

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**THE USE OF THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE IN THE
IMPROVEMENT OF FLUTE TONE.**

I would like to thank my supervisor, Mr J de C Hinch, for his effort in sending texts, guiding and generally helping me through this study. Without his encouragement and support, I would not have completed this task.

I also wish to convey my appreciation to Professor Henk Temmingh for the fact that he was open to the idea of this study and gave me the opportunity of going ahead with it, even though I was, and still am, living in Europe.

AMANDA J BOSCH

To my parents and friends in South Africa who sent me articles, general advice and helped me manage organisational problems, I am very thankful.

To the Alexander teachers with whom I worked in South Africa, Germany and Austria, I am very grateful. Their interest and their advice to me was always helpful.

This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the

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To my colleagues at the University of Salzburg who went to great lengths in helping me obtain what I needed, I am very grateful.

of the

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Findings and conclusions reached in this dissertation are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Human Sciences Research Council.

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Amanda Bosch

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Salzburg, November 1997



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ABSTRACT

The use of the Alexander Technique in teaching, performing and practising the flute is investigated, in order to determine how to apply the Technique to the art of producing a good flute tone.

The author's application of the Alexander Technique to teaching and playing the flute is described. Knowledge was acquired both through doing case studies on two flute pupils, and through the integration of personal experience, gained through taking Alexander Technique lessons, into flute lessons. This is set out in detail.

The decision to work intensively on the technique of sound production on the flute, made the author aware of the fact that we, as teachers and performers, encounter a large number of different problems in teaching and playing. Matters are complicated by a pupil's eagerness and "wanting to do things right". This can cause a certain amount of apprehension and even anxiety. Often the habits which inhibit progress prove very difficult for the teacher to correct. This study is aimed at detecting and solving these problems by using the Alexander Technique; hopefully leading to a better understanding of how the Technique can be applied to flute teaching and playing. Posture, breathing and embouchure control are specifically addressed.

For the teacher or performer who has little understanding of his/her own problems in playing the flute - e.g. in coping with the loss of a good tone caused by stage fright and other anxieties - the use of the Alexander Technique can mean the creation a new sense of physical freedom and mental flexibility. A knowledge of how to work on changing faulty habits and the creating of new and better means of body use, can be gained through the taking of Alexander

Technique lessons. The general principles and various applications of the Technique are described.

The problems musicians face - e.g. postural problems from sitting or standing for hours while practising the instrument, instrument-specific problems such as pain in the arms or shoulders, or physical tension caused by anxiety - are all habitual difficulties which can be detected, weakened and, hopefully, even erased through the use of the Alexander Technique.

This study aims to show that mind-body awareness work is fundamental for the teacher, the pupil and the performer. Very often, what appear to be simple problems in musical performance are bound to deeply-felt and long-standing emotions and experiences. Therefore, the seemingly simple problems associated with producing a good flute tone cannot be addressed without dealing with the person as a whole.

It is thus crucial for us as musicians to attend to the whole person - as we practise, perform and teach. This study attempts to lead musicians to a better understanding of all facets of themselves and others, through the application of the Alexander Technique.

OPSOMMING

TEN KEYWORDS

Alexander Technique

Primary Control

Kinaesthetic awareness

Flute

Posture

Teaching

Relaxation

Body awareness

Tone quality

Breathing

Vir die onderwyser of uitvoerende kunstenaar wat min begrip het van sy/haar eie probleme in die praktyk, by. hoe om 'n variasie van toonkwaliteit in 'n spanningsituasie (verhoogde spanning) te herstel, kan die aanwending van die Alexandertegniek 'n nuwe gevoel van fisiese vryheid en mentale buigsaamheid beteken. Hoe om swak gewoontes van verkeerde liggaamgebruik te verander kan deur die toewyding van Alexandertegniek-lesse daadwerklik bewerkstellig

OPSOMMING

Die gebruik van die Alexandertegniek in die onderwys en oefening van, asook uitvoering op, die fluit word ondersoek, met die doel om vas te stel hoe die Tegniek aangewend kan word in die kuns van goeie toonproduksie in fluitspel.

Die skrywer se aanwending van die Alexandertegniek in die onderwys- en bespeling van die fluit word beskryf. Kennis wat deur gevallestudies van twee leerlinge opgedoen is, word ondersoek, asook deur die integrasie van persoonlike ervaring deur lesse in Alexandertegniek. Hierdie word in detail uiteengesit.

Deur die besluit om intensief aan toonproduksie op die fluit te werk, het die skrywer bewus geword van die feit dat ons as onderwysers en uitvoerende kunstenaars 'n baie groot spektrum verskillende probleme die hoof moet bied. Sake word gekompliseer deur die leerling se gretigheid om "alles reg te wil doen". Dit kan 'n sekere mate van spanning en angstigheid veroorsaak. Dikwels word gewoontes aangeleer wat vordering in die wiele ry en wat vir die onderwyser baie moeilik is om te korrigeer. Hierdie studie is daarop gerig om genoemde probleme, met die hulp van die Alexandertegniek, makliker te kan raaksien en oplos. Hopelik kan dit ook lei tot 'n beter begrip van hoe die Tegniek aangewend kan word in fluitonderrig en -spel. Liggaamshouding, asemhaling en beheer van embouchure word spesifiek aangespreek.

Vir die onderwyser of uitvoerende kunstenaar wat min begrip het van sy/haar eie probleme in die praktyk, bv. hoe om 'n verlies van toonkwaliteit in 'n spanningsituasie (verhoogvrees) te hanteer, kan die aanwending van die Alexandertegniek 'n nuwe gevoel van fisiese vryheid en mentale buigbaarheid beteken. Hoe om swak gewoontes van verkeerde liggaamsgebruik te verander kan deur die bywoning van Alexandertegniek-lesse daadwerklik bewerkstellig

word. Die algemene beginsels en verskeidenheid aanwendings van die Alexandertegniek word beskryf.

Die instrument-spesifieke probleme waarmee musici te doen het, bv. postuurprobleme a.g.v. ure lank sit of staan en oefen, probleme met pyn in die skouers of arms, of fisiese verkramping veroorsaak deur spanningsituasies, is alles gewoonteprobleme wat raakgesien, verlig en, hopelik, uitgewis kan word deur die gebruik van die Alexandertegniek.

Hierdie studie bewys ook dat die bewuste verbinding van liggaamlike en mentale werk vir die onderwyser, leerling en uitvoerende kunstenaar van basiese belang is. Baie dikwels kom dit voor dat eenvoudige klein probleme in musiekuitvoering verwant aan diepliggende en langdurige emosies en ervarings. Daarom kan aan eenvoudige probleme soos toonproduksie in fluitspel nie gewerk word sonder om die persoon as 'n geheel te beskou nie.

Dit is dus vir musici van die uiterste belang om aan die persoon as geheel aandag te gee; wanneer ons oefen, lesgee en speel. Hopelik kan hierdie studie daartoe lei dat ons deur die geheelbeskouing onself en ander beter kan verstaan, deur die gebruik van die Alexandertegniek.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Motivation for the study

While working intensively on producing a better flute tone, I became aware of a grave problem, namely, not being able to fully achieve what I knew I was capable of, because of interferences. Since that time I have taught within a music college system and observed other teachers at work. This showed me that details and combinations of these interferences (mainly physical tensions) vary with each person. I became convinced that the teacher has the responsibility of helping the student to recognise and eliminate these. My discovery of the Alexander Technique, and my subsequent lessons in this technique, has led me to believe that the Alexander Technique should be incorporated into the training of flutists.

1.2 Aim of the study

This study is primarily aimed at examining, through both two case studies and my own experience, specific ways in which a flutist might increase his kinaesthetic awareness through knowledge of and application of the Alexander Technique, and apply this to the art of flute playing. It aims to assess the possibilities of using the body in a certain way, thus eliminating the unnecessary wastage of energy.

1.3 Background to the study

Because the Alexander Technique is concerned with the co-ordination of mind and body use, it has attracted writers from vastly different fields of inquiry. But specifically the author feels that there is a definite need for an exploration of the relationships between learning the skill of flute playing and the optimal use of body energy. Alexander's own books are fastidiously detailed explanations of both his practice and his theory; they are essential reading for any student of his Technique.

