

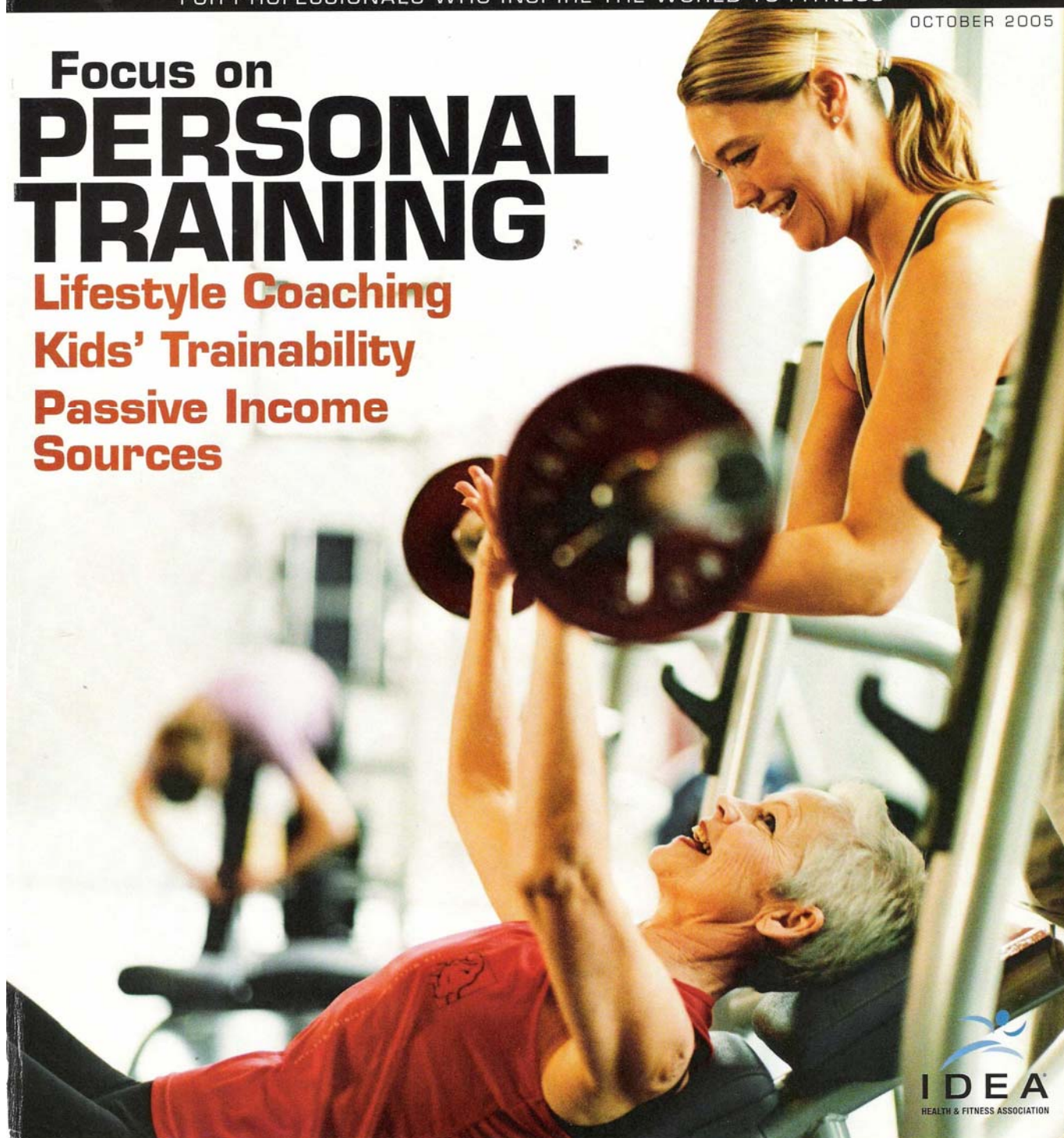
IDEA Fitness Journal

FOR PROFESSIONALS WHO INSPIRE THE WORLD TO FITNESS®

OCTOBER 2005

Focus on **PERSONAL TRAINING**

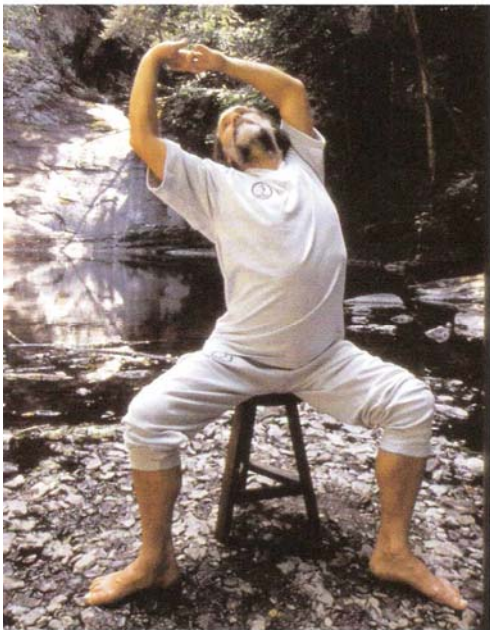
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By Rosalind Gray Davis

the Gyrotonic® and Gyrokinesis® system: a primer



Catch the wave as interest in this creative exercise method gathers momentum.

Juliu Horvath, creator and founder of the Gyrotonic Expansion System® and Gyrokinesis, is the epitome of a modern-day man for all seasons. An intuitive teacher, a former professional ballet dancer, a yogi and a wood sculptor, this 63-year-old Hungarian has developed a unique system of movement that gently works the joints and muscles of the body through rhythmic, undulating motions that embrace key principles also found in swimming, dance, yoga, tai chi and gymnastics. "The octopus, the monkey and the cat are my basic models because they can move in any direction at any given time with strength and control because they have no restrictions. The human

body has restrictions, but I can model the body—within the framework of its restrictions—to move in a similar way, to be free," he says.

Designed to take the body "beyond its current limitations," Gyrotonic training stretches, strengthens and elongates muscles, stimulating connective tissue in and around the joints and improving balance, coordination, strength and flexibility. Horvath believes that exercise should be a creative and playful experience: "I want music in my body and poetry in my body, and I want to be skillful without struggle; it has to come without struggle."

