

## Conversation with Peter Fiasca



**Peter Fiasca**, founder of Classical Pilates Inc, is from Southern California and began the Pilates method in 1988. He continued training with 1st generation master instructor Romana Kryzanowska and was certified by Romana in 1998. Over the years, Peter has studied with 1st generation master teachers Jay Grimes and Kathy Grant, as well as other notable instructors in the field.

Peter demonstrated Pilates home exercise equipment on QVC from 1997-2002, and has been an on-air guest co-host at QVC and Canada's Home Shopping Channel. In 2001, Peter was featured, with two other instructors, on a Pilates mat video with Romana Kryzanowska. In addition to producing the well respected award-winning Classical Pilates Technique series of four DVD titles, Peter is a guest instructor at Pilates training centers all around the U.S. and internationally. During the 1980s & 1990s Peter earned two masters degrees as well as a Ph.D. degree in psychology, working at well respected health centers in New York City and Philadelphia.

In the following interview, conducted via email, Tom Floyd asks Peter about his background and his views about Classical Pilates. What emerges is a man passionate about Pilates with deep convictions in regard to upholding the historical integrity of the Method.

**Tom:** You hold the title "Ph.D" So, obviously, Pilates was not your first profession. Tell us about your background and why you changed careers.

**Peter:** Several years before starting Pilates lessons, I had moved to New York City to attend graduate school in psychology at Columbia University. I began taking Pilates lessons during the 1980s after two years(!) of people saying Pilates would help my old knee injury heal. Over the years I had developed a slightly loose ligament in my knee from overuse in martial arts, basketball, and then dance. During this time of working and going to school, I would periodically question whether I had chosen the right career path. Although it seemed there were natural aptitudes, I sometimes became disillusioned with the study and practice of psychology.

Growing up I had always enjoyed being physically active. For example, I loved to go swimming, skiing, surfing, play basketball and tennis. When I decided to try the Pilates method, I was very fortunate to find the studio where 1st generation teacher Romana Kryzanowska was teaching in New York City. This was the main studio that preserved Joseph Pilates' original method. At the studio, I studied with an excellent teacher who worked with Romana for many years. I basically took my initial ten lessons on faith. At the beginning, my body didn't understand the movement in Pilates; it was foreign yet fun and seriously challenging! I confess to not liking the mat exercises because I could really feel my muscles more when I used the equipment Joseph Pilates designed.

As a generalization, with many exceptions, men tend to be more acclimated to using the resistance of weights and springs.

After about 10 lessons, I could feel the movement patterns in my body, and experienced the wonderful benefits of this extraordinary method. Because I loved the wonderful feeling and results of Pilates, I seriously considered becoming a Pilates instructor during the 1980s. Yet it also seemed important to complete more education and training in psychology. I attained the Ph.D. degree in 1992, and continued to take Pilates lessons throughout the years. The Pilates method and psychology are related to, yet independent of, one another. Since I had a continuing interest in mind-body relations over the years, I decided to write my doctoral dissertation in this area; it was titled "A Research Study on Anxiety and Movement." A short version of this study was published in the American Journal of Dance Therapy in 1993.

In 1993 I relocated to Philadelphia to practice psychology at a reputable inner city hospital. Although life was good, the healthcare industry was going through upheaval. Thankfully I still had a good job. I would take Pilates lessons intermittently, and continued to understand at deeper levels how remarkable this method of body conditioning really is. I loved the art and practice of Pilates! My body craved the movement; it helped me feel so much better physically, spiritually and mentally!

Sometimes my friends would suggest that I train to become a Pilates instructor because they understood my enthusiasm for the method. But I was reluctant to add more responsibilities to my schedule. Well, once again, it took about two years for me to make a commitment. In 1996 I became an apprentice at The Pilates Studio & Drago's Gym in New York City where Romana taught. During my initial 12-day seminar I practiced the advanced Mat workout for 12 days. Then I realized Joseph Pilates was indeed a genius. After this 12-day apprenticeship, I experienced the mat exercises differently, and they seemed sincerely medicinal. I felt fit, strong and flexible in a qualitatively different realm of overall health. These are good things. Of course, Pilates mat exercises and apparatus exercises support and complement each other. Those who have experience in the classical method understand Mr. Pilates designed his equipment for students to develop more strength, alignment, and coordination in order to practice mat exercises properly.