References to the advantages of the Alexander Technique are found in several books, but little detail is available about how the Technique has to be used in the production of tone in the playing of the flute. There is, however, enough material to indicate that other flutists had benefitted from their own application of the Alexander Technique.

2.1 Development of the Alexander Technique

Through the two case studies, vital information about the application of the Alexander Technique in bringing about changes in playing and tone production, with particular attention to posture and breathing, was acquired.

1.4 Presentation

Chapter 2 presents of a short introduction, consisting of a short biography of F. M. Alexander, as well as a short summary of the importance of the Primary Control in the context of using the Alexander Technique. The aspects of the flute blowing technique which are most relevant to the Alexander Technique are stated.

Chapter 3 contains the knowledge I have gained through my own experience of the Alexander Technique and the application of this Technique in connection with my own playing of the flute.

In Chapter 4 the two case studies are described in detail. The co-operation in flute lessons with the different Alexander teachers are mentioned and discussed in connection with my own teaching of Alexander Technique principles.

2.1.1 Primary Control

In Chapter 5 general concepts relating to the teaching of the Alexander Technique are detailed; the main aspects being, even before actually playing the flute, how to maintain a balanced body posture when standing, when holding the instrument and when breathing. In this chapter the use of the Alexander Technique in performing situations, when tension and interference problems arise, is also looked at.

Chapter 6 comprises the summary and conclusions.

CHAPTER 2

THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE

2.1 Development of the Alexander Technique

Frederick Matthias Alexander (1869-1955) was born in Tasmania on the 20th of January 1869. He also grew up and was educated in Tasmania. As a child, he received extra tuition, because normal schooling did not suit him and he suffered from chronic ill-health. By the time he was sixteen he had saved enough money to leave for Melbourne, to begin his drama education and an acting career. He became plagued by becoming hoarse during performances, for which the suggested treatments were inhalations and rest periods. The problem actually only occurred when he was reciting on stage. Over the years his throat condition gradually worsened to the point where he would periodically lose his voice completely. He applied all medical advice in the minutest detail, but none helped him. His career was eventually put in jeopardy when he lost his voice almost completely while reciting at a particularly important venue.

At this point Alexander had reached a dead end. Because no doctor was able to help him, he decided to search himself. Thus began his personal search for a solution to the problem of losing his voice during performances as an actor.

2.1.1 Primary Control

Alexander started observing himself, with the aid of several mirrors, while speaking in conversation and while reciting in performance. He subsequently noticed three habits which occurred when he was performing:

He pulled his head back.

He lowered his larynx.

He audibly sucked air in through his mouth.

He noticed that the pulling back of his head was causing the larynx to be depressed; this also raised his chest, therefore narrowing and hollowing his back. He found the same habits occurred when he was speaking normally, although to a lesser extent. The more he wanted to use his voice forcibly, to breathe less audibly and to produce a good speaking voice, the more he found that he was unable to do what he wanted just by willing it. He was forced to turn his attention to one of the other habits which he had noticed - the pulling back of his head. Experimenting painstakingly, he found that he could stop the depressing of the larynx and the gulping for air by changing the position of his head - by not pulling it back and down. Having realised the importance of the head position, he experimented further and discovered that pulling his head too far forward also resulted in depressing his larynx and led to hoarseness. After six months of search and analysis, he finally realised the importance of head balance in the correct functioning of breathing, speaking and standing. Although he had succeeded in isolating the apparent causes, he did not stop his research through observation. The imbalance of his head was also related to his tendency to lift his chest and shorten his stature, subsequently hollowing his back. As Alexander relates (1932:8):

This led me on to a long series of experiments, in some of which I attempted to prevent the shortening of the stature, in others actually to lengthen it, noting the results in each case. After further experimentation, I found at last that in order to maintain a lengthening of the stature it was necessary that my head should tend to go upwards, not downwards, when I put it forward; in short, that to lengthen, I must put it forward and up.

After Alexander had discovered and consciously realised the relativity in the use of the head, neck and torso, he was led to the eventual understanding of the *Primary Control* of the individual (Alexander 1932:9). This term was used by Alexander to describe the balanced relationship between head, neck and torso. It implies a tension-free balancing of the head on the tip of the spine - rather than being held in a tension grip on the tip of the spine. This allows both maximum freedom and economy of energy usage during all bodily activities. It can readily be observed in young children whose bodies have not yet been distorted by tension.

In his book THE USE OF THE SELF (1932) his experiences are described in detail. He also published MAN'S SUPREME INHERITANCE (1910), CONSTRUCTIVE CONSCIOUS CONTROL OF THE INDIVIDUAL (1923) and THE UNIVERSAL CONSTANT IN LIVING (1941). His self-developed system of body re-education, that took him a lifetime to evolve, is described in these books.

The Alexander Technique is an important addition to man's resources of self-awareness and personal education. Established by F M Alexander in the late 1890's, the Technique is valued in educational, theatrical and musical circles as a method of psycho-physical re-education. Lessons in the Technique help the pupil overcome patterns of bodily misuse that interfere with poise and free movement during activity. This encourages improved functioning, both physically and psychologically, with attendant benefits in co-ordination, health and well-being (Weymess 1984:44).

There are as many definitions of the Alexander Technique as there are people writing about it. It is difficult to explain the essence of the technique, because it has to do with the co-ordination of mind and body. Alexander's own books are detailed explanations of practice and theory. From different fields of knowledge, he attracted attention and reaction because his findings were so perceptively and persistently detailed in these books.

One of his most prominent students, Professor John Dewey, eminent philosopher and educationalist, wrote in the introduction to Alexander's book THE USE OF THE SELF (Alexander 1932:9):

[...] his procedure and conclusions meet all the requirements of the strictest scientific method [...] [H]e has applied the method in a field in which it never has been used before - that of our judgements and beliefs concerning ourselves and our activities. If there can be developed a technique which will enable individuals really to secure the right use of themselves, then the factor on which depends the final use of all other forms of energy will be brought under control.

[...] all that Mr. Alexander says about the unity of the physical and psychical in the psychophysical; about our habitually wrong use of

ourselves and the part the wrong use plays in generating all kinds of unnecessary tensions and wastes of energy; about the vitiation of our sensory appreciations which form the material of our judgements of ourselves; about the unconditional necessity of inhibition of our customary acts, and the tremendous difficulty found in not "doing" something as soon as an habitual act is suggested, together with the great change in moral and mental attitude that takes place as proper co-ordinations are established.

2.2 Physical aspects of the blowing technique on the flute

It is repeatedly stated in various textbooks about orchestral instruments that the flute is the most agile of all the wind instruments, capable of almost any nuance and technical difficulty, and that the tonal clarity in the high register floats above the orchestral ensemble and gives a shimmering brilliance to the whole (Bate 1976:229). What is mostly not stated, is that none of the said virtues can be attained by the flutist without years of constant practice. Nor is anything said about, for instance, the difficulties of reaching the same brilliance and full tone in the lower register as in the other registers, or the difficulties of intonation and playing without harshness in the top register.

(For the purposes of this study, I shall be concentrating on only the physical aspects of playing the flute that are relevant to the application of the Alexander Technique.)

Playing the flute is a very healthy activity if looked at from the point of view of, for example, a lung specialist. Flutists (like singers) are forced to develop their respiratory capacity, normally using the healthy principle of exhausting their vital capacity. By letting the air out relatively slowly, without leaving any 'stale' air behind, no 'residues' of air are built up in the lungs. The heart and blood circulation are thus provided with more than enough oxygen, which means that a potentially high blood pressure may well be lowered in this way. The possibility of a flutist having problems with high blood pressure is, in other words, quite minimal (Wurz 1992:248). The sometimes mentioned danger of contracting lung emphyzema is apparently unfounded.

