

Title: Drills! Drills! Drills!  
Instructor: Michelle Joyce  
Level: "All Levels" of dancers  
Info: 115 minutes

Review by MISHA 2008

You can practice your moves, your choreography, your improv and your performance skills, but what is the secret to flawless technique? How do you keep your locks and pops sharp and your eights and circles smooth and flowing throughout a long dance set? The "secret" isn't such a surprise – it takes a lot of hard work and practice of course!

I've heard many students bemoan the lack of a good motivator at home to help them practice. They learn movements in class, but have trouble practicing on their own at home. Or, they're tired of instructional videos that just teach movements and want to enhance and improve what they already know.

If you're looking for that cosmic "kick in the rear" to jump start your dancing and help tune-up your technique, this is the video for you. Michelle presents a well-organized, logical progressive approach that will appeal to pros and novices alike. As with other videos, Michelle does not just promote the dance but infuses her material with a nod towards fitness, creating a work that will help to improve all aspects of a dancer's form. Overall, this DVD is just fabulous. Michelle has put together a really well planned and executed offering for dancers of ALL abilities. This DVD is the "total package" of drills, providing sections to drill everything from core to isolations to layers and zils.

*DVD sections include:*

**Strengthening Drills:** Glutes, back, legs, thighs, lower abs and even the entire core are covered during this part of the DVD. Michelle begins with Suhalia-style glute squeezes and gives a detailed description of how, and how not, to execute the movement. A selection of drills for other parts of the body come next and trust me these exercises will definitely help you get into dancing shape! Here, too, are drills that will improve strength and control for specific movements including body rolls and undulations....

**Isolation Drills:** Now Michelle begins to focus on various dance movements. As with the strengthening drills she explains each movement clearly and concisely. Not only does Michelle demonstrate and breakdown the movements, but she also describes the muscles that drive each move. Frequently describing weight shifts and the anatomical changes involved with each movement, Michelle covers a total of 7 isolations before moving on to the actual isolation drill itself. This drill moves out of the standard "home" or basic position, incorporating a variety of foot patterns and arm positions while drilling the isolations broken down earlier. Movements are performed on both sides of the body and at a variety of speeds. In this way, the isolation drill has a bonus level of complexity as it also incorporates layering of body, arm, and feet position. Not only can you tighten up your isolations but you can also work on additional layers at the same time.

**Finger Cymbal Drills:** In the next section of the DVD, Michelle adds an additional layer to drilling by incorporating finger cymbals. First the three patterns that will be played are introduced along with explanations as to how each should be played. Michelle explains each in several different ways (according to dums and teks, counts, and hands) and there's even a bar that appears across the screen that breaks down each pattern. There's even a brief description about how to wear and play the cymbals, again making this valuable for both beginners and more experienced dancers. During the drill, Michelle plays each pattern and leads viewers through a series of arm movements.

**Zig Zag Drill:** This one was a new concept for me and one of the best on the entire DVD (and believe me, it was hard to pick a favorite!). Here Michelle describes a unique pattern that the body will take through the drill. This pattern is repeated through the hips (repeated on each side), pelvis, and chest. After first breaking down the drill and explaining how to do each aspect of it there is a section for dancers to follow along. Michelle then ups the anti by adding in zils along with the hip, pelvis, and chest patterns. This pattern is a wonderful way to increase range of motion in each area while working on locks and pops. I confess that here alone I spent several days just playing with the zig zag!

**Feet and Hip Layering Drill:** Another great section. Michelle breaks down the footwork (grapevine step) and then layers various movements onto the traveling step. Once again, she does a great job of explaining this section and also describes Suhalia's method of denoting when the movement will occur in conjunction to the music. As someone who's tried to briefly study the Suhalia method (and admittedly got mired down in the nomenclature) it was very helpful to see the movement demonstrated as the step was counted. Next comes the follow along section where Michelle layers 7 movements onto the step. As with several of the other drill sections, there is a voiceover track while Michelle runs the follow-along drill. A nice touch here is all the good tips Michelle gives while demonstrating the drill. If you listen as you follow along and drill, you'll pick up a number of nice points on technique and polish. Oh, and don't worry if you're a zil enthusiast – the ENTIRE drill of the layered traveling movements is repeated with added finger cymbals.

