

Regarding Cuban Hip “Action”



Let's address the word action. When I looked it up there were many definitions to choose from. The one I liked best was as follows: A gesture or movement. A manner or style of doing something. Typically the way a mechanism works or a person moves.

Again as I write I feel through experience that one must know what muscles are engaged when performing this action. A simple way to begin would be to face a mirror with legs together and alternate one leg straight and one leg bent simultaneously. Switch back and forth until you become familiar with the feeling and the look.

The bulk areas of the hip and buttock will be engaged. The Gluteals of course Maximus, Medius and Minimus. But specifically the lateral hip rotators. Piriformis and Quadratus Femoris, Obturator Internus and Obturator Externus. And Gemellus Superior and Gemellus Inferior. Fondly referred to as “the deep six”. The most important of these to address would be the Piriformis Muscle. I emphasize this muscle because it is the only one that starts at the front of the hip flexor and wraps around to insert into the sacral area. There is one on each side of the body. This is the muscle that the Ballet Dancers

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try to activate to maintain turn out. By practicing this wrapping action or visualizing it, it will help to engage the buttock area which must be active to create Cuban hip action. Remembering that your hip weight may go back toward your heel but your body weight must remain poised or balanced forward. Or as I like to say toward the front of your foot. A good tracking action would be to visualize the femur or thigh bone balanced over your ankle bone. Also when shifting or splitting the weight the intent is to keep the weight forward even if you are moving the hip backward. The classic bow and arrow effect. Another example would be reaching the five toes back to extend a leg into a backward walk for Ballroom. Your standing leg is still pressing or staying forward to your partner. Or how quickly can you rise to your toe without any adjustment? These images will help you to learn gauge the distribution of your body weight and see if you are balanced in the correct alignments.

But we must now think a little more dynamically if you will. The next actions I will speak about are what I call calculated or manipulated actions to add on to the simple forms stated above. The ribcage. This must work in an isolated fashion in opposition of each hip. Example if you are pressing back into your left hip your right rib cage will pull away sideways or diagonally in an equal and opposite energized action. And vice-versa. Practice of this exercise enables your whole core to work in a unified and dynamic action. Resulting is much more visual and pleasing experience to the eye as well as possible additions of different body rhythms and musicalities. This would also be a good time to put on the music and practice these actions on the spot with each dance. Noticing how quickly or slowly the muscles must react to the different speeds of music to be “in time”.

The final area I would like to address would be the Latissimus dorsi muscle located underneath the shoulder blades. This area can be used in a synchronized compressing action with the same hip being pushed back. Remember not to isolate the shoulders too much as they are the loosest joint in the body. Again this energy comes from underneath the shoulder blades. It adds a nice three dimensional flavor to the body rhythms on top of all the Cuban Hip actions.

And lastly I would like to address an issue I have been writing and teaching about for years. No matter what type of dance style you use it comes down to an instant or gradual weight shift or a blend of both. If you want to do a delayed or dropped hip action and transfer the weight gradually on a bent leg and call this “American Style” so be it. If I want to use the exact same muscles in the hip region and extend a straight leg in a Tendu ballet action and call it “International” so be it. The point is regarding Cuban Hip action the person in control of their body is making a style choice. The same muscles are being used to create this action no matter what you call it or how you choose to present it. Regarding Cuban Hip “ACTION”. Try not to dis-regard it!

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