

TWISTED FITNESS

Gyrotonics can help rotate you into shape

By Claire Walter

IF SOMEONE ASKED you to name a form of exercise that that was developed by a European, that was embraced by dancers, that emphasizes flexibility and toning, that can benefit any and all athletes, and that has both mat/floor and apparatus components and you answered Pilates, you would be half-right. Pilates is one half. The newer Gyrotonic Expansion System and Gyrokinesis are twin disciplines that comprise the other half.

These "Gyros" are a tad similar to Pilates in background and approach, but different in execution. While Pilates movements tend to be linear and designed to stabilize the body, Gyrotonic exercises are rotational and designed to enhance flexibility, both in the muscles and the joints and skeleton, especially the spine. Think of words like "gyration" and "gyroscope," and you get the idea. Gyrotonics has

become the catchword for both of these exercise programs.

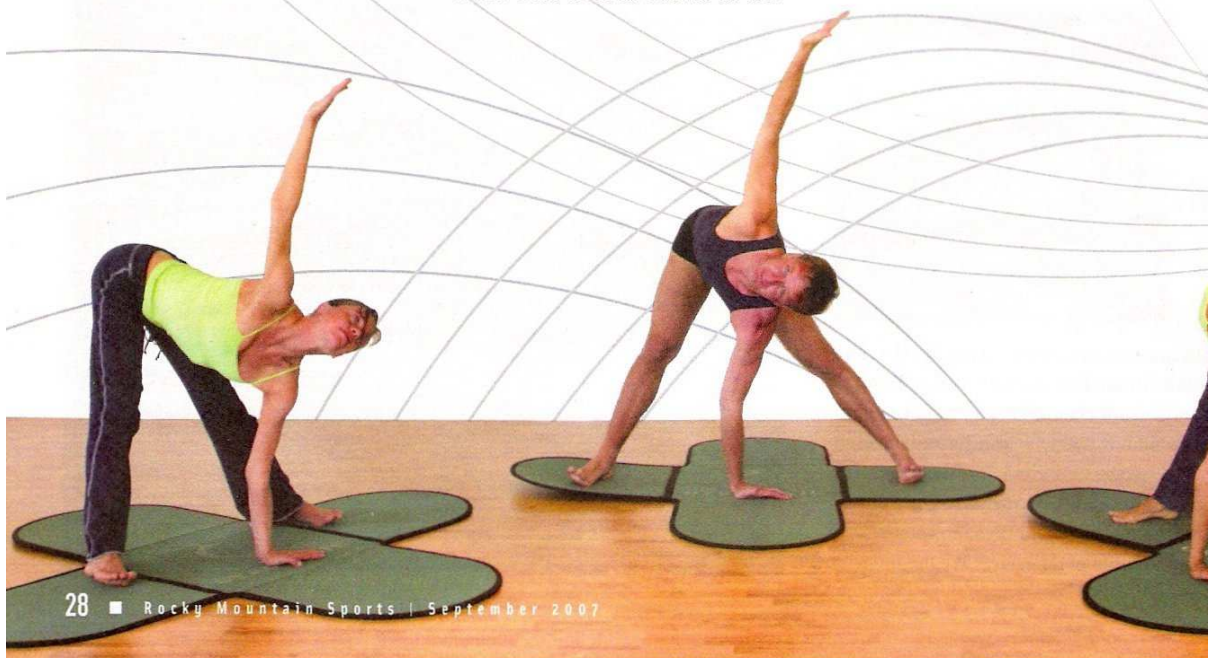
Some people who have tried both Gyrotonic and Pilates exercises prefer one, while others find them compatible and complementary and therefore do both. Angela Crowley, a Denver-based master trainer, says that Gyrotonic and Gyrokinesis are "rapidly moving into the Pilates world."

