Preface

ABOUT THE BOOK

In this book I combine scientific knowledge with a vision that completely *excites* me: dancers achieving incredible benefits from carefully directed athletic training.

Optimum neuro-muscular-mental functioning combined with expert dance tuition will enable committed dancers to become elite, professional performers. That may not be your goal, but the training I suggest will also help good dancers become great, giving them more satisfaction as well as skill. The primary purpose of this book is therefore to open these possibilities up to more dancers. Secondly, it is a handbook for selecting the best training trajectory for dancers, and finally, the book may give insights to sportsmen and women in various sporting codes about the types of biomechanical training that will improve their performance.

   The dancing I refer to specifically throughout the book is Ballroom and Latin American dance, also called Dancesport or Standard and Latin dancing. When I mention *dancers,* this will be directed at Ballroom and Latin American dancers as that is my field of expertise, but it need not halt there as the information throughout is applicable to all forms and levels of dance. I have two suggestions for readers:

- Read the information in this book with an open mind.
- Read it as a dancer, read it as a trainer, and read it as a coach.

These three groups have different issues that I address in this book. For example:

- *Dancers* are often blind to the path before them, so I offer them an appropriate road to follow.
- *Trainers* often lack structure in their training and allow the emotion-

al state of dancers and the results of competitions to unduly influence the training they prescribe.

- *Coaches* must have a clear understanding of their role. They are not trainers. They must maintain an overview of the processes involved in advancing the expertise of both dancers and trainers.

The tasks involved in each of these groups are often confused with each other, particularly in the dance world. One of my goals in writing this handbook is to clarify these three groups and their assignments. Recognising where your strengths and weaknesses lie in this process is important and requires a great deal of knowledge about yourself and your abilities.

For example:

- *As a dancer,* I have occasionally been over-eager to learn the next step even when my body was not ready for it.
- *As a trainer,* I am structured in my approach and know how to convey instructions well.
- *As a coach,* I like dancers to retain their independence and make their own decisions on their path to becoming excellent performers.

I shall start by outlining the subjects that are to be covered in this manual. How I address these topics is intended to be understandable and yet challenging enough to enrich your existing knowledge. You may already understand the information but not have implemented it in practice. I trust that reading it in the chapters that follow will assist you to do so.

Although some parts of chapters—such as certain techniques—are based on my opinion, I have also attempted to support them scientifically. All physiological aspects are derived from studies (which can also differ in opinion).

I am not under the illusion that what I have written is an all-encompassing thesis. The profundity that goes with each subject can be increased many times over. I know with certainty that if your interest is aroused, more detailed information can be obtained from other sources.

The purposes of this book
Primarily, it's an introduction to integrating athletic types of training into the

training of dancers. It's a stepping stone to knowledge that has been scientifically researched but is not yet sufficiently normalised within the Latin American and Ballroom dance disciplines. It is also a concise reference work that provides trainers and dancers with answers to questions about overcoming dance technique difficulties.

I particularly hope this book inspires more people to learn to dance, and for casual dancers to strive for excellence. Dancing is a skill that transcends many social barriers; it brings people together for mutual pleasure and satisfaction.

Finally, this is not meant to be a textbook: I want you to enjoy reading it.

How then can this book be used?

Can any dancer, with this book in hand, rock up to a gym, saying, "this is what I want to achieve"? This could be possible, but only if the gym or athletic trainer is an expert—knowledgeable in combining dance and muscle training to maximise dancing ability. It is important that the dancer's physical shortcomings (or points for improvement) be assessed first. Based on those findings, an appropriate long-term programme can be developed.

There can also be a misconception that gym training will help dancers primarily by increasing muscle size. But this is not what a dancer requires; pumping weights aimlessly or running for an hour on a treadmill makes no sense because training benefits are specific to the muscle groups being exercised. For example, cyclists do not improve their cycling performance by practicing swimming. Muscle training that improves a dancer's abilities requires specialist-level knowledge.

As a result, assistance in a gym should always be one-to-one and only after consultation with a dance coach. The dance trainer can tell the gym trainer which muscle groups need working on, and which movements require improvement, whether in speed, strength, endurance or agility.

Nevertheless, basic supplementary physical training should never become the main goal of dancers. I say that because I have seen experienced dancers get hooked on the 'endorphin high' they experience at the gym. This is almost certainly something they previously felt in their dance training but probably diminished with time. Unfortunately, the law of diminishing returns applies here where dancers experience progressively less satisfaction from their