a way to stay in shape, that she decided to start taking classes at her local taekwondo dojang, where her two children go. Stamatiou also liked the idea of learning how to defend herself after a few scary incidents on tours. She's now a red belt, and hopes to have her black belt by this summer.

How her dance training helps her: Stamatiou has been able to skip several belts (making her kids very jealous), thanks to her ability to quickly pick up movement. "It's very parallel to dance," she says. "When I post videos of practice on my Instagram, people are like, Of course you can do that, that's just like when you do a hitch kick in 'Cry!'"

One step closer to her dream job: "I have always dreamed of being a stunt woman, of playing a superhero. With my gymnastics background, my dance background, and now having a taekwondo background, I feel like it's the perfect combination."

Building strength and stamina: Stamatiou feels stronger than ever in her dancing, which she credits partly to her taekwondo practice, especially with its focus on speed.

The hardest part: "It's very shocking when you break the board with the palm of your hand or your foot," she says. "It definitely hurts, and it's something you just have to build a tolerance to. But I do enjoy feeling like a superhero."



Stamatiou feels that taekwondo has made her a stronger dancer.