

# deep connections

the revolutionary system **anatomy trains** teaches how the body is linked, head to toe

BY ROBIN WESTEN

Following a successful career as a professional basketball player, Ned (not his real name) had hopes of switching gears and working in real estate. But he never could enjoy his time off the court because of increasingly debilitating back pain, which had begun years earlier. After pursuing a number of therapeutic modalities without relief, the former pro was referred to Elizabeth Larkam, director of Pilates & Beyond in San Francisco. Suddenly, it was a whole new ballgame. Larkam watched Ned move and, based on her observations, designed a customized Pilates program for him. Ned practiced this regimen in conjunction with manual therapy for six months. Finally, after years of ineffective therapies, his ability to stand with comfort and move with ease was restored.

Larkam doesn't actually have superhuman powers. Her hypothesis was the result of years of studying the map of the Anatomy Trains Myofascial Meridians, visionary Tom Myers' ingenious approach of viewing the human body. Thanks to that training, Larkam was able to see that every time Ned would stride forward, fascia [soft tissue] would tug on his spine rather than allow for a smooth glide. She suspected that his back pain might be caused specifically by adhesions in the fascia that connected his left hip to his lower spine. Knowing that this fascia is continuous with tissue that connects the

back of the pelvis to the rib cage and arm, she realized that his spine was getting yanked from above when he raised his arm. [See illustrations of the Deep Front Line.] From there, it wasn't hard to design an effective therapeutic plan.

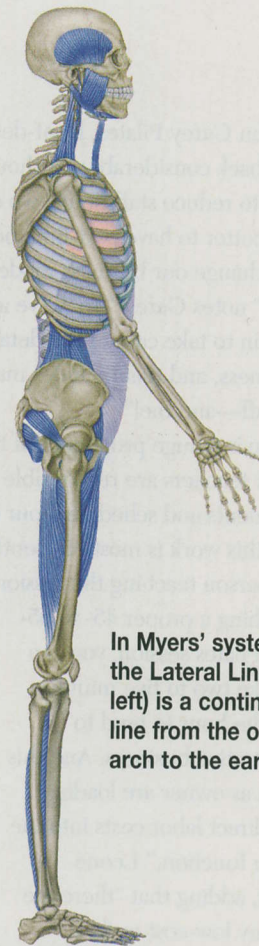
That's the beauty of the Anatomy Trains. Rather than refer to a standard model of the musculo-skeletal system, the revolutionary system focuses on the myofascia, the soft tissue that covers and penetrates every muscle and bone without interruption, like a net from our head to our toes. Pilates teachers who use the Anatomy Trains testify that it helps them observe postural and movement patterns in their clients with far greater accuracy. It also enables them to design specific exercises to release clients from long-endured painful patterns. Tom Myers, 59, the creator of the system, puts it this way: "Anatomy Trains provides the map to get from where you think the problem emanates to where it's really located." But that's just one stop along the journey.

By referring to the Anatomy Trains map, Larkam made the observation that the tightness in some of Ned's muscles and fascia was interfering with the mobility of his left hip when he walked. It also interfered with the ability of his spine to extend. With this understanding, she designed a Pilates Reformer program (standing lunge;

bridge in neutral; thigh circles with loops around the knees; supine leg circles; seated lateral flexion), which enhanced Ned's mobility and hip extension.

For massage therapists and other body workers, Myers also created Kinesis Myofascial Integration (KMI) which is a hands-on soft tissue massage technique based on Structural Integration (aka rolfing), and like the Anatomy Trains, focuses on the myofascial tissue. Using varying amounts of pressure, the KMI technique dissolves the adhesions in connective tissue, allowing it to support optimum posture and glide smoothly during movement. To be certified in KMI, therapists must complete 500 hours of instruction, which is akin to graduate-level training in massage. After completing this study, they can offer their clients a comprehensive, body-wide 12-session KMI series. Today there are some 200 certified practitioners in the United States and beyond—and the trend is growing.