By this time I was working at Abington Memorial Hospital outside of Philadelphia. Because I was still working full-time, I changed my schedule to 10 hours per day, four days each week, then I traveled to New York City to study and teach (as an apprentice) Pilates for three full days. There was exhaustion, to be sure, yet I loved what I was doing! I was passionate then, and I'm passionate now! I felt truly alive, energized, happy and exhilarated sharing time with other apprentices, as well as very experienced teachers with whom I studied. Individuals who are drawn to Pilates are some of the most intelligent, creative, and interesting people I've ever meet. I began taking lessons with Romana every week, in addition to taking lessons with other reputable instructors at The Pilates Studio. It took about one year for me to complete The Pilates Studio's rigorous training program. The year was 1997. Although I've taken many examinations over the years, The Pilates Studio had some of the most difficult. Then I continued to study with Romana regularly for several years after completing the apprentice program.

Studying and teaching Pilates became a central passion in my life, so it was important to make more time to experience all the goodness! Soon I requested part-time status at the hospital in order to open a small in-home Pilates studio. After a couple of years, I decided to work in Pilates full time. It was not an easy decision to leave a secure job with health benefits and a nice office with a view, yet I experienced a deep love of the true Pilates method. Also, I felt a sense of urgency to

help preserve Joseph Pilates' original method because there are so many derivations and mutations of this great method of body conditioning. Then, as now, I experience a deep sense of immittance and transcendence when studying or teaching the original method that Joseph Pilates created. Without doubt, I am blessed with this 'calling' to work in the Pilates method, and experience the journey with infinite gratitude.

From a more personal perspective, my gradual embracing of Pilates in the 1990s coincided with the deeply wounding experience of divorce from a 10-year marriage. One did not 'cause' the other. Yet this new river of life, and my family of Pilates friends, helped sustain body, mind, and spirit during years of loss, mourning, and healing. Pilates has been instrumental in assisting creation of a stronger positive spiritual and mental attitude. For this I will be forever thankful.

**Tom:** You say that you "felt a sense of urgency to help preserve Joseph Pilates' original method because there are so many derivations and mutations of this great method of body conditioning." Do you believe that any significant body of work was lost with the passing of Joe and Clara? Certainly, they "passed on" the work through many of their protégés, most notably Romana, but each protégé seemingly infused the work with his or her own personality, interpretations, and even innovations. Do you believe that is less true with Romana than with the other first generation teachers? Is there any evidence that what we call "Classical Pilates" may be somewhat different than what Joe taught?

**Peter:** During the course of his lifetime, Joseph Pilates taught thousands of students. If someone had the desire to become an instructor, it's my understanding that Mr. Pilates required her or him to work full-time in the studio for three years. Apprenticeship in the original studio was not formalized. Mr. Pilates did not have a certification 'program' as we think of it today. Students apprenticed by teaching, listening, watching and doing what Joe and Clara told them to do. It's important to acknowledge that Joseph Pilates created a unique and indivisible system (with built-in modifications, only if necessary) that help us create greater health and well-being within each person's constellation of aptitudes and limitations. The original Pilates method has definite rules, guidelines and principles that constitute its technique. Although there are many appropriate modifications of exercises (and tempos) given certain circumstances, it's essential to have relatively good comprehension of the entire method before altering standard practice. Studying the entire Pilates method engenders molten strength and intelligent flexibility in a qualitatively higher realm of mind-body-spirit coordination.

Mr. Pilates would impart general and specific knowledge; general in the sense of instructing students about the entire method, specific in the sense that he would give specific exercises (and 'themes' of exercises) to individuals because their bodies could benefit from moving in particular ways. Sometimes Mr. Pilates would create exercises and equipment for students, yet these same exercises and this same equipment invariably had applicability to most practitioners.

The probable source of Joseph Pilates' original method becoming multiply-interpreted resides here: most 1st generation students seem to have understood the entire method through the lens of how Mr. Pilates taught their particular bodies. It's a very unfortunate and unnecessary limitation of insight to construe Joseph Pilates' comprehensive system of body conditioning primarily in terms of how he taught a single body. Most 1st generation teachers were possibly: (1) unaware of how Mr. Pilates conceived and taught the entire Contrology system to people in the general case;

(2) intent upon teaching their own interpretation, their own version, of Contrology; or (3) a combination of numbers one and two.