His system has two components: the Gyrokinesis program, originally called "Yoga for Dancers," which works the entire body without equipment by stimulating internal organs through fluid and gentle manipulation of multiple joints; and Gyrotonic training, which uses apparatus that permits the person to move with support and resistance. Both forms of exercise allow the body to work in continuous, flowing movements and are synchronized with corresponding breathing patterns. Advocates of the work say it enhances aerobic and cardiovascular stimulation and promotes neuromuscular rejuvenation.

About the Founder

Born and raised in Romania, Horvath—who glides with the grace of a cheetah and speaks in heavily accented English—explained during an hour-long interview with *IDEA Fitness Journal* that the Juliu Horvath Method™, as it once was called, was developed after his personal struggle with chronic pain and injury. After dancing principal roles with the Romanian State Opera Ballet in his 20s, he defected in 1970 while on tour in Italy and after 6 months in a refugee camp was

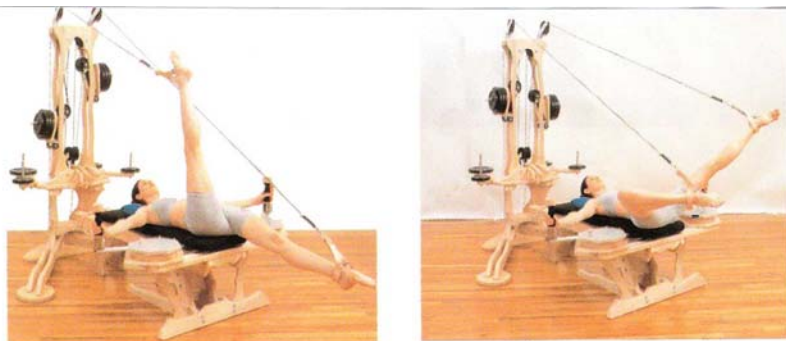
granted political asylum by the United States. Horvath then moved to New York City, was hired by the prestigious New York City Opera and toured with ballet icons Margot Fonteyn and Jacques d'Amboise. Eventually his journey took him to Texas, where he became principal dancer with the Houston Ballet, but his dance career ended when he ruptured his Achilles tendon and damaged several disks in his back.