In the past decade Myers has taught



In Myers' systems, the Lateral Line (at left) is a continuous line from the outer arch to the ear.

more than 200 Anatomy Trains workshops to thousands of students worldwide. Participants tend to be chiropractors, osteopaths, massage and physical therapists, personal trainers and dance instructors, as well as a growing number of yoga and Pilates teachers. **Kathleen Keller is one of them. A Pilates practitioner and Therapeutic Ball Specialist at the LifeMark Physiotherapy Clinic in Alberta, Canada, Keller has been using the Anatomy Trains for seven years. She observes, "It's given me a deep insight into how the body works and profoundly changed the way I approach my clients. Now I offer exercises that either activate or stretch myofascial connections, and I've seen improvements that are absolutely astounding. Myers' approach is invaluable."**

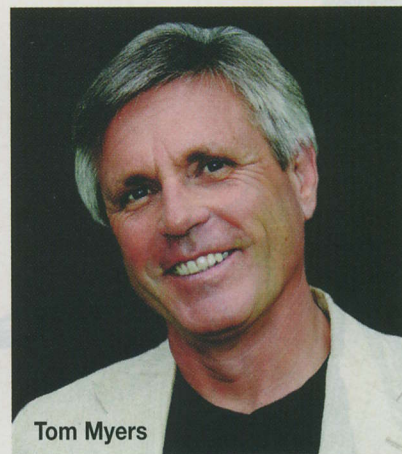
## MAKING CONNECTIONS

Just like the interweave of myofascial tissue, Myers credits the inspiration for his lucid vision and radical mapping of the skeletal system to his own interconnections with some brilliant minds, including Ida Rolf, PhD, who developed the eponymous groundbreaking system of soft-

tissue massage; Moshe Feldenkrais, the Russian-born Israeli émigré who created the mind-movement system that bears his name; and visionary architect and designer Buckminster Fuller.

In 1970, after studying English literature at Harvard, Myers headed to Southern Illinois to study with Fuller, and received a degree in design. From there he moved to Boulder, CO, and began to explore the workings of the body at the Rolf Institute of Structural Integration. Rolfing is a system that reshapes the body's myofascial structure by applying powerful, often painful pressure and energy to release physical and emotional trauma. Myers says Rolfing not only changed his body but helped him lose some of his ingrained New England stiffness and reserve. It also laid the tracks, so to speak, for his Anatomy Trains and helped shape KMI by educating him in soft-tissue manipulation.

After his training at the Rolf Institute, Myers moved to Little Rock, where he worked almost nonstop, giving up to 30 bodywork sessions a week before moving on to practice in England and elsewhere in Europe. Then, 12 years ago, Myers returned to his childhood home in Maine,