Most training centers today have lost essential elements of Mr. Pilates' original vision and practice. We have clear evidence of the differences between Joseph Pilates' original teachings and how most instructors teach the method today. Look at original archival film footage of Joseph Pilates teaching and exercising. Mr. Pilates was strong and direct in contrast to the way most instructors teach today. Another important point to remember is the nature of operating a single studio, like Joseph Pilates' original studio, in contrast to modern-day international corporations that promote their training programs and equipment. The primary goal of these large Pilates corporations is to increase market share of apprentices and equipment owners; it is secondary to preserve Joseph Pilates' original method and vision. Preserving the original method and aspiring to have global brand recognition are simply incompatible. In order to market the Pilates method to thousands and millions of people, organizations necessarily simplify it. Mr. Pilates' original method is highly intelligent, complex, sophisticated and subtly individualized in ways that cannot be marketed — in effect duplicated and sold — to uncountable numbers of people. Large current-day corporations in our profession devise 'formulas' to sell the method, and in doing so, eviscerate the heart and soul of Mr. Pilates' extraordinary creation.

Having made these points, it's reassuring to know that hundreds—perhaps several thousand—of Romana's teachers continue to preserve the traditional Pilates method with passion, loyalty, and artfulness. It seems to me, there is an invisible college of instructors (without walls or a permanent home) who continue to preserve the spirit and vocabulary of Mr. Pilates' historical method through Romana's teachings. If at all possible, I recommend that students and teachers of every school avail themselves to this collective knowledge and experience.

I remember Romana saying time and time again: "Pilates is all movement. How can I correct you if you're not moving?" She also said the Pilates method was "made for the normal, healthy body." Of course we can debate what the normal healthy body is, but watching Joseph Pilates' archival films clearly shows him working with uninjured students.

Romana would regularly stress the importance of "the golden chain," or the seamless connection between every exercise, and refer to the method as "poetry in motion" when practiced properly. Romana's passion for teaching Joseph Pilates' historical method with artistry, precision, charm and brilliance is priceless. Another extraordinary 1st generation teacher is Jay Grimes. He studied with Joseph and Clara Pilates for 12 years and continues to teach regularly. It's curious that we do not hear of Jay in the larger professional Pilates world.

Romana used to say that when teachers get bored, they will begin to change the method. My sense is people change the historical method when they haven't fully understood it, or when they haven't mastered the work. Of course, no one ever completely masters the original method. There is always room for improvement. It's easy, though, to conceive of new exercises, as well as new exercise orders, and presumably justify these choices. But why try to reinvent the wheel?

In my view, Mr. Pilates' traditional method is sufficiently complex and sophisticated to sustain a lifetime of fascination as we work toward new disclosures of new meaning, as well as new understandings of movement, and move toward qualitatively new realms of body-mind-spirit integration. There are indeed enough modifications within the original method to comprise infinite variety, especially when you consider the infinite variety of people we teach.

Today, I hear people who suppose that new knowledge requires us to change the traditional method. Today, I hear people say Joseph Pilates would have evolved and changed his own method. Perhaps, but do you know exactly how he would have changed Contrology? Today, I hear that it's okay to simplify, commodify, and abbreviate the method in order to market it to the masses. In my opinion, the original Pilates method resists becoming a formula; therefore teacher training is impossible to duplicate like a book, a DVD, a newspaper, a car or any other manufactured product. The traditional Pilates method is far too complex, rich, varied, subtle, and sophisticated to be packaged for purchase in a global network of teacher training sites.

Romana clearly carried on every aspect of Joseph Pilates' traditional method; yet I would like to highlight just a few points here. Both Mr. Pilates and Romana intended for us to create a harmonious 'composition' of all exercises during each workout so separate movements complement one another into an organized 'whole' qualitatively beyond each particular exercise. We practice shaping, articulating, and refining each exercise as we create a 'symphonic' arrangement of all exercises. We work out with dignity.

Both Mr. Pilates and Romana taught the importance of seamless flowing movement wherein we create a 'golden chain,' as Romana would call it, or 'river of energy' that smoothly connects all exercises together. They focused upon rhythm, tempo, musicality, dynamics, and coordination. Each exercise has its own tempo, its own song, so to speak. This is why we don't listen to music or watch TV while working out. The teacher's instruction, tone of voice, and images help guide our rhythms, dynamics, and flowing movement.

Both Mr. Pilates and Romana emphasized movement efficiency, or the removal of extraneous, unnecessary, irrelevant physical motions during your workout.

