

Introduction

The “Alexander Technique for Musicians” by Judith Kleinman and Peter Buckoke offers a practical and informative approach to the Alexander Technique. This book is of particular value for the specificity with which it connects, guides and informs musicians to apply the technique to their work – a trait missing in even the best books relating music and Alexander Technique. The book starts by enlightening the reader of the need of Alexander technique for musicians in the first chapter “Why might a musician use the Alexander Technique” and it follows with a discussion on how to apply this technique in the daily life of a musician. Not only does the book nurture a sense of awareness of unconscious habits performed by the musician, but the reader is also informed of the reasons why they occur and is provided with very simple yet effective exercises that can easily be implemented in everyday life. Chapters related to physical exercises in part 3 and 4 are well exemplified by being accompanied with a picture of each specific exercise, allowing the reader to better understand the activity. Another aspect that makes this book interesting is the variety of personal experiences that the author shares both as a performer and teacher.

Contents

This book is organized into six main parts divided into smaller chapters making it easy to follow. Such construction allows the reader flexibility to change chapters with no need to read the whole book to understand a specific chapter. **Figure 1**

The text is presented and displayed in three different ways each serving a different purpose: A) Body text: provides an variety of information; B) Bullet points: presents the most relevant information to retain; C) Text in square selections: gives a set of instructions on how to proceed with a certain exercise as well as providing a guideline on what the reader should be aware of or conscious about both physically and psychologically. (*vide Figure 1*)

Part I

Part One informs us of the need to have Alexander technique in our life and gives examples of different occasions where we reduce our body functions or damage different parts of our body with long hours of practice, sitting in an uncomfortable position for a long time, carrying heavy instruments, adopting wrong musical habits as well as feeling

So how do you practise Hands on the Back of a Chair?

Without doubt, this procedure is best learnt initially with the guidance of an experienced teacher of the Technique. It would require unusually good coordination to learn it from a book alone. So the following is for supporting your experiments with the procedure after initially learning it with your teacher. If you do not have a teacher: read this chapter, stay open minded, experiment and good luck!

This requires either one chair with a back-rail, if you plan to perform it standing, or a chair with a back and something else to sit on. You sit with the chair's back easily reachable in front of you.

- You are doing this procedure to connect your hands to your back.
- Maintain an awareness of your breathing, vision and balance.
- Notice any unnecessary tension, for example, narrowing.
- Think your back back, as your hands go forward (opposition in Direction)

We shall first look 'hands on a chair' – sitting.

- 1 Now, put on one side the thought that you are going to put your hands on the back of the chair. (That avoids an automatic or habitual response, that would be simply 'end' orientated.)
- 2 Consider your Primary Control and think of your head moving up and away from your two sitting bones. The two sitting bones connect with the chair

performance anxiety. The book describes different factors which cause damage to our body.

Part II

After informing the reader of the need of Alexander technique, the second part discusses how the book should be used. The fundamental ideas of F.M. Alexander are introduced: primary control, inhabitation and direction. It is then followed up with a discussion on how to make use of these techniques and ideas as musicians.

Part III

The third part discusses how to raise awareness of our body movements, breathing, voice and vision in order to correct our wrong habits:

*"Body mapping is an approach to understand the way your body functions best."*¹

The book explains how body mapping was formulated, how to improve it and to identify the signs of poor body conditions. This part continues with the discussion of breathing, how to understand the way we breath, Alexander's ideas on breathing and different parameters that can affect one's breathing followed by exercises.

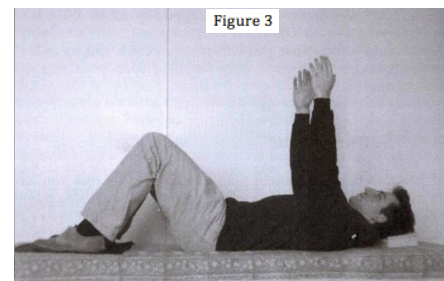
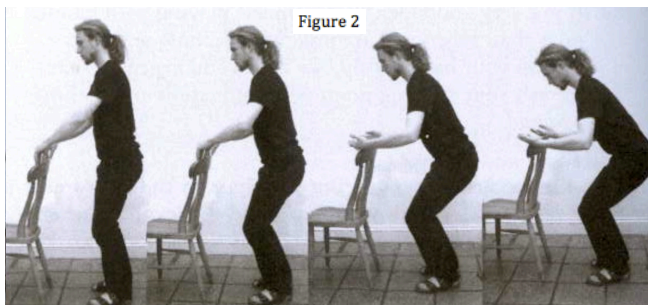
*"Breath is the life; and breathing capacity is the measure of life."*²

Next, the way in which the body can affect our voice is explained. This section provides very useful ideas and suggestions for singers.

