

# The Reformer Revolution: Why Dance Teachers Should Embrace Pilates This Summer

By Claire Hindley, Dance Education Consultant and Certified Pilates Specialist

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As dancers and educators, we ask so much of our bodies — and often, even more of our students'. We demonstrate across multiple classes, adjust posture with precision, and hold ourselves to a standard of performance that doesn't always allow time for rest or recovery.

This September, as studios fill with fresh energy, I encourage dance teachers to turn to a practice that's long been beloved by professionals but has recently stepped into the wellness spotlight: **Reformer Pilates**.

More than a passing trend, the reformer offers a grounded, intelligent system of movement that strengthens the body from the inside out. It's low-impact, beautifully functional, and remarkably aligned with the dancer's ethos of control, grace, and flow. I've been hooked for the last 20 years.

## From Hospital Beds to Ballet Studios: A Brief History

To understand the reformer, we must begin with its inventor: **Joseph Hubertus Pilates**. A German-born movement visionary, Pilates was a sickly child who became determined to strengthen his body through gymnastics, boxing, yoga, and anatomy.

During World War I, while interned in England, he began rehabilitating injured soldiers using springs attached to hospital beds — a practical innovation that evolved into what we now know as the Pilates reformer.

By the 1920s, Pilates had relocated to New York, where he and his wife Clara opened a studio. It wasn't long before leading dancers from the New York City Ballet, including students of **Martha Graham** and **George Balanchine**, began training under his guidance.

The method — originally called *Contrology* — focused on efficient movement, breath, core strength, and mind-body connection. A century later, those same principles still resonate deeply with the dance community.

## Why Reformer Pilates Is Great for Dance Teachers

While dancers have long been drawn to Pilates, dance teachers are now recognising its unique benefits for a career built around physical demonstration, correction, and repetition. The reformer — with its spring resistance and moving carriage — offers support, challenge, and feedback in equal measure.

### Reasons to integrate Pilates into your practice:

#### **Protects Joints and Prevents Injury**

Strengthens the stabilising muscles around vulnerable joints like the knees, hips, spine, and ankles — all high-risk zones for dance professionals.

#### **Deepens Core Intelligence**

Goes beyond surface-level “ab” strength to activate deeper stabilisers like the transversus abdominis, pelvic floor, and multifidus — essential for balance, turnout, and alignment.

#### **Enhances Teaching Cues and Body Awareness**

Pilates training fosters keener anatomical insight and more effective verbal cueing — which translates directly to better student learning.

#### **Sustains Energy and Mobility**

With low-impact movements and full-body integration, the reformer keeps educators strong and mobile without adding extra wear and tear.

#### **Supports Mental and Emotional Wellness**

The mind-body connection in Pilates encourages presence, breath awareness, and stress reduction — crucial for those navigating packed teaching schedules in the studio.

# Three Reformer Exercises for Core Stability (with Mat Pilates Alternatives)

Whether you're stepping onto the reformer for the first time or teaching in a space without equipment, these exercises are versatile, effective, and deeply aligned with what dancers need: core strength, alignment, and mobility.

## 1. Footwork Series (Heels, Toes, Arches)

### On the Reformer:

Lying supine on the moving carriage, feet press into the footbar from different positions—heels, toes, arches—while maintaining a neutral pelvis and controlled breath.

### Why it works:

Builds foundational alignment through the feet, knees, and hips while activating the core. Ideal for improving plié and relevé mechanics.

### Mat Adaptation:

Lie on your back with a resistance band looped around your arches or use a mini ball under the feet. Perform slow, controlled leg presses with awareness of pelvic and spinal stability. This replicates the same joint tracking and core engagement.



## 2. Bridging on the Reformer

### **On the Reformer:**

With feet on the footbar and arms grounded, the spine articulates up and down while engaging the glutes and hamstrings. The moving carriage challenges stability.

### **Why it works:**

Strengthens the posterior chain and trains spinal mobility. Supports pelvic awareness and control—especially useful for dancers experiencing lower back tension.

### **Mat Adaptation:**

Classic mat bridging. Lie supine with feet flat on the floor, hip-width apart. Peel the spine off the mat one vertebra at a time, maintaining breath and pelvic control. Add a resistance band around the thighs for increased glute engagement.

## 3. Kneeling Arm Series (with Straps)

### **On the Reformer:**

Performed in a tall kneeling position, using the straps for resistance. Movements like arm circles, rows, and presses challenge balance, scapular control, and core stability.

### **Why it works:**

Enhances upper body control and postural alignment—key for port de bras and long teaching days on your feet.

### **Mat Adaptation:**

Kneel on a mat with light hand weights or resistance bands anchored in front of you. Perform the same arm movements (circles, rows, biceps curls) with focus on upright posture, core activation, and shoulder control.

## Start Slow, Stay Curious, See Results

If you're new to reformer Pilates, start with a weekly class. Notice how your posture changes, how your breath deepens, and how your strength becomes more sustainable.

In a profession where burnout and overuse are common, the reformer offers something rare: support, strength, and a chance to reconnect with the why behind your movement.

# Where to Train: Reformer Pilates Education for Dance Professionals

Whether you're looking to deepen your personal practice or integrate reformer Pilates into your teaching, these respected organisations offer high-quality training:

## UK-Based Training Providers

### **Body Control Pilates** (London & Nationwide)

One of the UK's most established training schools with comprehensive reformer qualifications.

[bodycontrolpilates.com](http://bodycontrolpilates.com)

### **STOTT PILATES® / Merrithew™** (London, Manchester, Online)

Globally recognised, with science-based courses from beginner to advanced.

[merrithew.com](http://merrithew.com)

### **Polestar Pilates UK** (Various Locations)

Emphasises rehabilitation, anatomy, and functional movement — ideal for those with a clinical or holistic interest.

[polestarpilates.co.uk](http://polestarpilates.co.uk)

### **Ten Health & Fitness** (London)

A contemporary Pilates and wellness studio known for dynamic reformer classes and teacher training. Ideal for dancers who want to train in a high-end, performance-focused environment.

[ten.co.uk](http://ten.co.uk)

## Professional Bodies & Accreditation

### **Pilates Foundation UK**

A not-for-profit dedicated to high standards in teaching and ethics. Excellent for educators blending dance and wellness.

[pilatesfoundation.com](http://pilatesfoundation.com)

### **CIMSPA (Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity)**

The UK's governing body for fitness professionals. Check here to ensure your chosen training meets national standards.

[cimspa.co.uk](http://cimspa.co.uk)

### **Tip for Dance Teachers:**

Many Pilates training providers offer bridging modules or fast-track options if you already hold dance, anatomy, or movement qualifications.

## Final Thought

As dance teachers, we dedicate ourselves to the growth and well-being of our students — but often at the expense of our own bodies. Reformer and mat-based Pilates offer more than just strength or stretch; they provide essential tools for injury prevention, joint support, and physical longevity.

In a profession built on repetition, precision, and physical demonstration, looking after your own alignment, mobility, and core health isn't a luxury — it's a necessity.

When we move well, we teach better. When we're injury-free, we lead by example. Investing in your own wellness is one of the most powerful things you can do — not just for your career, but for every dancer who learns from you.