They also emphasized the utilization of space, and your 'relationship' with the apparatus. I would often hear Romana say "Dance with your apparatus!"

Both Mr. Pilates and Romana trained students to understand where we initiate movement, how we direct energy that sustains movement, and how we resolve movement. Of course we first focus on functional benefits; then we place emphasis upon transforming merely functional exercise into what Romana calls "poetry in motion," or the artfulness in animating movement. In short, Romana wants us to bring movement 'to life' during each workout. She would always say that "Pilates is an art form and science of the body." With this idea in mind, I believe you cannot reduce an art form and science of the body into a formula. There is too much complexity and centuries of history to consider.

For example, it's interesting to remind ourselves that Joseph Pilates did not invent Contrology, and he clearly acknowledges this fact. Contrology includes different systems "for regulating health and overcoming diseases," which have been developed and practiced in different cultures throughout the centuries. Mr. Pilates writes how "The traditional history of China affords us many instructive examples of the employment of various exercises to preserve and restore health." He specifically describes the mental and physical benefits of Kung Fu, which originally developed in China. Joseph Pilates also cites both training and healing arts developed in India, Greece, and Rome. He makes it clear how "the employment of Contrology for hygienic and medical purposes is by no means a new thing. In fact, it is older than any other means proposed for the same purpose. Contrology has been employed in every age."

Joseph Pilates' original contribution to the varied history of Contrology was to create a unique modern version of it, with precise exercises, goals, and qualities of movement that are based

upon, yet diverge from, other forms of Contrology... to sustain and enhance mental health, physical health, and spiritual health.

## **So where do these ideas lead us?**

### **What IS the traditional style of Pilates?**

As we learned from Romana, Pilates is first and foremost exercise; Romana said there should be a sign over every studio saying “Pilates is a workout!” Although our workouts may incorporate principles of rehabilitation, breath control, and stretching, these do not represent the method’s fundamental purpose. The historical Pilates Method is based upon an ordered sequence of exercises, which are characterized by flowing movement, technical clarity, rhythm and dynamics. Within the historical syllabus there exists a vast range of appropriate modifications designed to meet any physical issue or limitation. Oversimplifications or foreign methodologies are therefore superfluous.

### **The Art of Teaching:**

As Joseph Pilates taught, Contrology is an intrinsically communicative and cooperative activity, requiring hands-on physical contact. Students cannot, for example, adequately learn the Pilates method through Internet communication, which some organizations currently attempt. Apprentices and teachers cannot adequately learn to teach Pilates through online course instruction. One can safely say: You can’t learn to cook over the Internet, you can’t learn gymnastics over the Internet, and you can’t learn to dance over the Internet.

Following the historical model, duets and trios should be based on similar or identical levels of technique, and personal affinity. The Method comprises great complexity. Formulaic programs which reduce the overall movement vocabulary do not represent the full and complete Method.

### **Full Certification:**

Again, as Joseph Pilates taught his method of Contrology, we know it to be a unique system of body conditioning, which is an indivisible, unified technique. Permission to teach, or certification to teach, required extensive training on all apparatus, and took years of apprenticeship. May I remind you that Mr. Pilates’ never certified instructors to teach exercises on an individual apparatus. You were certified in the full method with every piece of piece of equipment designed by the master himself. In Mr. Pilates’ day, Mat certifications did not exist. There was no Spine Corrector certification, no Wunda Chair certification, no Reformer certification. Regrettably in today’s world, large corporations selling Pilates certification enrollment often segment the certification process by apparatus, and truncate training by reducing required hours. These same companies also create their own versions of traditional exercises and remove exercises because they assume it’s possible to improve Mr. Pilates’ brilliant method. This proclivity to alter the original method also includes smaller organizations and single-studio owners who are not aware of the traditional Pilates method, or assume they can improve the original method. “You can’t reinvent the wheel” is an appropriate phrase here.

### **The Right Equipment:**

As Joe Pilates refined his exercises, he also designed the equipment on which to practice them. The original equipment designs are indispensable to correctly practice his exercises.

### **Adherence to Technique:**

Let's turn to a single area of debate—although there are more—which illustrates the contrast between Mr. Pilates' original method and some of today's derivations. In Joseph Pilates' book, *Return to Life Through Contrology*, he writes "Because of poor posture, practically 95 percent of our population suffers from varying degrees of [abnormally pronounced, improper] spinal curvature, not to mention more serious ailments. In a newly-born infant the back is flat because the spine is straight. Of course we all know that this is exactly as intended by nature, not only at birth but also throughout life. However, this ideal condition is rarely obtained in adult life. When the spine [has abnormally pronounced, improper] curves, the entire body is thrown out of its natural alignment — off balance."