2.2.1 The use of the body in an asymmetrical position

Unfortunately for flutists, the situation from the point of view of an orthopaedic surgeon is a little different. The fact that many flutists (and singers) have problems with backaches is quite well-known. Less well-known are the causes thereof and the possibilities of avoiding these kinds of difficulties. A survey was made by a Swedish doctor Silverstolpe, who was also a violinist. He examined and treated a great number of musicians, who played various kinds of instruments and were having trouble with backaches. Statistically, after examining 647 music students between the ages of 17 to 24, he found 33% to be suffering from frequent backache, of which the greatest percentage (75%) were found to be flutists! (Followed by double bass players with 73%, guitarists with 53% and violinists with 52%.) Silverstolpe did not only effectively treat instrumentalists as a doctor, but also tried, in co-operation with the teachers, to find the possible causes, seeking better and less strenuous ways of using the body (Wurz 1992:249). Unfortunately his findings were only documented in a short published article and in his own manuscript.

The main and specialised cause of risks in playing the flute is seen by Silverstolpe to be the asymmetrical construction of the instrument (Wurz 1992:250). Brian Warren (1992:11), a British flutist who is also a teacher of the Alexander Technique, states that it is significant that most instrumentalists who become Alexander teachers, are either flutists or violinists - apparently because of the "off-balanced position you have to put yourself in" in order to play the instrument. The head is turned to the side and the arms are in an asymmetrical position. Warren thinks that the reason that this playing position causes these problems is contained in the evolution of the arms over millions of years, during which man learned to feed by bringing the arms up to the mouth. The elbow joints have evolved to take the hands to the mouth; so to play the clarinet or oboe, requires a more natural position. In Silverstolpe's study, the oboists and clarinetists were found to be far less likely to have problems with backache: the oboists being on 14% and the clarinetists on 10%.

It is somehow significant that, of musicians who train to become Alexander teachers, most play either violin or flute (Warren 1992:2). They seem to be the two instruments

that cause the most tension in playing - probably precisely because of the awkward stance involved in holding these instruments. The most desirable ideal is to have a flute or violin teacher who is also an Alexander teacher, but these people are few and hard to find.

2.2.2 Keeping the neck free

Warren states (1992:12) that the difficulty in keeping the neck free, while bringing the instrument up to the mouth to play, is one of the main problems in playing the flute:

Very few people can do that without tightening up. Once you have tightened the neck up you find that you have taken the whole body out of balance and that you are obliged to use a lot of tension in playing, particularly in the arms and fingers. [...] I think it is also significant that most flute players experience more fingering problems than other woodwind players because the arms are already out of kilter as it were. [...] If you discover that you are pulling the head back slightly, that slight pull back impedes the working of the nervous system, as all the nerves of the fingers come from the cervical vertebrae located in the neck. Ideally one should not need Alexander teachers because if you are a really intelligent flute teacher you should teach it all as part of the lessons [...] as good teachers do.

2.2.3 Starting with the headjoint only

When a child starts learning to play the flute, the first aspect to cope with is indeed the awkward posture. Fortunately, most people do not start with the instrument as a whole, but first only attempt to produce a sound on the headjoint alone; which implies that the arms are not used awkwardly in the beginning. Finding the right angle of placing the lips on the lipplate, blowing more or less halfway into and over the embouchure hole while shaping the lips, keeping the tongue out of the way, nevertheless ready to play a tongued attack, also present their own difficulties. Gustav Scheck (1975:70) states in his encompassing book about the flute that the variety of possible adjustments and differences in the small space between the lips and the sides of the embouchure are innumerable. As early as 1707 Jacques Hotteterre advised in his *Principes de la flûte traversiere* (Wurz 1992:110) that the right place for the embouchure should be looked for by turning the instrument

inwards and outwards - after keeping the lips closed together, pressed into a flat position and putting pressure on the corners of the mouth - watching with the aid of a mirror. From this kind of intricate direction, it is already quite obvious that merely attempting to find the optimal position for the lips to produce a sound could cause undue muscle tension and thereby wrong or unnecessary body use. However the teacher goes about avoiding this, it is important to help the student from the outset to be aware of the use of his body (Wurz 1992:40).

2.3 Other relevant aspects

2.3.1 Breathing and tone production

In listening to the tone produced by some flutists (or singers), one can be bothered or irritated when the vibrato, or the tone itself, sounds “pushed” (Lloyd 1986:50). Lloyd states that this could be because the shoulders become too tight in breathing, causing subsequent tightness in the chest and throat. A closer examination of the breathing technique and the breathing capacity would probably show that the muscles around the ribcage and chest are strong but tight, the diaphragm rather tight and without flexibility, and the intake of breath mostly audible.

2.3.2 Avoiding undue tension in the face muscles and embouchure

According to Bate (1976:231) flutists broadly recognise two types of embouchure: either tight or relaxed. A tight embouchure causes the face muscles around the mouth to be firmly braced sideways. The flute is pressed quite strongly against the lower lip and the corners of the mouth are often turned up. This is the description of an embouchure that causes undue tension and can cause subsequent tension in the face, neck, shoulders and arms. For a more relaxed embouchure Bate, amongst many other authors, states that the corners of the lips should be “turned more or less loosely outward”, to form a rounder aperture. Control of the air stream is mostly obtained by varying the tension at the sides of the mouth and by slight forward and backward movements of the jaw. This ‘relaxed embouchure’ presents certain

technical advantages: diminuendo and crescendo passages in the high register are eased, as is slurring over wide intervals (Bate 1976:232).

The use of the tongue should also be mentioned in connection with Alexander Technique. Most commonly, the flutist starts a note by forming the letter “T” with the tongue on the hard palate behind the teeth. By touching the upper lip with the tongue and withdrawing it quickly, a somewhat “smarter” effect can be created (Bate 1976:235). In using the techniques of double or triple tonguing on the flute, the tongue of the player should be efficiently trained to play fast, using, in exact alternation, the tip and the back of the tongue. This intricate action of the tongue can only be carried out effectively when the throat, shoulders and neck muscles are free and uninhibited (Wurz 1992:70).

2.3.3 Technical fluency and agility of the fingers

As Bate states (1976:230): “Supporting the flute should never be allowed to interfere with the fingers, so a good position is essential from the first.”

The fact that flutists experience more fingering problems than other players of woodwind instruments is said by the flutist and teacher of the Alexander Technique Brian Warren (1992:11) to be caused by the arms being held to the side of the body, with the head turned to the same side so that the body is in an “off-balanced position” (see Chapter 2.2.1). According to Adrian Brett (1992:11), a well-known British flutist, one has to work very hard on the flute to learn to control both the closing and the *release* of the keys; while clarinetists, for example, can play “with lots of energetic movement, and hand and finger positions which would be quite unacceptable to a flutist”. This implies that a flutist has to be more careful and disciplined in using exactly the correct hand and finger positions when teaching, playing or practising the flute. Also, in this respect, body awareness is an important aspect to be kept in mind.

CHAPTER 3

KNOWLEDGE GAINED FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE

3.1 Introduction

From when I was very young, I have been aware of being tall. It never really bothered me, except that I started slouching (as many teenagers do) when I was about sixteen, because I wanted to “fit in” and look more insignificant. At that time I was spending an hour a week with my flute teacher, mostly trying to solve technical problems. I was also playing in a youth orchestra, where I was slouching even more in sitting, because everybody else seemed so much shorter. Nobody paid attention to my bad posture while playing the flute, although I had a very good teacher.

3.2 Discovery of the significance of posture

It was not until a few years later, after completing four years of studying music, setting out to start an orchestral career, and playing solo-recitals, that I realised that my tone when performing was always of a lesser quality than when practising. The more I tried to correct this and make the tone sound as I wanted it to, the less successful I became.

