

June 2017

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from tap: by Renee Holingshead Photographs, aputhery of Selgedor, by Myle Si

KAREN ARCENEAUX HOW I TEACH HORTON

Karen Arceneaux is about to deliver some bad news to the group of advanced-beginner Horton students assembled before her: She's cutting the counts in half for an already tricky exercise.

"If it was two counts, now it's one. If it was six, now it's three," she says.

"I'm leaving now," one student announces, semi-laughing.

Arceneaux, without skipping a beat: "The door is locked."

Her quick wit is, as usual, a balm for the dancers' worry. She masterfully walks that careful balance of lightening the mood and centering her students in her Horton technique classes at The Ailey School in New York City-all while instilling a respect and reverence for a time-honored technique.

After Lester Horton began codifying his geometric, shape-oriented modern-dance style in a dance and less like an exercise." the first half of the 20th century, the choreographer Alvin Ailey (who had danced in Horton's company) skillfully repurposed much of it in his work. It's now an integral part of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's repertory and training program.

But it wasn't a technique Arceneaux discovered until she was in her 20s. A latecomer to dance-she started in college, in Lafavette, Louisiana-she didn't begin training earnestly until a successful audition for the Ailey two-year certification program. There, she studied intensively under Horton master Ana Marie Forsythe.

After a brief stint as assistant to both Forsythe and Denise Jefferson, then-director of The Ailey School, Arceneaux was promoted to school administrator. She remembers hoping that PHOTOGRAPHY BY KYLE FROMAN

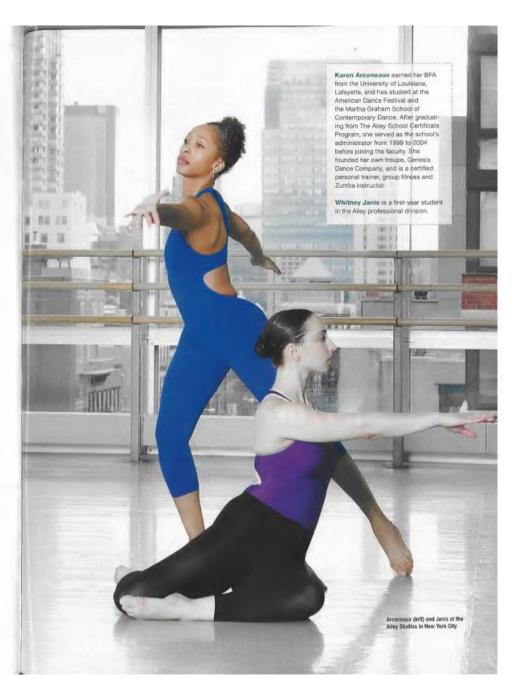
teachers would call out sick, so she could teach their classes. She laughs when she remembers her earliest teaching experiences-like the time Forsythe came into her class as she was teaching coccyx balances, an exercise done seated on the floor, balancing on the tailbone with the legs lifted. "After, she came to me, and all she said was: 'Coccyx balances are done in a three,'" Arcenaux recalls, mortified. "After that day, I went back to my Horton book. I said, 'I will be ready when they call me to teach.""

Now, after more than a decade of teaching Horton, she's seen the power it has to change her students' dancing. "They learn how to blend movements," she says. "I tell them, 'Use all of your counts.' If you're using every count, going from one move to the next, it becomes more like

"You can go on to any other technique after studying Horton, because it trains your body," she says. "You have positions where one leg is turned out and the back one is parallel. It elongates the body and gives you more strength, coordination, flexibility, proper body alignment. It's such a beautiful technique."

If Arceneaux sounds more than a little in love with Horton, that's because she is. "My Horton book is always at the foot of my bed," she says, "When you're entrusted with something so precious, you don't want to tarnish it. You want to keep it going for the next generation." DT

BY RACHEL BIZZUTO



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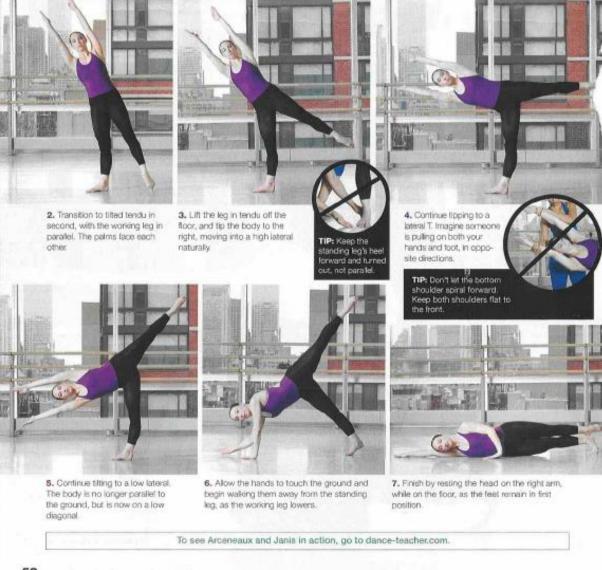
technique

Step-by-Step: High Lateral, Lateral T and Low Lateral

The lateral T is a hallmark of Horton technique. When executed correctly, the body resembles the letter T: The torso tits to 90 degrees, and the opposite leg extends for counterbalance. For a more advanced version of this staple movement, Karen Arceneaux has students continue tilling past 90 degrees to create a low lateral before diving to the floor, further demonstrating the clear lines and physical strength central to Horton. —R9

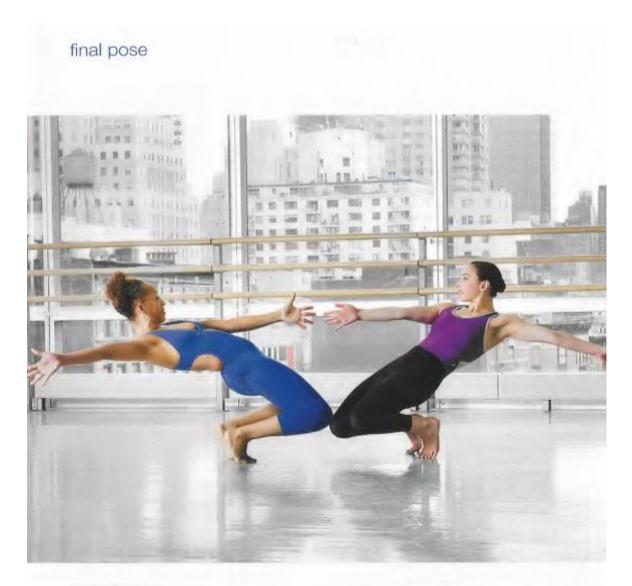


1. Begin in a grand plié in second position, arms also in second and feet in a natural second.



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Lean On Me Horton teacher Karen Arceneaux and student Whitney Janis at The Ailey Studios New York, New York

Photographed by Kyle Froman

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