In his book, *Your Health*, Joseph Pilates writes "...the normal spine should be straight to successfully function according to the laws of nature in general and the law of gravity in particular...In addition, the [abnormally pronounced, improper] curve itself is especially dangerous to the vital organs and the body..." He goes on to say "Abnormal obesity and the dangerous effects of corpulence have their origin in the improper curvature of the spine. Proper carriage of spine is the only natural way to prevent against abdominal obesity, shortness of breath, asthma, high and low blood pressure and various forms of heart disease. It is safe to say that none of these ailments can be effectively treated until the curvatures of the spine have been corrected."

In "The Mat Exercises" section of *Return to Life Through Contrology*, Joseph Pilates clearly states directions for properly practicing "The Roll Up" exercise: "Entire spine must touch mat or floor." Joseph Pilates' back is clearly flat in every other photo of him demonstrating Mat exercises.

For over a decade *The Pilates Method of Physical and Mental Conditioning* (Friedman & Eisen, Viking Penguin Publishers, 1980, 2005) became the first and only standard manual describing the Pilates method after Joseph Pilates' own books. Friedman and Eisen studied with Romana Kryzanowska while writing this book in the 1970s, long before the Pilates method became commercialized. Regarding Joseph Pilates' belief that the spine should be flat and lengthened while lying down, Friedman and Eisen write "...press your back as flat as you can. Try to get all the air out from under it. Check by seeing if you can get your fingers under the small of your back. If you can, leave them there, and try to squash them between your back and the mat. Feel the muscles work. Take your hand away without relaxing the muscles which are pressing your back toward the mat. Press harder." The photos of a woman demonstrating correct Pilates placement on pages 24-25 clearly show the entire lower back lengthened against the floor.

**Tom:** Pilates is gaining enormous popularity, yet the vast majority of practitioners are women. Do you have any recommendations as to how we can attract more men to the method? Touching the previous question a bit, Joe trained with heavy weights; Romana does not. You wrote "most 1st generation students seem to have understood the entire method through the lens of how Mr. Pilates taught their particular bodies." So, perhaps Romana didn't incorporate weight training because Joe never required it for her body. Could we incorporate weight training in a Pilates pro-

gram and still call it "Classical Pilates?" Could that hold the secret to attracting more men to the method?

**Peter:** During the late 1800s to early-middle 1900s body conditioning and physical fitness was primarily restricted to men. Physical fitness was considered an 'unladylike' activity and women were often excluded from participating. Although many women were in performing arts, we can assume very few (or none) ventured into arenas such as a body building, boxing, skiing, gymnastics or circus acts. Kathy Grant, an esteemed 1st generation master teacher, has personally told me on several occasions: "The Pilates method was made for men."

Joseph Pilates was born in Mönchengladbach (a city near Dusseldorf) Germany, on November 30, 1880, and developed an early interest in physical health and body conditioning. He was a frail child who had asthma, rickets, and rheumatic fever. In order to cope with these ailments, Mr. Pilates became dedicated to understanding methods of sustaining health and fitness. Part of Joseph Pilates' education included ideas surrounding the ancient Greek concept of Paideia. This may be one source of Mr. Pilates' holistic philosophy of striving toward ideal health, ethical action, beauty, artful movement, and excellence. According to the Paideia Publishing Institute (<http://paideia.us>):

To the ancient Greeks, Paideia was "the process of educating man into his true form, the real and genuine human nature." (1) It also means culture. It is the ideals in which the Hellenes formed the world around them and their youth. Since self-government was important to the Greeks, Paideia combined with ethos (habits) made a man good and made him capable as a citizen or a king. (1a) This education was not about learning a trade, or an art which the Greeks called banausos (mechanical) unworthy of a citizen, but was about training for liberty (freedom) and nobility (The Beautiful). Paideia is the cultural heritage that is continued through the generations. The Greeks considered Paideia to be formed by the aristocratic class, who were said to have intellectualized their culture and their ideas. The culture and the youth are then 'molded' to the ideal. The aristocratic ideal is the Kalos Kagathos; "The Beautiful and the Good." This idea is similar to medieval knights, their culture and the English word gentleman. Greek Paideia is the idea of perfection, of excellence. The Greek mentality was "to always be pre-eminent."