Horvath retreated to St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands to recover and regroup, and there he began an extensive study and practice of yoga. It was out of this experience and his personal research that the Gyrokinesis methodology first developed. "I discovered Kundalini energy through my pain and agony, and somehow that awakened me. Being awakened energetically means that you can read the movement when it is not a movement yet. You are like a little child who is totally unconscious and not prepared to make movement happen. Children move because something moves them from within."

Horvath returned to New York in the early 1980s and began teaching his new method of exercise at Steps on Broadway, a well-known professional dance studio, and in Central Park. With a zealous following, he opened his first studio, White Cloud®, in 1984 and set about designing and building his first Gyrotonic equipment.

Circles and Spirals

The Gyrokinesis program, which forms the core of Horvath's methodology, works the entire body through seven natural elements of spinal motion: forward, backward, left side, right side, left twist, right twist and circular. Horvath describes the movement as fluid, continuous and harmonious: "It goes out, and then it comes back. It is like dropping a pebble in the



LEFT: Master trainer Cori Doetzer demonstrates scissors using the Gyrotonic pulley tower combination unit's upper straps. The exercise is designed to release stiffness in the joints of the legs, hip flexors and ankles, while stretching and strengthening the hamstrings. The unique pulley system allows for a deep opening of the hip flexors because the legs are able to move below the bench.

RIGHT: Called Stirring the Clouds, this exercise is designed to create symmetry in the lower limbs by articulating the hip and knee joints. Master trainer Cori Doetzer is performing the work on the pulley tower combination unit to balance her left and right sides and strengthen the leg muscles that are more difficult to reach. The movement is also designed to release stiffness in the joints of the leg using a multidimensional combination that stimulates the hip-knee-ankle joint functional unit.

middle of a lake; the wave starts spreading and then comes back." Gyrokinesis exercises are performed on a 16- or 20-inch stool.

According to Matt Aversa, vice president and chief operating officer of Gyrotonic International in Pennsylvania, when "Juliu built his wonderful equipment, . . . the exercises were already there. The dilemma, which he resolved, was to build equipment that would allow one to continue to perform these movements."

Aversa elaborates: "Gyrotonic movements consist of guiding the body through a series of circles and spirals. It helps us create a musculature that is strong but that also has the dexterity to allow the bones to do what they are meant to do. Furthermore, it allows the body to keep moving, without interruption, because of the circularity of the movements and the design of the equipment itself. There is no endpoint to Gyrotonic exercises."

After more than 20 years, the Gyrotonic apparatus has evolved considerably. The basic piece of equipment, the pulley tower combination, is an elegant, curvy sculpted unit made of wood, leather and various pulleys and weights. It increases spinal articulation, eliciting a spherical and three-dimensional awareness in the body.

There are four additional specialized units:

- The GYROTONER®, which duplicates the movements of the human body in multiple planes, is beneficial for shoulder, elbow and wrist rehabilitation. It has handle and foot units that operate either separately or together.
- The jumping-stretching board, a versatile apparatus that stretches and

strengthens the torso, is especially useful for lateral movement of the lower limbs.

- The ladder unit is designed to increase proprioceptive understanding and enable optimum stretching.
- The leg extension unit, used for the lower body, is considered effective for knee, foot and ankle therapy.

All the equipment is designed to provide joint articulation without compression, the goal being to distribute the work evenly between agonist and antagonist muscle groups. The apparatus accommodates all body types and strength levels. It is currently being used in therapeutic, dance, sport-specific and general conditioning facilities, in addition to Gyrotonic exercise studios.