*"We speak and sign with the whole of our body. It is just not action in the vocal apparatus, everything we do with our body while we are speaking or singing effects the result."*³

The last chapter studied in the third part concerns vision. It addresses our visual habits, how much to focus and how to have more freedom in the directions of our focus.

Diagrams and pictures are used throughout the book, but in this specific parts it makes a big difference in better understanding the activities. In figures 2 and 3 is an example of how this book provides a better understanding of the text by having a picture related to it.



Part IV

Part four of this book titled "Stillness and movements" introduces several physical exercises such as: semi supine, hands on a back of the chairs, balance and

¹ Kleinman, Judith and Buckoke, Peter. *The Alexander Technique for Musicians*. Bloomsbury Methuena Drama. 2013. p.84

² Opus cit. p.91

³ Opus cit. p.108

movements, and energy.

"Semi supine work is a chance to re-establish a sense of neutral. ... you can refresh yourself so you are ready for playing a concert, a rehearsal or for productive plying practice."⁴

Hands on a back of the chair is a procedure that Alexander finds as constructive conscious control. How to benefit from this movement as well as the right way of performing the exercise is fully explained in the chapter fourteen of this book.

In the next chapter of this section the reader is informed on how to put our body in a balanced position.

"When a musician is playing their body needs to be in balance with their instrument as a totality"⁵

"Having a repertoire of practiced movements (...) helps to free us up so we can move however we choose when we play."⁶

The book gives different suggestions for practicing balance both with and without the instrument. In the movements and energy chapter we are introduced to several activities that will lead to freedom in our body movements.

Part V

Part five provides a thorough discussion on the relationship between pupil, teacher and different elements that can assist the student to having the best result from lessons. It also addresses the primary problems of playing each instruments. The last discussed issue in this section of the book is about what to expect from a good practice and how to achieve it.

Part VI

The last section of this book talks about performance related issues, for example, how performance anxiety can effect our body. The author then gives guidance on how to deal with this issue in order to achieve a powerful performance.

Book Comparison

The comparison is between the The Alexander Technique for Musicians that is being reviewed and other significant Alexander Technique books currently available in the market. Existing books can be divided in two main types: A) those related to Alexandre Technique alone; B) those that relate to Alexandre Technique and for musicians.

"Mind, Muscle and Music" is quite accessible and readable for any audience. However, despite its clarity it does not present diagrams or pictures. Also, it is expected from the reader to have either bought or read the previous book "Mind and Muscle". This means

⁴ Opus cit. p.136

⁵ Opus cit. p.152

⁶ Opus cit. p.166

buying two books totalling one hundred pounds, a price not acceptable for most readers. In comparison, the “Alexander Technique for Musicians” is very affordable and also shares an accessible language giving the reader a change to focus on the issue without being distracted with difficult phrasing construction or technical lingo. On the other hand, Pedro de Alcantara’s “Indirect Procedures” despite being a fine work focused exclusively on musicians issues while at the same time giving an introduction to the principles of Alexander Technique, is written in a more technical way, making it harder for any reader to grasp. Though situated in a medium price range, it can not be used as a self-guide book, and requires the reader to have had previous experience with Alexander technique. However, the book “Body Learning” is not oriented to musicians, although it’s a very interesting and useful book to be studied after having had lessons and guidance by a teacher, a similar situation like “The Use of the Self”, “Eyebody” and “Art of Changing” books that offer good value for the price and, from the perspective of a musician, can also be used to complement the experience of the Alexandre Technique. Similarly, the “Alexander Technique for Musicians” chapters related to physical activities need to be studied with guidance of a teacher but over all it can be used as a self-taught book. It starts with the basics and explains everything in a way that is useful for any audience.

**Personal
opinion**

I recommend “The Alexander Technique to Musicians” to musicians of any level and I believe that studying it will make a difference in everyone’s lives. However, the information, mental and physical exercises will require time for the reader to fully assimilate its contents.