Mr. Pilates moved to England in 1912 and trained detectives, as well as military police in self-defense. During World War I, Mr. Pilates was interned as an 'enemy alien' with other Germans in Lancaster, then the Isle of Man. He became a nurse during this time, training other camp internees to keep physically fit with his unique exercises that used spring resistance. Joseph Pilates was given credit when none of the individuals he trained succumbed to an epidemic of influenza, which killed thousands of others in England during 1918. After World War I, Mr. Pilates returned to Hamburg, Germany and continued to train military police.

Joseph H. Pilates' system of body conditioning continued to develop with his designs of specific apparatus. After relocating to Hamburg, Germany, for a period of time, he helped train the police force in his method of body conditioning. Joseph Pilates then decided to emigrate to New York City for a new life and the opportunity to train Max Schmelling, the renowned German



boxer who became famous in America. Mr. Pilates opened the first studio of Contrology in the early 1920s.

.At first, Mr. Pilates primarily trained circus performers, boxers, and health enthusiasts in New York City. As his reputation began to grow, such notable choreographers as Martha Graham and George Balanchine learned of Contrology. Realizing the remarkable benefits of Mr. Pilates' method of body conditioning, Balanchine and Graham would refer dancers to Mr. Pilates' studio to sustain strength, flexibility and rehabilitating injuries. Since most dancers are women, the gender ratio began to change dramatically over the years. The ration of men and women changed dramatically over the next couple of decades. By the 1940s-1950s, we can assume about 90%-95% of individuals who practice the Pilates method are women.

Although it's wonderful that women gravitated to Mr. Pilates' method, an unfortunate side effect is that men began to see Contrology as body conditioning 'for' women. The qualities of movement began to change in method as well. As more women and dancers began to teach the Pilates method, there was more emphasis upon subtler aspects such as fluid movement, poise, creating long beautiful lines, and graceful strength. Although these qualities of movement are integral in the Pilates method, other aspects of gymnastic strength, vigor, strong balance, and abrupt stop-start exercises were practiced less often. Traits that we tend to associate with traditional femininity began to precede traits associated with traditional masculinity. Having said this, today we see many excellent strong men instructors in our profession, and gradually there are more men coming back into the practice of Contrology. Yet when you see Pilates advertised on television, in magazines, and in health clubs, the character of this publicity is almost entirely geared toward attracting women into the Pilates method.

Even though Joseph Pilates was a tough gymnast and boxer, he actually discourages the practice of 'body building' with free weights in his writings. Mr. Pilates believed that bulking muscles to achieve a hyper-masculine appearance, in fact, contradicted becoming simultaneously strong and flexible like a mountain lion, which is a primary aim of Contrology. Joseph Pilates did not believe people should lift weights to bulk their muscles. Yet he also saw the importance of sustaining muscular definition and toning the muscles with lighter weights. There is indeed an arm weight series — using lighter weights — in the Pilates method that is in practice today.

Here are a few suggestions to help encourage men to study and train in the Pilates method. First, instructors and studio owners might want to regularly communicate Mr. Pilates' history (being a gymnast and boxer) to apprentices and clients. Second, it could be helpful to host Pilates workshops specifically for men, focusing upon aspects of strength, coordination, and skill then relate these qualities to sports that men participate in: running, golf, swimming, football, basketball, tennis, surfing, skiing, snow boarding and so forth. Third, training program directors might consider actively recruiting men to become Pilates instructors. Fourth, studio owners could actively search for, and hire, well-trained men Pilates instructors. Fifth, teacher training organizations and studio owners could advertise men more regularly in brochures, books and DVDs. Sixth, I recommend that everyone buy Daniel Lyon's book *The Complete Book of Pilates for Men* (HarperCollins 2005).

Although the next point may be controversial, it's sometimes helpful to unearth inherent biases that men and women face in today's society. In contrast to other professions — for example medicine or law — male Pilates instructors are not ascribed significant degrees of importance or status. Since men are primarily valued by their ability to earn money and achieve occupational positions with relative power, prestige, or privilege, most men will not be interested in becoming

Pilates instructors. Although training programs and studio owners might consider incentives to attract men into our profession, women will probably continue to be the dominant group of studio owners and training directors for the foreseeable future.