Instructor Training

Gyrotonic education in the United States is based in Miami Beach, Florida, where Horvath does his teacher training and certification. According to master trainer Kathy Van Patten, founder and owner of Bodyworks Studio in Boston, "Not only does Juliu personally certify each current instructor, but he has trademarked his work in almost every country in the world; and although he revises and extends his work, the practice of Gyrotonic is very consistent all over the world."

Debra Rose of San Francisco Gyrotonic has worked with Horvath since the mid 1980s. She says, "Certified Gyrotonic trainers have all worked directly with Juliu, and his underlying principles are like a rock." As an example, Rose describes how the breath is used in the exercise system: "There are a number of different

ways to use the breath. If you have a slow exercise like the Arch and Curl, you do a longer, more sustained, fuller breath; and if you're doing a more percussive movement like the Twist and Pull, then you use a more percussive breath. The way Juliu interlaces the breath . . . facilitates the movement; it is so organic."

In Europe, Gyrotonic education is headquartered in Bad Krozingen, Germany, at the Reintalklinik, where Horvath spends 6 months each year. Apart from offering teacher-training and certification programs, the clinic has a Gyrotonic Room specializing in joint rehabilitation, especially for knees, hips and spines. This room is run by Horvath's brother, Paul, a physical therapist.

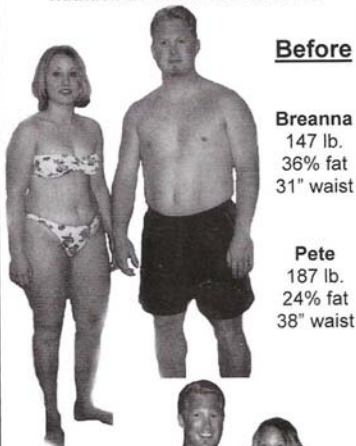
Master trainer Stephanie Spencer, owner of Pacific Movement Center in Santa Cruz, California, did her teacher training in Germany. "I wanted to see the rehabilitative aspects of the Gyrotonic method, and you definitely see this at the clinic. The scope of the work is all-inclusive, from people with physical problems to the dancer, the athlete or just the average person. There are modifications, but it is basically the same system for all bodies, which makes it so unique and brilliant. Everyone can get something out of it."

Christine Wilson, a master trainer at Infinite Dynamics in San Luis Obispo, California, and a registered nurse who works with orthopedic surgeons, chiropractors and physical therapists, says, "Gyrotonic principles can be applied by trainers who have had medical training or those who have not; Juliu has made the system so safe that if you apply it correctly, the way it is taught, the client will get great benefit out of it. My medical background gives me the security to know that the system really works."

Currently there are 873 licensed Gyrotonic studios worldwide, with 532 in the United States and 62 master trainers who have undergone years of extensive, specialized training personally supervised by Horvath. These master trainers are permitted to conduct basic teacher training. The advanced training program has been closed temporarily because, as Horvath puts it, "Now everyone wants to be a master trainer because we are a growing community." He says he doesn't want to expand his teacher-training system in such a way as to dilute what he has already accomplished. "I'll let the master trainers