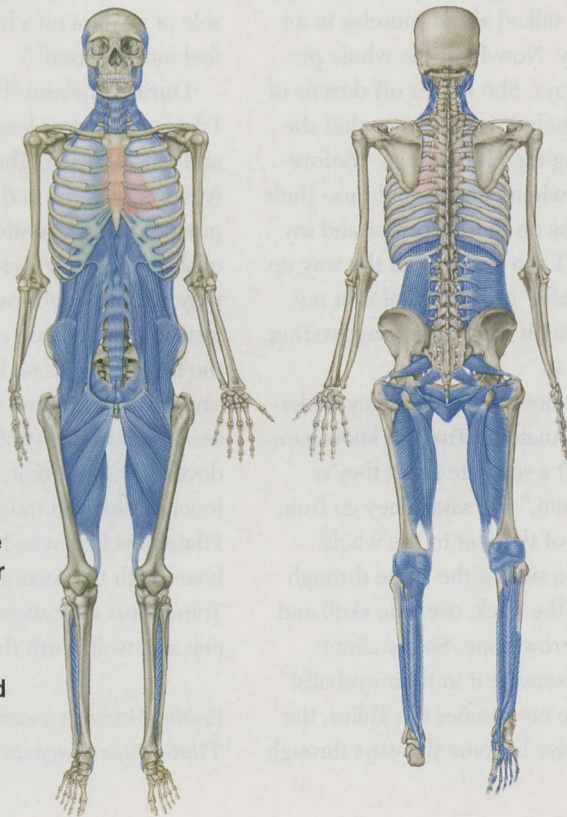
Tom Myers

where he now spends his rare but precious free time sailing. He credits this pastime for honing his intuition and his listening skills. "Oddly enough, when you're sailing, just as when you're working with people, you have to be fully aware of all your senses," he explains. When he's not on the open seas, the much-sought-after Myers is on the road, leading workshops around the globe. (For more information, including workshop schedules, visit [anatomytrains.com](http://anatomytrains.com)).

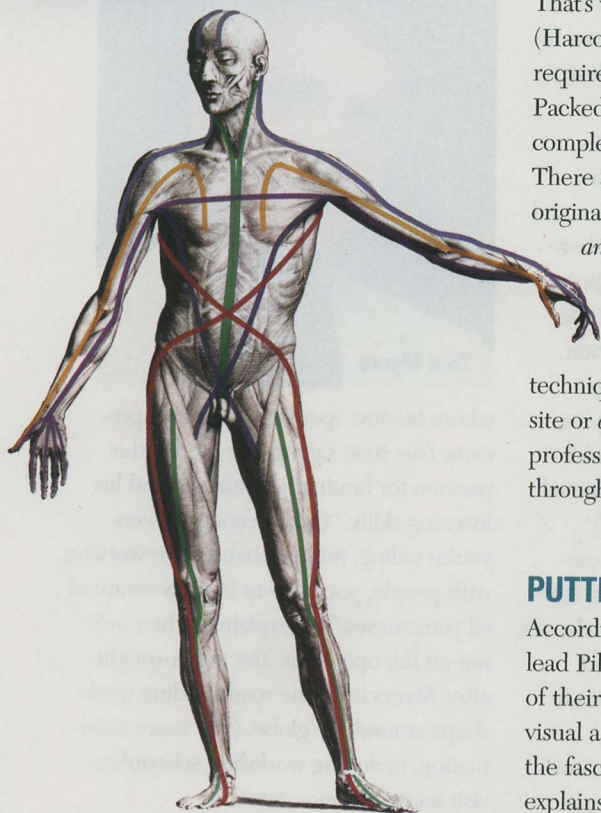
## A NEW WAY OF THINKING

"For 500 years, ever since we first started looking at anatomy, we've divided the body by cutting separate muscles away from each other," says Myers. "But no muscle ever works in isolation. "In reality, muscles work like a coordinated string of 'sausages' surrounded by the warp and weft of the myofascial tissue." Myers got the idea for the metaphor of muscles strung together like sausages from an article titled "The Double-Spiral Arrangement of Musculature in Man," written by Raymond Dart, a famous anthropologist and a student of the Alexander Technique. The article sparked Myers to think about ways other structural continuities could be described. "It's helpful to envision muscles in the body suspended with a single overall fascial [soft tissue] bag, which in turn surrounds and suspends the skeleton," he says.

Taking this notion a step further, the Anatomy Trains system identifies all the myofascial meridians in the body. It's akin to the Chinese-medicine meridian



**Near right: The Deep Front Line, the body's "core," links the central muscles and fascia from the foot to the tongue and jaw. Far right: The Spiral Line wraps the body in a double helix of coordinated muscle.**



**The Anatomy Trains map: The body uses the many myofascial slings in its constantly changing dance between mobility and stability.**

system—but viewed from a Western perspective. Myers’ system gives practitioners a way to see into their clients’ “internal roadmap” so they can follow the route that leads to the real source of discomfort and release it. (See diagram at left.)