The next problem which occurred, but which did not seem to have anything to do with playing the flute, was that I was getting such a hoarse voice. It seemed to get worse after practising the flute, but I did not pay any attention to this ‘co-incidence’. I started practising in front of a mirror, not really knowing what I was looking for. I also tried to change my embouchure, to produce a tone that sounded more relaxed and open. While standing in front of the mirror one day, I suddenly realised that I was automatically putting my neck forward on my shoulders when bringing the flute up to

my mouth to start playing. I was effectively shortening my stature when playing my instrument. Needless to say, this also looked very unattractive. I started attempting to do it differently, keeping my head high on my shoulders, bringing my arms slowly and carefully up to my head. At first I realised that the old position immediately returned when I tried to play a few notes. But after experimenting for some time, I realised that there was a change occurring in the sound I produced. When I forgot about the fact that I was attempting to stop slouching when playing and jutted my neck forward as before, the tone also sounded more strained. Whereas when I took the trouble to be careful and managed to play a few notes in my new position, the sound was different - more relaxed. But when I tried to keep this sound, while concentrating on something else, the old habit returned. This brought me to the realisation that I was unable to produce the tone I wanted, because this new posture felt wrong and the old habits returned.

3.3 The first lessons in Alexander Technique

After about two years of working on sound in various ways, I heard about the Alexander Technique. I was giving recitals with a singer, the soprano Gwyneth Lloyd, who was also an Alexander teacher. The first feature of her singing which struck me was the fact that everything she sung sounded so incredibly relaxed. Her sound was absolutely wonderful - even without vibrato.

The first Alexander lesson with Gwyneth Lloyd was an unforgettable experience - I had the distinct feeling that I was being gently streamlined. It was not any kind of exercise or yoga discipline. I was lying on the foam-covered table, tense and full of apprehension. She did not actually seem to be touching me, only gently repositioning the limbs and muscles of my entire body. She started by placing her hands over the tops of my shoulders, performing some kind of subtle repositioning, which caused them to feel as if they were floating outwards. She kept on placing her hands on several parts of my body, rearranging my head, my arms and legs, my feet, and finally my hands. My spine felt elongated, my whole body relaxed and loose. She showed me how to get up from this position, without unnecessary tension.

Afterwards, I was more aware of my posture than ever before. I felt as if I was floating along, my shoulders stretching outwards and my lungs expanding.

I wanted to be able to convey this wonderful feeling of body contact to playing the flute. For this to occur I had to solve the problem of combining the playing of an instrument with the most optimal body use.

I realised that there were a few habits that were standing in the way of my making the progress I desired:

1. My neck was not free enough to produce the desired sound. I was trying different exercises to make the neck muscles relax, but they did not seem to have much effect - especially after I had been playing for a while. I was continually tightening the throat and neck muscles.
2. My arms were becoming too tense. I seemed to be lifting the flute always higher, which caused my fingers to start clutching the flute; this in turn caused problems with demanding technical passages.
3. My shoulders were too high. My torso seemed to be dropping forward while playing and I seemed to be fighting an ever-lasting war against gravity. In spite of my efforts of will, I was not able to overcome this problem.
4. In the process of breathing, I felt that the lower back was contracting; this was impeding my ability to distribute the accumulated air in such a way that I could control the length of phrases, the tone colour, the vibrato, etc.

These were the most noticeable symptoms of a flute playing technique that was becoming unnecessarily effortful - and therefore tiring. Each person has his own combination of physical tensions, varying according to the type and amount of

stress, and the length of time the habits causing the tension have been allowed to run unchecked (Lloyd 1986:2).

In the next Alexander lessons, we started by standing, sitting and standing up again. In my lower back there was a knot of tension, which I was told to release. I was trying to get the feeling of “relaxing into the sitting bones” (Lloyd 1986:75), which actually caused me to relax the tension in my upper thighs.

My teacher was conveying the messages to my body through her hands. She was also talking, explaining in a calm way what she wanted to happen. I was rarely told to “do” anything. After each lesson, I felt a distinct difference in my body awareness.

It became apparent to me that I was also depressing my larynx, especially when I was feeling apprehensive or tense in any way; this was causing my speaking voice problems. It was suggested to me that I open my chest, so that my shoulders could become wider, as I tended to bring my shoulders round to the front and downwards, particularly while playing the flute. By bringing my shoulders to the front, I was depressing the whole front area of my thorax. By contrast, when opening the chest, a tingling sensation occasionally occurred in the top of my arms and shoulders. It was explained to me that this was the result of the increased circulation.

In a standing position, I was learning to release the unnecessary tension, not only in my shoulders and upper body, but also in my legs. However, when I tried this while playing the flute, it felt wrong. This was mainly because I was feeling too relaxed to play faster notes, for instance. I decided that I must incorporate what I had learned, but that I should be very patient and allow myself a few months of not playing or practising for anything in particular.

3.4 Learning body awareness and experiencing Primary Control

As I became more aware of my body, and of the wrong way I was using it, I also became familiar with the idea of releasing tension in one part of the anatomy by

allowing a release to take place in another part. I also became aware of the stiffening of my arms when I was getting ready to play something which my brain told me was difficult. This is called "interference" (Alexander 1932:58). I learned that interference was obviously present in my playing of the flute. There were signs that it was present in speaking, walking and other movements as well.

To get the optimal position of my head, in balance with the centre of my back, I was asked by my teacher to think up in my body, to drop my nose slightly, and release my weight downwards. I had to "let it happen" rather than pushing or wanting it. The simultaneous feeling of my body's movement up and down into the sitting bones had to be allowed. I became aware at this stage that I was pulling my shoulders back rather than letting the releases simply happen. When I focused my attention on the sound I wanted to produce when playing the flute, the awareness of the mechanisms in my body had a freeing effect on my ability to produce a good sound.

The correct head position, which Alexander called the Primary Control, was acquired mostly by the repetition of the most basic procedures such as sitting, standing up, and sitting down again. I was asked to put my "face back into my neck", to imagine the tip of my nose being attached to the first vertebrae at the back of the neck. This piece of imagery was helping me very effectively to get the sensation of pins and needles, particularly in the shoulders, which meant increased blood circulation. The sensation of sitting down was very interesting. I became aware of pulling the muscles short in the back of my neck when bending to sit down. I was asked to let the weight go into the sitting bones, while keeping the position of the head on the shoulders intact, so that it would not detract from my balance. I was not allowed to push my bottom out towards the chair. By letting go of the tension in my legs I was able to overcome this interference and sit down in a very graceful manner - without even having to try.

This becoming aware of my habit of shortening the muscles at the back of the neck when sitting down brought me to the realisation that I was doing the same when lifting my arms to start playing the flute (see Chapter 4).

3.5 Transferring Primary Control to the playing of the flute

After the repetition of the sitting and standing procedure helped to generate a feeling of lightness, we went on to walking. Many hours of walking, outside the time of the lessons, helped me to be more free in the movement of my body, without slouching, pulling or over-stretching any muscles. The encouragement which came from realising that I was overcoming so-called energy blocks and that I had a naturally responsive body system, was helping me to keep trying to acquire the same balance in the playing of my instrument.

The use of the Alexander Technique in playing was sometimes causing a chaotic, jumbled feeling, and after the first few lessons I actually felt very confused. This started disappearing though, after about the tenth lesson.

The creation of conscious connections between several muscle groups was helping me to a great extent to control myself and the reactions of my body in stressful situations (see Chapter 5.6). This was because I was becoming increasingly aware of what was happening in my body.

The concept of being fixed in my old long-held habits, and of holding residual tension in my muscles after playing activities, became very important in the process of learning the releases that should take place in my muscles. I was finding the new looseness in my neck muscles, with which I had previously had so much trouble, very encouraging.

To experience the releasing of my lower back was also a great encouragement. Long periods of standing, practising or playing had always caused a considerable amount of pain in this area, probably because I was naturally tending to lean backwards, hollowing my back. I was asked to think my weight into my heels, to let the new releases which I had learned just happen, rather than to think that I actually had to *do* something.

My speaking voice was becoming better whenever I allowed it to flow freely without tension in the throat. My teacher, who was a singer, explained that I was creating more space in the throat, because I was in fact learning to let go of the tension and effort in the muscles while playing; all this was influencing my speaking voice as well.

4.1 Introduction

I found that the changes were taking place so fast, that I could not really keep up with them. To concentrate on playing an instrument, while learning awareness (i.e. being aware of how the body reacts) is rather tiring. Extensive application of the Alexander Technique can therefore be virtually exhausting.