**3/4 and Standing Shimmy Drills:** Two different ways to perform the 3/4 shimmy are presented here: a hip-drop version and a hip up version. Michelle also demonstrates several different variations on the movement before going into the drills. Each of the two forms are drilled slowly first and then at a speedy rate. The drills aren't simply done in place, however – Michelle moves you forward, backward, and even in circles. The next section really needs no breakdown or explanation at all, and is simply a follow along shimmy drill. Once again Michelle performs the drill, adding different arms with the shimmy and varying speeds, as a voiceover plays. Here too dancers will find a number of great tips as they practice with Michelle. As the drill progresses, the shimmies change and become increasingly harder in difficulty and speed.

Hip and Chest Layering Drill: Here Michelle combines hips with ribs. Breakdown first, and then a rather challenging drill. Each section of the body moves independently of the other and this will definitely provide a good challenge for most dancers. As the chest movement switches directions, the pacing of the different levels is varied, and other additional variations are presented this drill offers material for many challenging practice sessions. And, once you're comfortable with the drill layers, you can always follow along to the zil section.

Choreography: The final part of the DVD is a choreography that combines all of the drills on the DVD. The inclusion of this on a drill DVD was brilliant – it provides dancers with a quick way to practice all of the various drills while also drilling their brain too! Not only can you drill your movements but you can actually practice learning material at the same time. Michelle's so sneaky! The choreography is broken down into 4 manageable sections and is then presented in full for dancers to practice.

*What Worked for Me:*

- I loved the inclusion of strengthening exercises and the thought of using these as a drill. We so frequently drill “just the moves” and it was great to see the idea of strength drills included on a DVD. Some of these movements were intense (see below) but once you master them you will have a wonderfully strong body on which to base your dance.
- The progression of this DVD, from basic foundational material and drills to layers to zils and a full choreography, was well planned out. Each section was covered thoroughly and with a good attention to detail. Dancers of different levels will be able to adjust their practice plan accordingly rather than just having to tumble through a haphazard arrangement of drills as on some other DVDs.
- The application of various speeds and pacing for many of the drills was a nice touch. Frequently drills are demonstrated at only one speed and this variation was a nice way. I also loved the idea of switching the “leading” hip from side to side while working on each drill.
- The zig-zag drill was creative and offered me a new approach to drilling. For anyone who feels “stuck in a drilling rut” this new form alone would give you hours of challenging material.
- Michelle explains her drills according to the music, inspiring a musicality that many other drill systems lack. Frequently drills are simply demonstrated, but here Michelle talks about matching them to the downbeat and other aspects of the music helping dancers to drill not only the moves but musical interpretation too.

*What Might Not Work for You:*

- If you're not a fan of the Suhaila style drills that are fairly intense exercises, you might not like the strength drill section of this DVD. Similarly, if you never play zils then the finger cymbal section might not be your cup of tea. The nice thing, however, is that there is still a ton of information that will benefit dancers of all levels.
- At times, it was a bit difficult to see Michelle's feet. Personally this was not an issue for me once I understood which feet positions she was incorporating into her

drills. But for some this might present a problem as the instructor's feet positions are only shown in the mirror behind her. For some, only seeing the feet mirrored may be a bit difficult to follow.

*One last note:* I teach a regular, weekly drills class. I love drills, and try to think of all sorts of fun and unique ways to do various movements and dance concepts. I *\*really\** enjoyed this DVD and was quite impressed with the approach to the isolation and zig zag drill sections in particular. If you're looking for new material to drill, or even just new ways to execute your drills, I'd really recommend this DVD.