**Tom:** What was your inspiration to produce the Classical Pilates Technique DVDs? Tell us about some of the challenges you had in producing them.

**Peter:** During the period before making all four Classical Pilates Technique DVD titles, I had studied with Romana every week for several years at Drago's Gym in New York City. As workout partners, Tiziana Trovati and I were taking lessons together with Romana every Friday at 11:00 AM for over two years. In 2000 Romana asked us to demonstrate Pilates mat workouts in her first commercial DVD video. Being asked by Romana was a remarkable privilege, and humbling. This DVD project, however, was not Romana's; it was produced by someone who sold home Pilates equipment on QVC cable television. Therefore Romana did not have directing or editing control. In one sense, it's surprising to think Romana had never previously documented Joseph Pilates' original method on a professional video. Yet Romana periodically made it clear she didn't like the idea of filming the Pilates method. Although she never explained, my sense is that Romana believed filming the Pilates method would simplify its complexity and greatness; the method would be necessarily compromised on video.

After the DVD with Romana was released early in 2001, Romana wanted to film her own video wherein she could decide its contents. Along with six other instructors, we had two or three rehearsals at Drago's gym on the Reformer. Time passed. There were no rehearsals for months and months. It seemed Romana's goal of making a DVD to preserve Joseph Pilates' original method wouldn't come to fruition. I firmly believed Mr. Pilates' great method should be preserved on DVD video. There seemed to be a growing sense of urgency to preserve the method amongst many instructors, including me. The question was: how could we individually and collectively preserve the original method? Because the method has been bursting with popularity, derivatives were spreading like wildfire. Looking around, it seemed traditional instructors did not have an equal voice in the larger professional world. It seemed our values and teachings were subsiding before larger market-savvy individuals and corporations who were altering the original method in order to sell to the masses. So, after a great deal of soul searching, it was worthwhile to explore how one might make a DVD to help preserve Mr. Pilates' great work. Of course this was a very humbling aspiration.

It was best to speak with Romana directly. I asked Romana what she thought of my idea, and asked her to direct the production (or participate) in any way she believed appropriate. Romana gave me her blessing, and granted use of her name for a dedication. Yet Romana declined to participate, citing her agreement with The Pilates Studio, Inc., of New York City. I thanked Romana for her generosity and began to think about preserving the method on film. At the time, I never once thought about selling DVDs. My purpose would only be to help preserve Joseph Pilates' method. That's it. I imagined that I would share a few copies with fellow instructors.

I started on a wing and a prayer, a couple of video cameras and a dream. I budgeted about \$2,000 for the entire venture. I soon learned that video production and editing are seriously complicated endeavors, and they were way beyond my comprehension. I asked two of the best instructors and Pilates technicians, Jamie Trout and Junghee Kallander, if they might join me. They said yes. Assuming all three of us had a relatively good understanding of the method, we

scheduled a video shoot. We filmed workouts on the Universal Reformer apparatus as well as Pilates mat workouts. The footage was terrible because we didn't rehearse, and because we filmed in a small old run-down ballet studio. I was faced with a decision: either give up, or go into debt. I chose the latter to fulfill the dream. Through all of this, Beth Clarke was instrumental in organizing the video shoot and helping to edit the material.

Still learning, our next video shoot was slightly better, yet the lighting was poor. We filmed the full range of workouts on the Universal Reformer apparatus. Even though the lighting was sub-standard, we decided to edit the material into a presentable format. Again, the main purpose was to simply have the video as an organized visual record of Joseph Pilates' original method; and second, to share it with a few fellow instructors if they were interested.

It was crucial to preserve essential qualities of strength, flowing movement, seamless transitions, and artfulness. Romana always wants these qualities to be expressed during a workout. Colin Webb of Webb Video Productions, Beth Clarke, and I worked hard. We often found ourselves in 'editing hell' because I would not compromise anything. Romana once said to me, "Sacrifice nothing!" After showing some other instructors the two Complete Universal Reformer Series videos in January 2002, they were interested in having them. Since they appreciated our work, we let other instructors know about the videos by sending an email announcement. This was a beginning, yet there was much more work to do: filming the Complete Mat Workout Series, the Studio Equipment Series (with the extraordinary technical and artistic facility of Christina Gloger), as well as the Magic Circle Mat Series & Reformer Mat Workout. Somewhere in the middle we actually re-filmed the Complete Universal Reformer Series because I wasn't satisfied with the original footage of the early videos. To emphasize the importance of how Mr. Pilates' original method is practiced by men, I asked Jim Monroe to demonstrate workouts in two of these DVD titles. Jim Monroe loves the historical method! He is an exemplary practitioner because his mental focus, energy level, work ethic, and articulation of exercises are all strong and clear. In addition, Jim has a different body type than me; it's instructive to see different people practicing the method. We tend to express different qualities of movement. Jim's primary work is in biochemical research. He is a highly accomplished senior research scientist at a pharmaceutical company who earned his Ph.D. in biochemistry from Harvard University.