Since beginning working in this way on the technique of tone production on the flute, I have found that it is quite impossible for me to teach a student to produce a good flute tone, without also transferring an understanding of the Alexander Technique in connection with both acquiring and keeping a proper blowing technique.

The connections and applications emerge and grow of their own accord. Although I was not hunting for opportunities to apply the Alexander Technique at every single turn, I found it quite impossible to keep the Alexander Technique out of my teaching. The border between the application of the Alexander Technique and my playing the flute was becoming increasingly vague. Analysing and describing what was going on by intelligent observation became integrated into my teaching and learning. As Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote: "We are by nature observers of our own conduct." (Brett 1992: 11).

4.2 Case 1: Gudrun

Gudrun was an advanced amateur flutist who had been playing for more than ten years. She had been taking flute lessons while a student, and then went to teaching Geography in a school. She was playing various kinds of amateur gigs, mostly with an Austrian folklore windband. She found it quite pleasant to play and was aware that the sound she was producing on the flute was deteriorating. She was a classically-trained flutist with a rich, natural sound, but this was becoming strained

CHAPTER 4

KNOWLEDGE GAINED FROM TWO CASE STUDIES

4.1 Introduction

In compiling these case studies, which were undertaken with pupils of mine of different ages and at different stages of development, I tried to locate specific causes for specific problem areas, as well as specific cures. As these are not always clearly definable, I would not recommend that a flute teacher use these exercises without either personal Alexander experience or the help of a qualified Alexander teacher.

During these case studies, I had to keep in mind that I could not always apply every aspect of the Alexander Technique, but that I had to let things slowly develop; to let the connections and applications emerge and grow of their own accord. Although I was not hunting for opportunities to apply the Alexander Technique at every single turn, I found it quite impossible to keep the Alexander Technique out of my teaching. The border between the utilisation the Alexander Technique and my teaching the flute was becoming increasingly vague. Analysing, discovering and self-discovering by intelligent observation became integrated into my teaching and practising. As Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote. "We are by nature observers and thereby learners" (Brett 1992:11).

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Gudrun was an advanced amateur flutist who had been playing for more than ten years. She had been taking flute lessons while a student, and then while teaching Geography in a school. She was playing various kinds of amateur gigs, mostly with an Austrian folklore windband. She found regular practice difficult and was aware that the sound she was producing on the flute was deteriorating. She was a classically-trained flutist with a rich, natural sound; but this was becoming strained

and thin, whenever she tried to play louder or with a more singing tone. She suffered from fatigue and pain in the lower back from time to time. I suggested that she take some Alexander lessons in Salzburg, where I could be present, and that we incorporate Alexander Technique in her flute lessons. She agreed to this.

4.2.1 Body posture

Gudrun complained of fatigue after playing. Her head was held too far forward in playing, and from time to time visible tension occurred in her neck. Her neck was stretched forward, with her arms held quite far to the front; her shoulder blades were pulled up and tense at the back. Her embouchure was very flexible, and her fingers quite agile; thus she relied mainly on this, and less on what the rest of her breathing and blowing system was doing. Her pelvis was raised at the back, so that she was continually raising her heels from the floor and stiffening her legs while playing.

4.2.2 Breath and embouchure control

Gudrun's breath capacity seemed to be diminishing. Breath intake and expiration was mostly active only in the upper half of her chest. The muscle tone in her abdomen was weak, so that her sound-support was weak and inconsistent. She often complained that she felt as though she never had any control over her breathing muscles. Subsequently, the sound was unsteady and wavering. Although her embouchure was flexible, the corners of her mouth were often retracted excessively, especially in the upper range of the instrument.

4.2.3 The head position

The major interference with her technique seemed to be the forward-held head position. When her head was held by the Alexander teacher, she managed to play slowly through the three octaves of the flute while keeping the sound full. This was the only possible way to keep the sound resonant. Without this guidance, she had no control over her head position, and every attempt at playing by herself, without

her head being held, resulted in the sound getting thinner and breathy. She managed to let go of the tension at the corners of her mouth when she was asked by the teacher to “think her face back into her neck”. This loosening up of the lips was connected to the direction given by the teacher to “let the tension in the neck go”. This was the first improvement.

4.2.4 Learning body awareness

After the first few Alexander lessons Gudrun began to understand what it meant to “release weight into the sitting bones”. In her subsequent flute lessons I became aware of the fact that she was not raising her buttocks any more, which meant that the tension in her lower back was getting better. This was the second improvement. She was consequently having less trouble with backaches and found flute playing less tiring. In releasing the lower part of the back, she was saving and distributing her body energy in a more economical way (Warren 1992:10).

Releasing the tension in her legs was still difficult. I was continually telling her to relax her knees, to rather bend them a little, and to distribute the weight more evenly via her feet into the floor (Barker 1978:83). It feels very ‘unsafe’ to relax the buttocks if you are used to tightening them in playing. To help her with releasing the tension in her legs, we tried moving around during the lesson; she walked slowly around while playing, leaving her neck free and moving her head gently and naturally from side to side.

Gudrun was delighted with the new awareness of her body and what she was doing with it - this helped her to do more intelligent practising. It was evident to her that she had to be much more careful and disciplined in practising the flute.

The Alexander teacher decided to experiment with Gudrun’s breathing to see if she could get her head/torso alignment under control. Gudrun, although feeling satisfied with her breath capacity, was actually suffering from shortness of breath and too little control over letting it out. She therefore compensated by taking in as much air as she possibly could - audibly! Nevertheless, it was apparent that she still suffered from

shortness of breath. She understood that she had to re-examine her breath control and that she was probably overdoing the intake of breath, thus causing other tensions in the head/neck/torso alignment, the shoulders and the abdomen (Lehman 1914:29).

We were getting better results when Gudrun tried to relax her abdomen before the intake of breath. Singer Lilly Lehman underlines this aspect (1914:29):

Undoubtedly, I took in too much air in breathing, cramped various muscles, thereby depriving my breathing organs and muscles of their elasticity. I often had, with all care and preparation for inhalation, too little breath, and sometimes, when not giving special thought to it, more than enough. I felt too, after excessive inhalation as if I must emit a certain amount of air before I began to sing. Finally I abandoned all superfluous drawing in of the abdomen and diaphragm, inhaled but little, and began to pay special attention to emitting the smallest possible amount of breath, which I found very serviceable.

The Alexander teacher asked her to be aware of the messages which she wanted to convey to her hands; to "listen to her hands". She said that Gudrun was trying too hard at this stage and that she should use the Alexander lessons more to relax and not try to *do* anything in particular. In a standing position, she was asked to think her weight releasing into the sitting bones. An immediate and visible release of the stomach wall and abdomen followed. She did some work with Gudrun in a sitting position, after which the tendency to lean forward when picking the flute up to the lips seemed to decrease. She was asked to inhale, letting the air out over the tongue without pushing or blowing.

The teacher started working with her on flexing the pelvic muscles, in a lying down position. Gudrun had very little control over the muscles between the sitting bones. Her long-standing habits of tensing the lower back muscles were too ingrained for her to develop strength in her lower abdomen at this stage. The tension in her lower back was interfering with the abdomen muscles so that she had too little support and control in her lower abdomen. The actual tightening of her back was detrimental to her breath control (Byles 1978:56).

Gudrun's lack of breath control was also causing her to tighten her throat; this in turn caused the sound to lose its fullness. This habit seemed to be very strong and irresistible, and also contributed to the tightening of her lips when playing in the higher register of the flute. With the releasing of her neck, allowing her head to be free and "high" on her neck, she managed also to let go of the narrowing in her throat. In practising the flute she was encouraged to play only long, slow notes at first, in order to give herself time to allow the releases to take place.

Each progressive step in attaining better breath control was linked up to her previous success of "thinking her face back into her neck"; this also caused the releasing of the corners of her lips. The further loosening up of her lips was connected to better breath control. We did some breathing and voice exercises in her flute lessons, singing "aah" and "ooh" on several notes, experimenting with different vowels to see which was the most effective in helping her to open her throat in singing. She also tried the different vowels while blowing, where she was most successful in thinking the "o" sounds. To her everything sounded the same at this stage, but she remarked that she had the feeling of being able to focus the sound better when she was thinking of a round vowel.