Driving the system is the understanding that fascia is continuous from head to toe and from front to back, and that it penetrates every tissue in the body (excluding the circulatory system and the organs). Along the Anatomy Train are myofascial “tracks” and bony “stations.” The stations are attachment points for the fascia. The tracks are either muscular or fascial units. Myers divides the tracks into “expresses”—myofascial units that traverse two or more joints—and “locals,” which span only one. Locals are typically closer to the bone and determine posture, whereas expresses are more superficial and govern movement.

Granted, this is a lot to envision.

That’s why Myers’ book, *Anatomy Trains* (Harcourt Health Sciences, 2009), is required reading for his workshops. Packed with illustrations, it outlines his complete myofascial meridians system. There are also instructive videos: the original two-DVD set, *Fascial Tensegrity and Anatomy Trains Myofascial Meridians*, plus a series of eight technique DVDs, which illustrate fascial and myofascial release techniques. (Ordered through the website or *optp.com* for \$76.75 (or \$63.95 for professionals); the book is also available through *amazon.com*).

### PUTTING PILATES ON “TRACK”

According to Myers, *Anatomy Trains* can lead Pilates instructors to the true source of their clients’ difficulty. “We teach visual assessment by offering a map of the fascia for the mind’s eye,” he explains. “The *Anatomy Trains* helps teachers see the unobvious thing, where the blockage or tightness is actually located, so they can then make the unobvious correction.”

Kathleen Keller agrees. “All the training I’d done previous to *Anatomy Trains* only talked about muscles in an isolated way. Now I get the whole picture,” she says. She rattles off dozens of examples, including a favorite that she calls *Getting the Hamstrings*. “Before the *Trains*, when clients would use their legs in straps on the Reformer and say things like ‘I can feel this all the way up to my eyeballs,’ or ‘I can feel it in my neck,’ I thought they were exaggerating. I didn’t get it.”

Now she does. “Thanks to my understanding of *Anatomy Trains*, I know hamstrings aren’t a separate issue; they’re part of a chain,” she says. They go from the bottom of the feet to the whole back, up one side of the spine through the back of the neck, over the skull and end at the brow bone. So my clients really were sensing it in their eyeballs!”

The more one studies the *Trains*, the more extensive become the ways through

which this method can help teachers get to the root of students’ problems or just enhance their performance. Here’s one, courtesy of Myers, who isn’t trained as a Pilates instructor but has a “comfortable familiarity” with the discipline. “Let’s say one of your students is doing Leg Circles on the Reformer, but you notice she’s failing to gain a neutral pelvis. You might think the problem is in her back or pelvis muscles,” he says. “But it might really be in the leg...or neck. By following the meridians to the source of the imbalance, a teacher can see the true connection by following the meridians to the source of the problem.”

Beyond the added awareness a teacher gains, the *Anatomy Trains* also keeps Pilates practitioners on track. “Once my students get what I call the myofascial meridians frame of reference, I’ve found they’re not only more motivated but learn more easily,” says Larkam. “Instead of clients thinking they have to memorize separate pieces of choreography, they can internalize the sequence because they make the connections—and get the whole body structure. I’ve even heard students say, ‘Oh, now I understand why when I massage the sole of my foot on a ball my shoulders feel more relaxed!’”

During *Anatomy Trains* workshops, Pilates instructors learn visual assessment and touch-cueing. They gain a new ability to see patterns in their mind’s eye and practice using a gentle, awareness-evoking touch on their students. “Since they learn to ‘see’ a map of the fascia instead of a skeleton or a linear view of the bones, there’s no heavy adjusting,” says Myers, “because when you can truly see a pattern or a problem, you can devise a way out of it, through either touch or through movement.” And Pilates teachers who have gotten on board with the *Anatomy Trains* agree: A Tom Myers education is a lifelong journey, and well worth the price of a ticket.

*Robin Westin is a contributing writer to PilatesStyle Magazine.*