



Somatics in Action: A Mindful and Physical Conditioning Tool for Movers

Lauren W. Kearns. Handspring Publishing, 2017.
210 pages, \$39.95 (paper).

Author Lauren W. Kearns writes, “It is from that place of intuition, contemplation, and engagement that I have developed *Somatics in Action*” (xv). Kearns, a choreographer, dancer, and certified Pilates and yoga instructor, details her dance-inspired movement system in *Somatics in Action: A Mindful and Physical Conditioning Tool for Movers*. Kearns’s thorough, bottom-up approach dissects and examines both the physicality and ideology behind Somatics in Action (SIA) and the components that form it. It not only serves as a detailed introduction for novice and casual movers, but also for seasoned practitioners, teachers, and students; it is an important back-to-basics exercise in the context of SIA. This reintroduction to the foundations of Bartenieff Fundamentals, yoga, Pilates, modern dance, and more helps to “promote the intentional and mindful three-dimensionality of movement” (153) by asking movers to reexamine and reflect on practices that might have become rote throughout their learning. Comprehensive descriptions and the succinct synthesis of multiple practices ensure that the reader fully understands the system and its parts, and its role in creating a more mindful, connected mover.

Kearns describes SIA as both a movement system and philosophy. The foundation of SIA incorporates imagery, experiential anatomy, and body integration as well as the Pilates principles of “postural alignment and balance” (xv) with the yogic principle of “proper physical alignment, understanding of anatomical structure, and yogic energy channels” (xv). Many threads are woven together by Kearns’s background as a dancer, choreographer, educator, and practitioner. The text accomplishes an intricate and gradual unfolding of information that is essential for understanding and improvement. Kearns’s text is a fully developed tool in which she examines and thoroughly breaks down the mind-body connection for the reader. As a lovely homage to how the system develops and builds, the text consistently integrates and refers back to earlier sections to aid readers in their ability to connect concepts and practices to the whole.

The book is broken down into four main parts: “Foundation,” “Body Practices I,” “Body Practices II,” and “Body Practices III” (I: Yoga, II: Pilates, and III: Somatics in Action). “Foundation” introduces terminology that Kearns uses throughout the rest of the book to ensure that the reader or practitioner is familiar with the language, movement concepts, and relevant anatomy. Additionally, she introduces some historical and contextual information on her somatic practice topics. Kearns also provides some personal history, describing how she incorporates these practices into her larger repertoire of mindful body work. Within each body practice section there are photographs of fundamental poses and exercises with a step-by-step instructional guide for each, including various levels of difficulty, and use of equipment. The author also integrates reflective and practical prompts—questions and tasks based on themes and poses—for both students and teachers.

Somatics in Action could be used in any somatics-based class as a textbook or pedagogical tool. Kearns, a professor of dance at Elon University in North Carolina, clearly takes the time to examine her movement system through the lens of a teacher, providing suggestions for sample lesson plans, additional educator resources, and assignments that progress with the pace of the book and the class. Because of the totality of her approach, each section provides information and resources for teachers and students, as well as individual movers looking to expand their own practice.

As with any written description of a physical activity, there is room for interpretation and therefore error. Although simple poses like *svasana* or *corpse pose* translate simply into description, explanations such as “external single and double leg extension with port de bras” (166) can become lost in technical explanation, especially for a new mover. The author provides a helpful tool to address this issue: More complex exercises are paired with QR codes that, when scanned, provide a video of the practice.

Kearns states, “As human beings, I think it is important to be mindful. As movers, I believe it is paramount to deepening, refining, and evolving our physical and mental practice” (1). *Somatics in Action* combines complex ideas and movement vocabularies while providing a guide to use, as individual movers, to break down, examine, question, integrate, and practice the many parts that make up the whole—the whole of SIA and the whole of who we are as human beings.

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