4.2.5 Transferring body awareness to the playing of the flute

In Gudrun's flute lessons we worked, at this stage, on allowing her lower abdominal muscles to release outwards (Lloyd 1986:100). As she was allowing the releases in her throat to take place, the tension in her neck was easing up as well. After having experienced the releases in her neck and shoulder blades, she went for two conventional Alexander lessons again. After these she was able to drop her pelvis in sitting down. She also reported feeling more relaxed than before and able to extend her abdominal muscles; this meant that she was able to let the releasing of her stomach muscles take place, before inhaling air. At this time, we found the breathing exercises in the *Flute Check Up* by Peter Lukas Graf (1991:6-13) very useful. Although she had tried these exercises previously, she had found them to be too exhausting and had described them as "an impossible torture". Now she was actually enjoying them!

The “Monkey position” was something which always helped her to get in touch with her new-found body awareness again. When tension occurred in any way, by e.g. tiredness or apprehension, and caused an inability to let the releases happen, we always used this half-sitting position that the Alexander teachers call “Monkey” (Lloyd 1986:44). It was explained as a process of allowing freedom at the back of the neck, releasing tension at the front of the legs, so that the knees give way and go forward and away. The Alexander pupil lets the arms hang freely on either side of the body, while the ankles, knees and hips are bent and the torso remains “wide” and lengthened. Alexander (1932:64) described this as the position of greatest mechanical advantage. It takes the average student a great deal of practice to become released and free in all the joints of the body and still allow width and length in the torso; but it is a very useful position for attempting to learn another skill while staying free in as much of the body as possible (Lloyd 1986:40).

Overcoming problems

The teacher showed Gudrun how to gently empty the lungs, allowing tension to be released all the way through the body while the air was being let out in a gentle “huh” sound. This is called by the Alexander teachers the “whispered ah”. It is a gentle process, not having much to do with her breathing as a flutist at this stage, but she was encouraged to simply let it happen, without *trying* or *doing*.

Flute and playing with an embouchure which I can rely on

Our observations of her playing after having attended the Alexander lessons were very valuable. At this stage Gudrun had actually stopped listening to the sound and was concentrating on how she was using her body. I observed that there was a much nicer flow in her sound production. She was no longer so tense in the shoulders, but when they moved it seemed to be part of the flow in the sound. Her body seemed to be much more in balance than prior to her taking Alexander lessons.

Understand or have patience with detailed explanations

During this time, Gudrun went to study in England for six months. Here she also went for Alexander classes from time to time. When she came back, she started preparing for an audition for the Mozarteum in Salzburg. Her walking, sitting and standing habits were changed, and the use of her body as a whole was completely different. She had lost some weight in England and reported not to be having

backaches any more. She was thinking of taking up volleyball again. This I advised her not to do - at least not at that stage. (I was instinctively sure that she would fall back into old habits of wrong body use if she were to take up this strenuous sport - especially at the highly competitive level at which she had previously played.) Luckily, she decided to take my advice. She passed her audition with comparative ease.

4.3 Case 2: Katharina

Katharina was a very young pupil. She started taking flute lessons with me at the age of eleven, after she had had lessons with another teacher for ten months. She was very keen and eager to learn. I did not immediately realise her unusual talent and capacity to absorb and adjust, because I was too acutely aware of a number of overriding problems.

4.3.1 Stating the problem

Katharina held her neck, arms and flute in a totally awkward position. She poked her neck and face very far forward, letting the flute hang to the right side at a strange angle and playing with an embouchure which I can only describe as 'impossible'. The embouchure hole of the instrument was almost completely covered, which meant that she was making almost no sound, even though she was blowing very strongly with a tight smile-type embouchure. She wasted most of her air and gasped continually for more.

I did not try to persuade Katharina to take Alexander lessons, as I had to use Alexander principles to teach her from the very first lesson. She was too young to understand or have patience with detailed explanations, she just wanted to be able to play the instrument. Although she was not yet a teenager she already had a strong tendency to slouch. She was very tall for her age, which was perhaps playing a role in this. I use the word 'perhaps' because she only slouched when taking the flute to her mouth and starting to blow. She was completely unaware of this fact. When I happened to mention it a few times, trying to make her understand that her

posture was bad and had to improve if ever she was to improve her sound production, she looked at me with an expression of complete disbelief. She answered that she was always being told not to slouch, but to walk and stand well because she was so tall. In other words: *The playing of the instrument was causing her to do exactly what she was trying not to do.*

At first she frankly disbelieved me, and was quite adamant about it. It was only when I brought *two* mirrors into the class, so that she was able to see herself from different angles, that I could convince her that her posture needed to be changed. She became aware that she was doing something of which she had been completely unaware. This was her first experience of kinaesthetic awareness. This realisation led to her beginning to believe and trust me.

In addition to the features described above, Katharina was also pulling and lifting her left shoulder higher than her right, causing her left arm to lift the flute; this was causing her in turn to complain of both fatigue and cramping in her left shoulderblade. Needless to say, the angle at which the flute was dangling downwards looked extremely uncomfortable.

The tension at the corners of her mouth and in her upper lip was causing a lot of energy to be wasted. Furthermore, she was losing too much air, which made the sound too breathy, with little or no control over either the intonation or the production of the different registers.

I thought at this stage that changes would take place reasonably quickly, because she was at such a perceptive age, and learning very fast. Nevertheless, as I came to know her better I was amazed at her extraordinary will, intelligence and ability to change old habits and learn new things at a rapid rate.

4.3.2 Experimenting with alternative methods of teaching the flute

We started working without the flute. I organised a piece of foam for her to lie on, and initiated some elementary breathing exercises. We both lay down on the floor

and I showed her how to breathe by placing my hand on my abdomen. She imitated, with her hand on her abdomen, feeling it moving upwards when she inhaled, downwards when she exhaled. She had had difficulties in doing this correctly in a standing position, for when trying to do it correctly, she was actually doing it incorrectly - inhaling and flattening the stomach at the same time. This was causing tension. I asked her to try not to do anything; just to lie down and feel (experience) it without trying - just letting it happen. While lying on her back with bent legs and a number of books under her head, I showed her how she could let her back 'melt into' the floor by releasing the tension in it. After we had done this a few times, she required fewer books for support under her head, which meant that her head-neck-torso alignment was improving (Lloyd 1986:74). She was enjoying these unusual kinds of activities in her flute lessons, which was a help to me because, although we laughed quite a lot at the beginning, she began to realise that she was able to breathe correctly and stand more upright, without over-stretching, after doing the exercises while lying on the floor. I explained to her that she could allow herself to lengthen throughout her whole body. She found this easy and relaxing.

After we had been practising the lying down breathing exercises and the movement of getting up into a standing position, (rolling onto her side first, not stiffening the back in standing up) she started to show signs of a better head/body alignment when holding the flute. At this stage, I did not allow her to do much more than hold the instrument while breathing, keeping it in a blowing position.

The next step was to play some long notes; but her embouchure was still a problem. By standing with her body in better alignment, she was also holding the instrument differently - not so far forward any more. This implied that the angle at which she was blowing into the flute was also, automatically, changing. But she was, understandably, seeking for the old embouchure position, wanting to go back to the old habit. I tried different things to help her release more tension. For example, I stood with my hands cupped under her elbows and asked her to let the weight go into my hands; in other words, to release the tension in her arms and simply release her arms into my hands. She responded immediately by collapsing. She said that she could not do what I wanted because she was afraid of letting the instrument fall

to the floor. I persevered and repeated the same procedure with her a few times, initially without the flute. When she again tried to produce a sound - with me holding the weight of her arms at the elbows - she said that her arms felt completely light. This was, at least, a small yet definite improvement.

