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PHOTOGRAPHS BY MATTHEW MURPHY at the Ailey Studios in NYC

Amid the flourishing 1930s American modern dance scene, Lester Horton began shaping a technique that would serve as the foundation for much of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater repertoire. "Alvin was never shy in saying that Horton was most influential to his choreography," says Ana Marie Forsythe, chair of the Horton department at The Ailey School. After her students' first semester of Horton classes, Forsythe sends them to see the company perform. "It's always fun to hear my students report back, 'Oh, I saw a lateral T! I saw a hinge,"" she says. "But of course Alvin used the technique so artistically, it just blends in."

Even if your students don't dream of performing in Ailey's Revelations, Forsythe describes Horton technique as invaluable in creating strong, long and versatile dancers. "Jazz dance uses many of Horton's shapes and movements, like the hinge, table position and flat-backs. It helps dancers understand how to use
their adductors, and how to move their body from their pelvis. It made me a better ballet dancer because of the use of parallel," she says.

Horton's motivation was to explore how many shapes and directions the body can move. "The technique has a huge range of dance vocabulary that explores many areas of the body," says Forsythe. When Horton began codifying his technique in the 1950s, he created movement studies called fortifications and preludes that train a dancer to move precisely and artistically.

Forsythe starts her classes standing, with a sequence of roll-downs, flat-backs and a mix of Horton's 17 fortifications that focus on strength-building and six preludes to help develop students' artistry. Her students also practice the lateral T , a key element of the Horton technique.

Here, Forsythe and Ailey II dancer Paige Fraser demonstrate a lateral-T series that exemplifies the clear lines and physical strength vital to the technique.


A native of New Jersey, Ana Marie Forsythe began studying the Horton technique with Joyce Trisler and, at 14, joined the Joyce Trisler Danscompany. In 1973, Forsythe started teaching at The Ailey School and, since 1979, has been the chair of the Horton Department. She leads an annual Horton pedagogy workshop attended by teachers from around the globe, and this June, she stepped down as director of the Ailey/Fordham BFA program. Forsythe is a co-author of the book The Dance Technique of Lester Horton and has created three DVDs documenting the technique. In addition to The Ailey School, she has been on the faculty of Vassar College, The Boston Conservatory, The New School and the State University of New York at Albany.

Paige Fraiser, 21, is a senior in the Ailey/Fordham BFA program and a member of Ailey II.

[^0] series at dance-teacher.com.

## technique



Begin in a wide, naturally turned-out second position, arms in a high V-shape.
Counts 1 and: Drop to a grand plié in second position, using momentum, so there is a little bounce at the bottom. At the same time, swing your arms down and to a crossed position at the base of the plié.
Count 2: Return to original position, straight knees, arms in a high V .
Count 3 and: Repeat the plié bounce, with arm swing.


Count 6 and: Stretch your arms out to the high right diagonal and feel your left toe pulling in opposition. Maintain that connection as you recover your torso; your left foot reaches toward the ground at the same time.
On the "and" after count 6 , return to second position (with arms in a high $V$ ) so you can repeat the phrase to the left side, lifting your right leg.


Back on the right side, repeat counts 1-5. Counts 6, 7: Once in the high lateral position, maintain the straight-line torso-to-toe connection as you tip farther to the right, until you reach a lateral T . Your right hip acts as a fulcrum.


Count 8 and: Once you have reached lateral T , begin to extend your arms out and arc up to return to the starting position. Make sure that neither your leg nor your arms move independently; the torso line should be maintained the entire time. On the "and" after count 8, return to second position to repeat the phrase on the left side.

Challenge your dancers:


Add two more counts (counts 9,10 ) to the phrase and have your dancers relevé before extending her upper body to recover and repeat the phrase on the next side.


Or on counts 9 and 10, have your dancers maintain the lateral position and lower their torsos past the straight $T$-shape to a full lateral.

## Troubleshooting:




Do not lift your gesture leg before bending your torso to the side.
Do maintain a strong connection through your abdominals and make sure to feel your arms and leg reaching away from each other in opposition.


Don't: If your dancer isn't fully engaging her abdominals, her back will probably be arched and her leg may lag behind her body. Do: Make sure your gesture leg is turned in, and directly to the side. (Your standing leg is turned out.)
"It's either a T-shape, or it's not. Horton liked this clarity of line. There's no ambiguity, so it's easy for people to see and understand in their own bodies when they're learning to dance." -Ana Marie Forsythe


[^0]:    Watch Paige perform the full lateral-T

