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Alexander Technique: Relating to Musicians and Performers

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Observational Learning, Hands-On Instruction, Listening

A performer’s goal is the best possible performance every time, but you cannot perform optimally if you are tense. The Alexander Technique takes you through realizing and releasing your tension so that you can perform and move with ease.

Frederick Matthias Alexander (1869-1955)
Creator of the Alexander Technique
Suffered from chronic laryngitis as an actor. Doctors were not able to help so he started using mirrors to study himself, and designed a way to recalibrate the kinesthetic sense, and to bring it into line with our conscious intention. His own ailments improved greatly and doctors recommended he teach the technique. Alexander taught for 35 years before expanding his studio and training others.

The Alexander Technique is a practice in learning how to move mindfully the way nature intended and how to release harmful tension in the body. To be an instructor you must complete a 3 year full-time study program at an accredited teacher training course equaling 1500-1600 hours of instruction.

Tips for Musicians:
• Connect with your home (body) from the floor up through your body to a string pulling on your head
• For better alignment: drop your jaw, align your neck with your spine
• Soften your eyes, let them move
• Connect with your breath: exhale using a whispered aaah sound and release all of the air then inhale like normal
• Do not think of better posture because posture implies being static; musicians are always moving
• The goal is to develop new natural habits. Never “try” to fix a problem. Trying to fix something is almost as bad as doing nothing.

Purpose:
The technique is particularly helpful for actors and musicians since their trade requires daily strain on specific muscles. The purpose of this project was to learn how to better understand how the body’s muscles work in regards to playing instruments and singing. The technique is either unknown or undervalued within the music department, and this project helped create awareness of its value.

What to expect from a lesson:
• Typically an hour
• common types of lessons: relatively silent, resolutely chatty, informative
• The process is all about observational learning from first lesson to 100th lesson
• Exercises usually center around chair/sitting and table/laying down exercises
• Many different parts of the body are connected to each other
• On average it takes 30 lessons to make a meaningful and long lasting change
• Just thinking about something can make it better so the lessons are teaching you to be self-aware