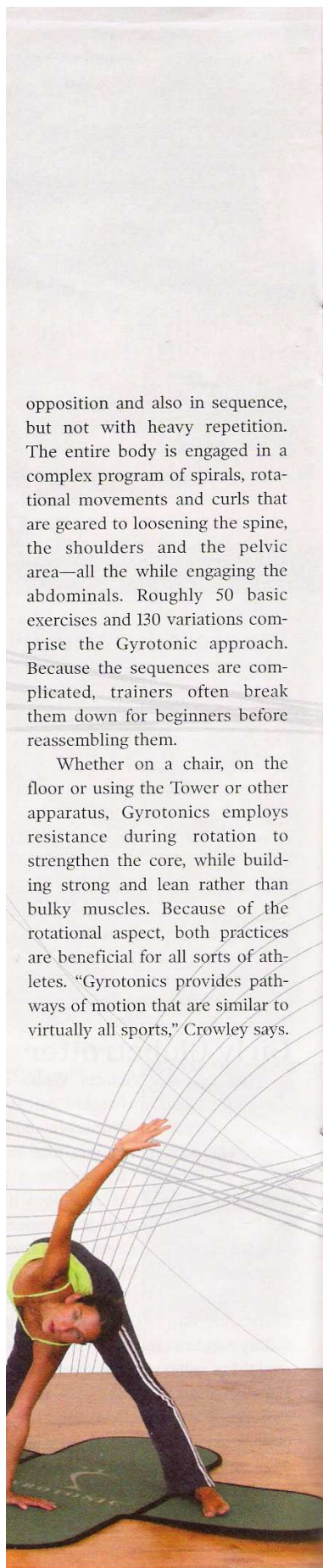
Developed by Romanian-born dancer Juliu Horvath in the 1980s to recover from his own injuries and originally called "Yoga for Dancers," Gyrokinesis' series of fluid movements was inspired by yoga, tai chi and dance itself. The necessary "equipment" for Gyrokinesis was, and still is, enough floor space for one person to move without obstruction and a chair or stool to sit on. Perhaps inspired by Pilates, perhaps not, Horvath went on to invent apparatus to take Gyrokinesis to the next level. That level is known as the

Gyrotonic Expansion System (also called GTX). Madonna is said to be one its practitioners.

Both forms are based in the same principles, utilizing a sequence of fluid, sequential rotational movements, especially of the spine, coordinated with conscious, yoga-like breathing to increase range of motion. Once you learn the basics of Gyrokinesis and develop body awareness of how it should feel when performed correctly, you can do it at home with a videotape or DVD. Unless you have several thousand dollars to invest in a Tower, the prime GTX apparatus, you'll head for a studio throughout your practice.

The Tower is indeed a tall contraption fitted with two sets of pulleys, a bench, rotating wheels with handles and assorted straps, cables and weights. In order to prevent repetitive movement problems, muscles are worked in





opposition and also in sequence, but not with heavy repetition. The entire body is engaged in a complex program of spirals, rotational movements and curls that are geared to loosening the spine, the shoulders and the pelvic area—all the while engaging the abdominals. Roughly 50 basic exercises and 130 variations comprise the Gyrotonic approach. Because the sequences are complicated, trainers often break them down for beginners before reassembling them.

Whether on a chair, on the floor or using the Tower or other apparatus, Gyrotonics employs resistance during rotation to strengthen the core, while building strong and lean rather than bulky muscles. Because of the rotational aspect, both practices are beneficial for all sorts of athletes. “Gyrotonics provides pathways of motion that are similar to virtually all sports,” Crowley says.

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“Throwing a ball, batting, playing tennis and swimming all require a rotation motion.” Cathy Bosson of Pilates in the Pines in Castle Rock gets “a lot of golfers who are looking for flexibility” of the back and shoulders. Many, she says, combine Gyrotonic and Pilates programs.

Trainers themselves come to Gyrotonics via different paths. For instance, Deb McBride of Boulder’s bodySpan Studio was a dancer who was “ready to stop dancing and was looking for something else.” She found Gyrotonic movements to be “the perfect transition—I was moving in a way that dancers do but without dancing.” Her clients include athletes who “have strength and power but not much flexibility.” Guy Nicknair, a personal trainer and neuromuscular therapist, was a body builder who heard about Gyrotonic from a client. It worked for him, and now he features it at his BBalanced Studio in Denver.

“The spine can move in seven natural directions,” Nicknair says. “People have to understand that and also feel it.” And of course, there’s no way to feel it without trying it. ■