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## HEALTH & FITNESS

### Exercising Your Creative Mind

By PIA CATTON

he exercises in choreographer Twyla Tharp's new book "The Creative Habit" (Simon & Schuster, \$25) won't necessarily make you break a sweat. What they will do, however, is get your creative juices flowing, no matter what your field or fitness level.

Ms. Tharp's field, of course, is dance. She counts among her many credits, ballets for the world's best classical ballet companies, works of dance for film and television, and the Broadway musical "Movin' Out." But creativity is common to people in all vocations — and Ms. Tharp has written her book for anyone who seeks to

call forth original ideas.

"Creativity is not just for artists," she writes. "It's for businesspeople looking for a new way to close a sale; it's for engineers trying to solve a problem; it's for parents who want their children to see the world in more than one way."

Furthermore, Ms. Tharp aims to dispel the notion that creativity miraculously happens to some people and

cises, Ms. Tharp wrote essays that illustrate why they can be valuable.

In the chapter titled "Scratching," Ms. Tharp explains her practice of seeking inspiration from various sources. The process of "digging through everything to find something" can include activities like reading, listening to other people's conversation, looking to your mentors, and getting close to nature.

But simply taking a walk isn't going to bring your magnum opus to fruition. One exercise in this chapter is to take a walk with purpose. "Turn it into a field trip by imbuing the walk with a steely determination to come back with something in hand," she writes. The destination could be a museum or a local construction site, but you must be looking at it all aggressively.

By contrast, the act of sitting alone in a room can also summon equal creative energy. One exercise she offers is to sit quietly alone and think. Ms. Tharp takes special care to note that she's not describing meditation. Instead, she's talking about "seeking thoughts from the unconscious, and trying to tease them for-

ward until you can latch onto them."

Ms. Tharp's exercises will challenge you to think deeply about yourself and your surroundings, as well as what motivates and inspires you. But what makes this book more than just a how-to manual is that the author provides a great many examples of creativity in her own life. Of topical interest is her detailed description of creating the hit musical "Movin' Out." From her initial pitch to Billy Joel, whose songs she used, to the 11th hour changes she made in the

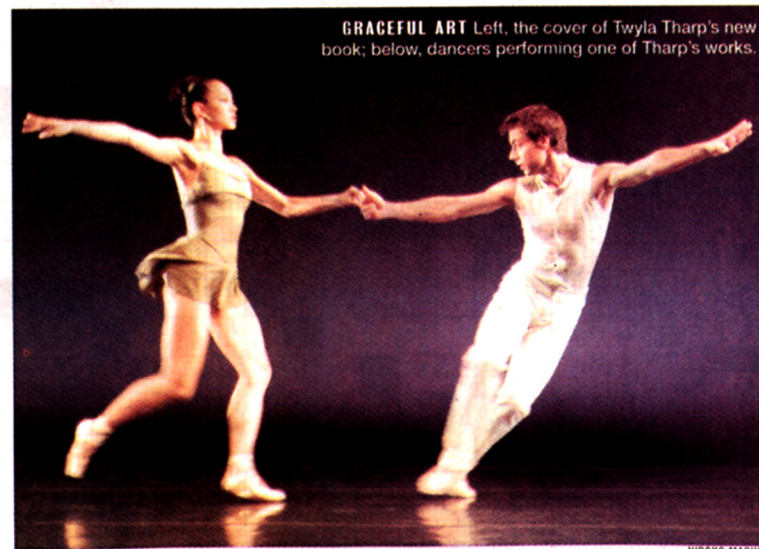
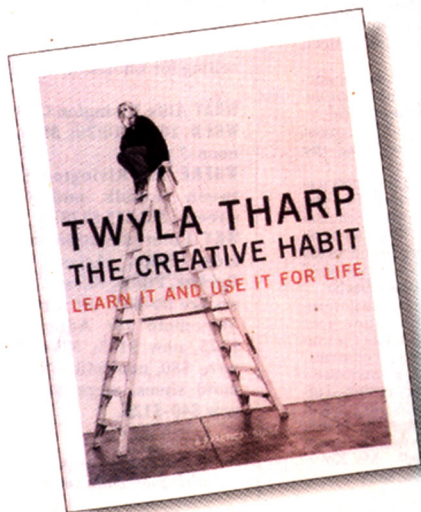
show when critics panned elements of it in Chicago, Ms. Tharp is willing to lead by example.

"The Creative Habit" is written in straightforward prose and a personal voice that makes it a better reading than the usual self-help book. It will benefit anyone in pursuit of innovative thinking — and it won't take too much time away from the boardroom, drafting table, or whatever the case may be. Ms. Tharp has valuable insights to share, and it's to her credit that she did.

'Creativity is not just for artists,' Twyla Tharp contends in her new book, 'The Creative Habit.'

not to others. She writes, "It is the perennial debate born in the Romantic era, between the beliefs that all creative acts are born of (a) some transcendent, inexplicable Dionysian act of inspiration, a kiss from God on your brow that allows you to give the world 'The Magic Flute,' or (b) hard work."

Ms. Tharp chooses answer "b" — with gusto. And she's written 240 pages on how to coax, encourage, and nurture your artistic side. At the heart of the book are 32 exercises that call for more mental elbow grease than physical. Most require no movement, and all can be applied to different tasks or projects. To bolster the exer-



GRACEFUL ART Left, the cover of Twyla Tharp's new book; below, dancers performing one of Tharp's works.