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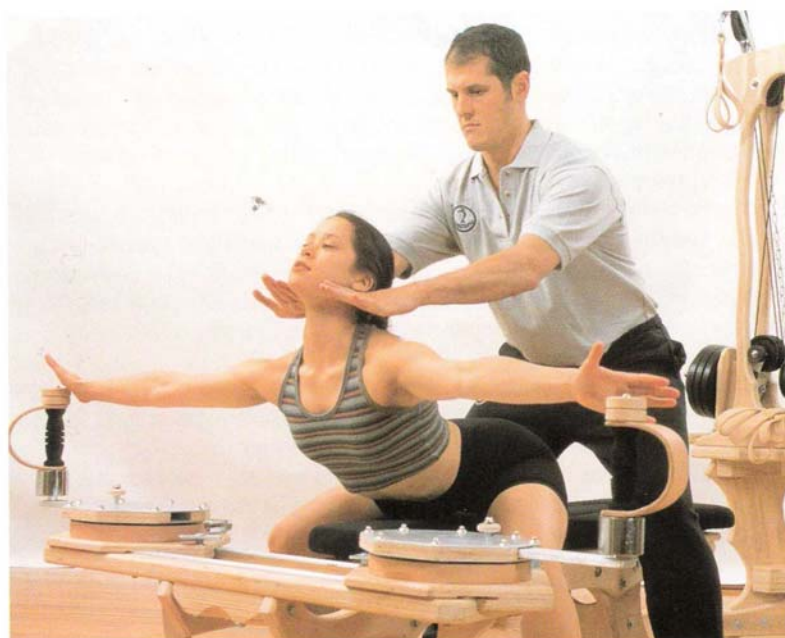
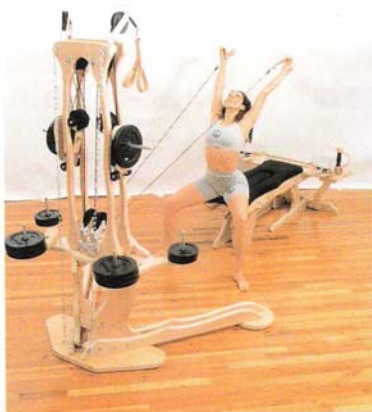
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TOP LEFT: The end movement of the long arm combination series may look like an expression of pure joy, but it also has the function of lengthening, opening and strengthening the torso throughout the movement. The exercise is executed by facing the pulley tower combination unit with hands in the lower double loop straps and moving the torso with spherical awareness.

TOP RIGHT: Juliu Horvath spirals his spine in a Side Arch, Side Curl, accomplished in one continuous, fluid movement. The exercise, part of the Gyrokinesis repertoire, massages the body's internal organs by curling the waist in both directions with the arms following overhead in a circular motion. The complexity of this movement relates to an athletic pattern, as in trampoline jumps or in the "hammer throw" in track and field.

BOTTOM: Master trainer Matt Aversa guides a student teacher through the Arch and Curl on the pulley tower combination's handle unit. The shortest way to explain the complex effects of the movement is as follows: The Arch and Curl is used to elicit articulation and mobilization of the spine, to release the joints of the arms, and to awaken the nervous system.

it is not the right physical activity."

To address this issue, which he considers of paramount importance, Horvath has designed and personally carved a child's version of the pulley tower in the shape of a playful dragon with functional but whimsical moving parts. He plans to manufacture the piece in Miami Beach, Florida, and will build it for two age groups, 4- to 10-year-olds and 11- to 16-

year-olds. Horvath's enthusiasm and dedication to help young people are evident: "The future is in the children; our future is always in who is growing up, and somehow I feel that this [Gyrotonic] work is going to enhance a little part of their life." ■

Rosalind Gray Davis, an award-winning journalist and media consultant for more

Resources

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than 30 years, is an avid student of the Gyrotonic Expansion System and a certified Pilates instructor. In addition to authoring a recent biography, she has written for a number of major U.S. publications, produced documentaries on a variety of subjects, produced and written broadcast news and discussion programs, and taught college journalism.

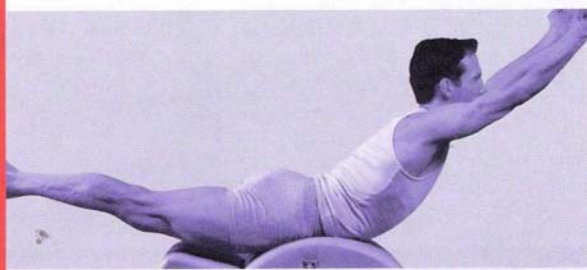
Besides the people interviewed for this article, Ms. Gray Davis would like to recognize Ana Padilla, Terri Crawford, Ellen Henrici and Donna Luder, all licensed trainers in the Gyrotonic Expansion System and/or Gyrokinesis, for their contributions to this article.

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