**Tom:** Certainly, your Classical Pilates Technique DVDs reflect your passion to "preserve Joseph Pilates' original method." How, specifically, do you intend them to be used? Since you said, "Contrology is an intrinsically communicative and cooperative activity, requiring hands-on physical contact," I doubt you intended them for beginners to use them as their primary way of learning the method. Nevertheless, numerous people have posted messages on this discussion board explaining that they want to do Pilates, but have no access to a teacher. In a circumstance such as that, do you believe the DVDs are useful as a learning tool?

**Peter:** I see the collection of Classical Pilates Technique DVD titles as a visual glossary of historically accurate Pilates movement vocabulary. Although we have documented a full-range of various exercises (pre-basic to super advanced) and many complete workouts (pre-basic to super advanced) there is certainly more work to do! I believe the DVDs are worthy as reference material or instruction for enthusiasts and instructors, as well as students who are new to Pilates. Sometimes people overlook the fact that we filmed pre-basic and basic exercises and workouts in each DVD title. We furthermore encourage viewers to study the Pilates method with a well-trained cer-

tified instructor in each DVD title. When I speak to prospective students and current students, I regularly caution people that DVDs should only be used as a secondary learning source. Yes, Contrology is an intrinsically communicative and cooperative activity, requiring hands-on physical contact. Yet there is an important place for documenting the correct articulation and refinement of each exercise, as well as proper rhythms, dynamics, energy, minimum of extraneous motion, and smooth seamless transitions between exercises. It's also inspiring to see the full-range of Pilates method exercises! If students or teachers have only seen basic-intermediate exercises (or workouts), how is it possible for them to be inspired, to move toward desired goals, to move beyond their current technical level? Technique, in this case, is not simply performing exercise. I'm referring to wholeheartedly incorporating aspects of mind, body, spirit and imagination to support one's evolution toward deepening self-knowledge and expanding artistry. The true nature of Mr. Pilates' original method is nothing less than becoming a more complete human being.

In cases where individuals don't live close enough to study with an instructor, or they don't have the time or money, DVD instruction can be much better than nothing if the viewer works safely and conservatively. My hope is these people will be inspired to find a qualified instructor, and to study the traditional method when they're able.

**Tom:** Tell us about any upcoming projects. Do you have more DVDs, or media of another kind, on the way?

**Peter:** Yes, we have two new DVD titles being released, probably in February 2006. You're the first to know the specifics! We began studying, organizing and rehearsing for these new DVDs in February 2005. The production quality is beyond our previous work. The first DVD demonstrates a brilliant and fun educational curriculum of Pilates for children and young adults ages 5-17; it was created, written, and co-directed by Jennifer Morley. We have a beautiful and charming cast of children who practice the method with natural spontaneity and skill. As many people know, Mr. Pilates pays significant attention to the needs and problems of children, so it was natural to study his writings and create a wonderful program. Both new DVD titles feature special guests Alycea Ungaro, best selling author and director of Real Pilates, as well as Fatima Bruhns, former teacher trainer for The Pilates Studio of New York.

The second DVD demonstrates traditional Pilates Mat workout levels with special attention to difficulties relating to neck and spine. The featured individuals are Steve Hash, Sandy Shimoda, and Karen Garcia. This DVD is interesting because we balance the two overlapping, yet sometimes diverging, professional areas of traditional Pilates technique with medical principles and concepts. The DVD script was written by Megan Rich, P.T., who helps define Classical Pilates movement in clear descriptive terms, as well as providing a sound medical substructure for each workout. Both DVD projects have been very challenging in new and creative ways. I feel deeply thankful to help continue preserving Joseph Pilates' original philosophy and technique.

To conclude, I would like to convey a touchingly beautiful quote from Romana's teachings. From time to time, she would say "If you are true to Pilates, Pilates will be true to you."

**Tom:** Thank you so much for sharing so much with us!

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