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Dancing the *Wu Tao* Way By Michelle Locke

Everyone is getting on the dance band wagon right now. Millions of people across the globe are becoming aware of dance as a medium for the individual expression, of beauty, passion, and joy, the qualities of the soul. Just look at the increase of shows like 'So You Think You Can Dance' and 'Dancing with the Stars' to see how popular dance is becoming. It's no wonder people everywhere are signing up for dance classes in all styles.

Welcome to Wu Tao. Wu Tao Dance is one of the newcomers on the dance block. Suitable for everyone, Wu Tao is essentially about healing. Through the medium of dance, and using the inspiration of beautiful music, Wu Tao enables everyone to tap into their soul and express themselves while balancing out life energy and increasing physical fitness.

Wu Tao (translation: "The Dancing Way") is a therapeutic dance workout that aims to restore balance. Based on the principles of Chinese Medicine, it works by harmonising the flow of vital energy called Qi or Chi, throughout the body. The Chi flows through channels called meridians and Wu Tao helps to rebalance, unblock and restore the chi flow in these meridians.

Wu Tao – The Dancing Way® was developed in 2001 by former ballerina Michelle Locke. A career in classical ballet was brought to a halt when Michelle suffered a serious back injury that forced her to stop dancing. Devastated by the loss of her career, but motivated to heal herself, Michelle discovered Shiatsu, went on to study it and in 1993, set up the first Shiatsu school in WA. Her passionate love of dance and her on-going interests in eastern healing methods, led her to create Wu Tao.

Wu Tao is dance that balances the Chi. It is unique in its style, as well as being beautiful to do. There are no harsh or jarring movements, just flowing, expressive dance that energises and tones the body while calming the spirit.

Fundamental to the practice of Wu Tao, is its foundations in Traditional Chinese Medicine and the philosophy of Taoism. The 'Tao' simply means the 'way' or 'path', which in essence, refers to living life in harmony with the natural flow of Life. Ancient Taoist sages lived out their days observing life in the natural world and attuning themselves to it. Hence, being able to 'flow like water', be 'flexible like a tree', turn inwards and build energy in the season of winter, or harness the energy and move obstacles from the path in spring.

Many people these days are looking for ways to become less stressed, more peaceful and more joyful. It is obvious that being in this zone is good for you! Recent scientific studies (see *Molecules of Emotion* by Candice Pert) show the benefits of thinking thoughts that increase positive feeling states.

It has been proven that one of the biggest killers of human beings is stress and its related conditions. Hence, the increase in therapies and methods that reduce stress, such as yoga, meditation and psychotherapy have become very popular.

One of the unique benefits that Wu Tao has is that you are able to embody positive states of awareness, as

opposed to just thinking about them. You literally dance them into being.

Imagine this. You have a problem with your boss. It's driving you crazy. You have been thinking of how to resolve it for days, going over and over it in your head. It takes a few days for you to think up a solution, and by the end of that time you are stressed and fatigued.

Now imagine this: You have a problem with your boss. It's driving you crazy. You have been thinking of how to resolve it for days, going over and over it in your head. You go to your Wu Tao class. You take the situation with you into the dance. In the first dance you embody letting go. As you dance you let go of your thoughts, feelings, expectations and struggle. No thinking is involved; you just embody release as you dance.

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In the next dance, you become trust. You give yourself over to the energy that is greater than yourself, (also called God or Source Energy); trusting that in your surrender, the way will

open up. In this dance you simply rest, surrender and trust the process. Next dance is about self expression and clearing energy blockages. In this one you consciously dance out all and any feelings that you have about the situation. If you are angry, you dance it. If you are frustrated or anxious you dance this too.

Wu Tao
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The next dance relates to the Fire element and is about celebration and transformation. The final earth dance embodies gratitude. This is where it all comes together. Here you give thanks for the gifts and opportunities this situation and person has brought you.

Working from the premise that Life supports you, you stop pushing and resisting. Instead you give thanks for everything that Life is bringing you, opening yourself fully to the energy. This brings about a total realignment with Life and everything is brought into balance.

By the time you leave class, you feel peaceful, balanced and energized. The situation you came in with is no longer a problem and you have accessed the inner resources to deal with it effectively and easily. You are free of anxiety and tension and able to move forward knowing the situation has been resolved. The energy is always available to show the way.

In Wu Tao, the dances help you to harness the power of life force energy. As you dance you begin to know yourself as one with this energy. It becomes easier to listen and follow your inner guidance. There is a sense of flow and ease that is palpable. The mind is given 'time out' and bliss naturally arises as the body becomes fully engaged in the dance.

In a regular class the dances are done in sequence. The class starts with some gentle stretches and warm-up, followed by the dances, and finishing with meditation and deep relaxation. When you leave the class, ready to rejoin the world, you are centred, peaceful and energized. Many people sleep better after a class and the effects are enduring and sustaining.

Wu Tao offers classes and workshops to many different groups of people including children, the elderly, and the corporate sector. It is most beneficial to join a beginner's class or workshop first, but many people jump straight in to a regular class and pick the dances up over a few weeks.

Also available are classes and workshops in Wu Tao for Two™, a version of the dances that are done with a partner. The Wu Tao for Two™ dances are unique beautiful, and great fun to do! They also help us to bring harmony, love and balance into our relationships with others by increasing energy flow and connection.

Wu Tao classes are now held in most states throughout Australia, as well as in New Zealand and the UK. Those people passionate about Wu Tao and wanting to share this healing modality are able to take it a step further and become teachers. The teacher training program which is now offered in most states of Australia as well as New Zealand is intensive, transformational and practical. Wu Tao now has over 80 trained teachers, including 10 teachers in New Zealand.

For people who are looking for a different experience where healing and balance are important, Wu Tao could be just the thing. Differing from other healing forms such as yoga, tai chi or pilates with its use of music and dance, it offers the discerning participant a very enjoyable, powerful and energising experience for body, heart and soul.