4.3.3 Becoming more aware of the body (kinaesthetic awareness)

During the next two lessons, Katharina seemed to be going back to her old slouched position - although not completely. I thought that she needed to lengthen and widen through her whole body and decided to try some crawling with her. During my own Alexander classes, I had become aware of the fact that there are many physical processes involved in this action, probably making it easier to feel the releases taking place. This crawling position made it easiest for me to feel the lengthening and widening releases taking place at the same time. I tried to show my pupil, who by this time really trusted me not to be making a fool of her, how to go down on one knee, then on to the haunches, and then leaning the weight of the body on the hands so that she was on all fours. I gently placed my hand on the small of her back, asking her to lengthen herself - but without using any muscle tension. She responded at first by raising her back. I asked her to think length into her neck and width into the throat. After thinking this way, she was able to release the small of her back. We repeated the whole process a few times and then went into a rocking position from where we tried crawling a few steps, then getting up again without undue muscle tension.

These activities were taking quite a lot of time in each flute lesson. She understood that they were important and that she was not wasting her time, but I always had to make very sure that she was not bored. We always had to get back to playing the flute, of course. It was for me of great interest to see how the basic concepts of the Alexander teaching began to emerge in the context of her being generally much less formal and more relaxed; she was not so psychologically tense anymore.

Katharina was playing everything from memory at this stage, as I was trying to allow as little interference as possible. She could read quite well, as she had been playing

the recorder since she was a little girl, but she enjoyed being able to play from memory now and was also encouraged by this to try and improvise quite a lot. When I asked her to play something from memory though, she kept her eyes looking down to the floor.

4.3.4 Improvement of tone quality

The fact that she was keeping her eyes down was causing her to pull her neck and head out of alignment again, which had a negative effect on the tone production. Her whole face and neck were following her eyes and it was not enough to merely tell her to raise her eyes. I explained that she had to try and think of the tip of her nose connecting with the first vertebrae at her neck, so that “the face could go back into the neck”. Trying this a few times rapidly engendered a change in the tone colour from thin to more resonant. She expressed astonishment at this. I also became aware of the fact that she was changing the position of her jaw; this resulted in her not covering the whole of the embouchure hole with her lower lip any longer.

At this stage I asked her to release her weight into her feet. I could actually see how her stomach seemed to relax. (Her mental ability to use imagination and phantasy also helped here immensely.) This improvement had the added benefit that, by thinking the weight downwards into her feet, she was able to let her lower abdomen release. After allowing this further release to take place, the tone quality was completely different - stronger, more resonant - and she could keep the tone quality for much longer. This also helped her to use, and thus need, less air.

At this stage, I felt that I needed the advice of an Alexander teacher. I was lucky enough to find a student flutist who was doing an Alexander Technique training course in Munich. She lived in Salzburg and it was therefore possible for her to attend some of our lessons during the weekends. She was very interested and helpful, so I introduced her to Katharina at the next lesson. Katharina was proud of the fact that she now had two teachers!

Operating a release prior to breathing in order to play a note on the flute, was a new idea for her; but a very rewarding one, when she managed not to overcompensate

by over-stretching the back or her neck. With the help of the Alexander teacher she was able to let the weight release into her feet and form a more resonant tone, as if incidentally.

Where she had been falling back during the week, either into the old slump or over-stretching her neck and back, it was most satisfactory for us to see that she was able to lengthen now throughout her whole body. She was also carrying herself differently in her everyday life.

I have worked with experienced Alexander teachers in South Africa, Germany and Austria, and I was able to observe Alexander teaching to instrumentalists (mostly flute and violin); this helped me to direct and observe Gudrun's and Katharina's progress. All of the processes and changes observed during the two case studies, and during my own Alexander Technique lessons, led to eventual conclusions. From these I could form vital concepts that helped me in both performing and teaching.

5.2 Balance in standing

With both of the case studies the most important problem areas seemed to be with the balance between the head and the body, and therefore with the alignment between the position of the head and the spine. Gudrun held her head too far forward, causing both tension in her neck and pain and fatigue in her back. This in turn caused her to raise her pelvis at the back and stiffen her back while playing, which created yet more tension. To help her to release the unnecessary tension in the back, and to allow the consequent releases to take place, she had to be in a state of the faulty, or over-stretched, position of her head. On the other hand Katharina held her neck, face and flute all at a totally awkward angle. Through the Alexander feeling of the natural alignment between head and body during the process of learning to play the flute.

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CHAPTER 5

THE USE OF THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE IN THE PLAYING, PRACTISING AND TEACHING OF THE FLUTE

5.1 Introduction

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To attain a balanced stance, students have to learn to release the tension in the back muscles when standing. The idea is actually for students to find a distribution of weight that allows them to make the most of their postural reflexes. As an aid in

helping students to understand this, the following description should be considered (Wale 1973:339):

Normally the body is kept in the correct posture by the beautifully balanced action of opposing muscle groups, and by efficient working of the nerves which control this type of muscular activity. Such activity is, in effect, an anti-gravity reaction. It is known as postural tone and exists throughout the body. This form of work does not, however, produce fatigue in the same way as do voluntary contractions of the same muscles. If a man be asked to extend his spine, or even his knee, repeatedly, the muscles will soon tire; yet he can remain in a sitting or standing position for a very long time.

It is this postural tone that lessons in the Alexander Technique help one regain. Students have to learn a growing awareness of how to retain good posture while both preparing to play and when playing the instrument. This means that the muscles can begin their necessary contractions for correct breathing from a balanced, rested state; rather than from an already hard-working, tense state. The student who tends to lean forward while playing is a good example of this. The action of leaning forward makes the muscles in the back contract, which in turn may cause, for example, the flute tone to be thin and the higher notes to be more difficult to obtain. This is because with a forward-leaning posture there is less possibility of effective support. Whereas, if the student keeps a balanced posture, the back can be brought into the support mechanism with no resistance from the series of muscles that were distorted in order to strain the body forward (Lloyd 1986:136)

The same principle can be applied to sitting. The Alexander student will learn very early on how to find his sitting bones and thereby stimulate all the reflexes that enable the torso to maintain an erect posture while sitting. It is important that the student learns to find the middle position in sitting, where the torso is supported without becoming tired. As orchestral flutists sit while playing, it is vitally important for them to attain this relaxed balance.

Maximum freedom and energy can mostly be observed in young children, whose bodies have not yet been distorted by tension. The Primary Control (Alexander 1932:23) can also be observed in underdeveloped cultures, in the perfect balance between head and torso (Gelb 1991:54). This poise can, according to Alexander, be

regained by the adult through an understanding of this Primary Control and a re-education of the general use of the muscles controlling the balance between head and torso.

5.3 Balance in holding the flute

This statement by music therapist Phyllis Nefsky (1990:17) is a good summary of typical flute holding problems:

When playing the flute, tension can build in the neck, shoulders and back despite a relaxed approach. The flute is not centred in the middle of the body like a clarinet or a trumpet. The flutist's left arm, fighting gravity to hold the flute, compresses the left shoulder muscles in the same way the right arm strains the right shoulder. Pulling too far back with the right arm compresses the right side of the back and may cause a slight twist in the spine. In addition, the body may become more tense while playing troublesome passages, so pay attention to posture while playing the flute.

It is easier to describe this body control than it is to actually attain it in practice. The analytical, critical and doubting part of the brain is working hard when we are in the act of learning something and *trying* to do it right. The "trying hard" actually interferes with the free movement of our bodies (Mather 1990:25). During the case studies it was apparent that the correcting releases in the body took place only when no effort to *do* was made, but when, instead, they were simply left to *happen* - as with the instruction to Gudrun to continue easing her head up, *letting* her body follow, and *letting* her arms float up until the flute touches her skin. This was the direction which brought her the first visible improvement.

Until recently, it was assumed by Westerners that the brain does all the thinking and that the body does all the feeling and moving. But instead we have to learn that our brain, body, nervous system, sensors, muscles and limbs act as a system, as an integrated whole (Mather 1990:25). As the holding of the flute necessitates the use of all the limbs, especially head, arms and shoulders, the first and most simple, nevertheless most important, lesson to be taught regarding the holding of the instrument starts with the teaching of the awareness of the *whole* body.

