

ISLAND FITNESS CONFERENCE 2026 · SESSION 2

# Creativity, Risk, and What New People Need

*An experiential 5Rhythms® session.*

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# The 5Rhythms®

The 5Rhythms was created by Gabrielle Roth, a New York dancer, musician and author, in the late 1970s, after an injury she was told would end her dancing. It has been described as a way to become conscious through dance.

5Rhythms is a dynamic movement practice, a practice of being in your body. It ignites creativity, connection, and community.

**5Rhythms, danced in a Wave: Flowing, Staccato, Chaos, Lyrical, Stillness.**

Two maps. Waves works with the body. Heartbeat works with emotion: fear, anger, sadness, joy, compassion. Today is Waves. When people move, things move.

# Why I offer this dance. It is not therapy. It is therapeutic.

Occupational therapy is about meaningful doing: adjusting the person, the task, or the environment so the doing becomes possible. A 5Rhythms Wave is a task that adjusts itself to every body in the room.

## **Range**

Physical and emotional

## **Creativity**

No right way, so the body  
invents

## **Thinking**

Improvising in the body, then  
in the mind

## **Awareness**

Noticing patterns of  
movement, patterns of  
thinking, patterns of  
relationship

# Some of the research on dance and improvised movement.

## Presence

99% of conscious dancers feel more present in their body.<sup>1</sup>

## Mental health

Across 41 studies, dance lowers depression and anxiety.<sup>2</sup>

## Creativity

Improvised dance improves divergent thinking.<sup>3</sup>

## Awareness

Creative dance raises interoceptive awareness.<sup>4</sup>

1. Laird, Vergeer, Hennelly & Siddarth (2021). Conscious dance: perceived benefits and psychological well-being of participants. *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*, 44, 101440. 2. Koch et al. (2019). Effects of dance movement therapy and dance on health-related psychological outcomes: a meta-analysis update. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 1806. 3. Sowden, Clements, Redlich & Lewis (2015). Improvisation facilitates divergent thinking and creativity. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 9(2), 128–138. 4. Rosado, Motta, Cruz-Ferreira & Pereira (2025). Enhancing interoceptive awareness in community-dwelling older adults: effects of a psychomotor intervention mediated by creative dance. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 16, 1515393.

# 5 Rhythms, five different qualities of movement and energy patterns.

## Flowing

### Letting in

Continuous, circular, feet.  
Balance, weight shift,  
grounding.

## Staccato

### Letting out

Edges, exhale, focus, beat.  
Coordination, power,  
timing.

## Chaos

### Letting go

Head goes, spine loosens.  
Full release, cardio load.

## Lyrical

### Lightening up

Light, spacious.  
Repetition, patterns,  
moving with others.

## Stillness

### Integration

Stops and starts, slower  
motion, breath.  
Interoception: sensing the  
body from inside.

# Why move like this? A container, with freedom inside it.

*How: prompts, not structured steps. Invitations that offer people*

## **Creativity**

An invitation to move in a new way. The body can find something it hasn't done before.

## **Risk-taking**

People choose how far to go, and the edge can move a little each time.

## **Body schema**

New movement patterns update the brain's map of the body. More range, more options.

## **Regulation**

The wave rises and falls. People can notice their internal state and adjust it.

# Choice, all the way through.

**There are no steps to get right.**

It's not about performance.

**Everything can be adapted.**

Smaller, slower, seated. Eyes open or closed. Stop, take a break, step outside, breathe.

**You choose how far to go.**

The participant chooses how much effort to give, and how much to do.

# Supporting the nervous system.

## Ways to regulate, any time

Eyes open

Eyes closed

Stopping movement

Taking a break

Going outside

Using the breath

## Sensory

I always check the volume, the sound, quality, the lights, and the temperature before the class starts.

BRAVE, NOT SAFE

# It activates the nervous system. It also supports it.

The shape is known before the risk begins.  
Permission is said out loud, early, and again.  
Every invitation has a smaller version.

I go first.  
Humour, early, so people feel at ease.  
I'm at the door at the start and at the end.

Let's move.

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What helped you take a risk?

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What shut you down?

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What would you have needed to feel differently?

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What helps people feel included, engaged, and willing to return?

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Stretch the comfort  
zone. With choice. With  
safety.

*That is what new people need, on any floor.*

Thank you. You were  
brave.

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