

## Yoga Link: Shoulder Shape-Up

by Jill Miller

Pranamaya, 2008

Review by Beth T. Cholette, Ph.D. on Apr 29th 2008



This DVD is part of the new Yoga Link series offered by Pranamaya.com. The instructor for this series is Jill Miller, who had previously created her own self-produced video series called Yoga Tune Up. This new series from Pranamaya incorporates many aspects of Miller's prior work but adds excellent production values plus a variety of additional workout and DVD options. For starters, there are two main aspects to this DVD, the Shoulder Workshop, in which Miller uses live instruction to break down the individual moves in great detail, and the Shoulder Practice, which Miller presents the same exercises via voiceover for a more flowing practice experience. Also included is a 16-minute Breath Primer: this same segment appears on all three of the DVDs in the Yoga Link series, and it offers an opportunity to obtain detailed instruction on the types of pranayama, or yogic breathing, which Miller utilizes in these practices.

The Shoulder Workshop includes a 38-minute session plus 11 minutes of Shoulder "Extras." The workshop itself focuses on the 12 directions of shoulder movement (a brief primer on this precludes the workshop), with exercises on Flexion/Extension, Elevation/Depression, Internal/External Rotation, Protraction/Retraction, and Detraction. Starting from the warm-ups, Miller introduces exercises that are as unique in their ways of targeting the body as they are in their fanciful names (from "Jane Fonda Light Bulb Exercise" to "Pin the Arms on the Yogi" to "Holy Cow at the Troth"). She concludes the workshop by putting all of the various directions of movement together for a Dolphin/Down Dog sequence. The Shoulder Extras which follow include short (1-3 minutes) stretches for the forearms, wrists, palms, thumbs, and shoulders; these exercises can be performed virtually anywhere. Miller's advanced knowledge of anatomy and human movement shines through her teaching, and her easygoing, down-to-earth style allows her to connect with her students in a straightforward manner.

At 43 minutes, the Shoulder Practice is actually slightly longer than the Workshop, as it includes a full number of repetitions for all the exercises. Although Miller instructs via voiceover here, she still offers plenty of cues on breathing and especially form. As mentioned above, she performs all the same exercises as in the workshop, and so she uses the same props as well (yoga mat, 1-2 blocks, dowel, blanket, and table). The DVD case rates the intended audience for this practice as "beginners to teachers," but I think that those new to yoga are likely to be intimidated by the level of flexibility demanded by many of the movements. Miller *does* frequently remind viewers that they *don't* need to look like her; she encourages each individual to go at their own pace and to respect their own limits. But even experienced yoga practitioners like myself are likely to feel a bit daunted at times, as I did when I attempted Miller's "1/4 Urdva Danurasana at the Wall": although I can attain a poor-man's version of urdhva danurasana (upward bow or wheel pose), this exercise completely blew me away, as my own shoulder flexibility was barely adequate to allow my arms to straighten even slightly. Miller sometimes demands much from her viewers in other ways, too. For example, her "Body Surfing" exercise, part of the shoulder retraction series, is ideally performed lying on a blanket while pulling yourself across a long expanse of smooth flooring--a bit tough for those of us practicing on carpet (the trash bag substitution is less than adequate, and most home exercisers are likely to have small space restrictions as well).

The goal of these shoulder exercises is to mobilize the shoulders from every angle, and by the end of the practice, Miller certainly achieves this objective (your muscles will no doubt achingly bear witness to this fact). This DVD is ideal for counteracting the effects of poor posture, overcoming imbalances, and strengthening weak muscles. Those new to Jill Miller and craving someone who can teach them about the way that their body moves are likely to find a new love here. Personally, I'm glad to see Miller getting the increased attention and recognition that she deserves through this new series, as she casts a unique light upon a crowded yoga media field. I do think that the specific formatting of the Yoga Link series, which separates the more intensive workshop-type tutoring from the actual practice, fails to make the most of Miller's best quality, which is her vibrant live instruction; in her own Yoga Tune-Up series, the teaching and practice were seamlessly rolled into one. Still, I wouldn't hesitate to recommend Jill Miller's Yoga Link series in general and this DVD in particular to any experienced yoga practitioners; few other yoga teachers will challenge you to explore your body in such an intense yet accessible manner.

**Link:** [Pranayama web site](#)

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