Several different methods of body-learning have already been developed by different well-known and less well-known teachers and performers. A method that was presented several times at International workshops and flute masterclasses is the so-called *Edu-K Action Balances* (Educational Kinaesthetics) developed by Paul Dennison, a Ph.D specialist in reading disorders, and his wife Gail Dennison, a dancer and artist. They teach that there are no learning or performance disabilities, only blocks, and that selected physical movements remove the blocks. For instance, the bringing up of the flute to the head can be practised in the context of a series of movements designed to help the flutist to reach the goal of being relaxed and balanced with the flute in the hands, and playing. Various bodily movements can be combined with the playing of a simple phrase (see Chapter 4.2.1); for example, turning the arms (and hence the flute) along with the head and eyes to the right, left and back as the phrase is being played. Or bending forward and then straightening up while playing (Mather:1990:27). These actions can help to release habitual tensions that some flutists hold.

5.4 Balance in breathing

It does not take long to perceive the value of naturally co-ordinated breathing as taught in Alexander Technique lessons and its relevance for flutists (and singers). Everyone operates a slightly different balance in normal everyday breathing: nevertheless, as everyone's mechanism is constructed the same, there must be a generalised, basically 'ideal' system.

During Alexander lessons the method of verbally communicating information about new ways of using the breathing muscles was used by the Alexander teachers. A verbal description is sometimes enough to stimulate the desired action in the student, although it mostly does require further amplification. If the teacher wants to create awareness of certain specific parts of the body, or awareness of muscles not accessible to touch, then only verbal descriptions can be used. This helps the student to respond to both mental direction and visualisation. There are numerous good verbal descriptions which can help to conceptualise physical actions. An example of this was used during the first case study:

Rather than think of the muscles working on the outside of your body, imagine two rods passing horizontally through your abdomen at the level of your pelvis, one from side to side, the other from the middle of the front to the back and where they cross each other, you apply downward pressure to support your sound (Lloyd 1986:131).

This kind of verbal description obviously does not work as well if the student is not quite ready to respond to that particular advice. After the releasing of muscles, as progressively learned during Alexander Technique lessons, penetrates deeper, there should be an increased response to such directions.

5.4.1 Reflex-facilitated breathing

The value of the Alexander Technique when examining breathing technique is that it aims at reducing the interferences, without compensating for them. (The problem with most research done on breathing is that it always includes people with poor postural co-ordination. Thus the picture of natural breathing is distorted from the outset.) Reflex-facilitated breathing allows the breathing mechanism to operate with as little interference as possible. Lloyd (1986:137) writes:

I learned this breathing in Alexander lessons: I experienced the guidance of my singing teacher towards this breathing and gradually taught myself to sing with this natural breathing while practising. In time I learned to allow it into rehearsals and performances. Singers and non-singers alike interfere with their natural breathing and it is a most liberating experience to re-learn the natural flow of supported sound.

She goes on to describe the following method: As the student lies on the table (as Katharina lay on the floor during Case Study 2) the air is first let out of the lungs, and then the air is allowed to be drawn into the lungs - "It is a process of allowing the air pressure within the lungs to equal the air pressure outside" (Lloyd 1986:138). The student then counts numbers, for instance 1 2 3..., not necessarily well-enunciated, until the air supply runs out. Then air is allowed to fill the lungs by "letting the ribs spring out sideways" The whole process is then repeated.

Here the differences in breathing mechanisms are highlighted - not everyone's ribs "spring out" automatically. Some people have more flexibility in the stomach wall and

the upper chest area, so that their mechanism works on a vertical plane. Internationally acclaimed flutist Peter-Lukas Graf teaches the student abdominal breathing (Graf 1991:6-7):

Play the first long note until the breath is exhausted; the abdominal muscles will tighten. Remain in that position without moving or breathing in (c. 2 ¼ seconds). Relax suddenly (letting go): air enters the lungs. (See Chapter 2.3.)

Nevertheless, whatever the differences, *the abdomen should not be tightened when preparing to breathe*. The tightening can be easily observed by an onlooker, although not as easily felt by the student; thus it has to be pointed out to the student the moment it occurs (Lloyd 1986:138).

During the time I was co-operating with several Alexander teachers; I often asked for advice in connection with particular problems in teaching and playing; describing some particular difficulties of my pupils or my own. Once a flute student of mine begins also taking lessons in Alexander Technique, I would suggest to the student that they ask the Alexander teacher to work on certain aspects that I had previously found helpful for me. One does learn to a certain extent to communicate to the student the directions one would direct to oneself, thinking of their body as one's own. But it is not possible to overstate the increased abilities and power of communication that a flute teacher can gain by also training as an Alexander teacher.

One's powers of observation are increased a hundredfold; one's understanding of body mechanics helps with the understanding of singing technique; one's ability to identify the muscles that are not working becomes a vital tool in one's own singing and in the students' singing; and, most important, one is given the power to actually change the posture for the better in those students that are being hindered by habitual postural imbalances (Lloyd 1986:133).

Nevertheless, there is no way that a flute teacher can properly learn to teach Alexander Technique without completing a demanding three year-course.

5.5 The Alexander concept

Alexander spent sixty years of his life developing ways of putting into practice the concepts which he had evolved through his experimentation. He emphasised that we as human beings have the choice and responsibility of controlling the ways we use our bodies. If we learn to exercise this control, the functioning of our bodies can begin to improve - and will continue to improve (Gelb 1991:33). If this control is not exercised by choice, our bodies will be influenced by poor use and will therefore be continually deteriorating in function.

Alexander actually re-educated himself. He discovered that as soon as one concentrated on attaining the desired goal, habitual patterns would dominate, unless one could, by some means, interfere with those habitual patterns. He attended very closely to new manners of body use. Alexander realised that repeatedly trying an activity utilising poor body use is both pointless and harmful, so he stopped the activity, analysed the process, and decided what was preventing the desired functioning. In the process he corrected the poor use and thus gradually made progress towards the goal of economical and meaningful body use (Gelb 1991:62-63).

In order to eliminate a negative pattern that, due to constant repetition, has become habitual, the conscious choice must be made to struggle constantly against the habits. In this process of elimination, the person will come to the realisation that attention has to be given to the use of the body as a whole.

5.5.1 Functioning as a whole

There are many influences that lead to imbalance in the use of our bodies - trauma, stress in everyday-life, mental attitudes, pressure, tiredness etc. Being in a tense state becomes a part of everyday-life and tension patterns become part of the

habitual way we use our bodies. The most important goal of the Alexander Technique is to enable the body to function as a whole. Alexander discovered that his whole body was involved in the misuse of his voice. He also realised that the disconnected use of the body both implied and caused disconnected functioning of mind, body and emotion. Body awareness is an effective tool in learning about our whole selves - physical as well as emotional (Linden 1992:26).

To achieve power and sensitivity as an individual, let alone as a musician, the inner self should be attended to, in order to develop the sensitivity, balance and harmony we need. Alexander taught that the human being functions as a psychophysical whole. His concept of balanced body use, which affects its functioning (Lloyd 1986:24), is a vital one in acquiring any technique which is to be consciously learned. A teacher could, for example, become convinced that a certain aspect of a technique is vital for every student and teach it to the extent of losing the balance of the whole. When the awareness of the functioning as a whole is strong, the individual is protected against this tendency and will be able to maintain balance (Alexander 1932:46).

5.5.2 Impaired kinaesthetic awareness

It is most important to realise that it is almost impossible to teach oneself the Alexander Technique. This is because our kinaesthetic awareness is mostly impaired, due to the need to constantly cope with the pressures from the outside world. Thus we need the guidance of a teacher to learn to perceive our activities accurately. Only when the level of kinaesthetic awareness has been improved to an acceptable level of accuracy, can the student be regarded as self-sufficient (Lloyd 1986:27). Alexander discovered that his own awareness of what his body was doing was untrustworthy. In other words it often occurred that the incorrect habit actually felt right. He observed the same problem with his students. This convinced him that this lack of accurate kinaesthetic awareness was not merely his own individual specific problem. The perception of exactly how much energy is needed for directing a specific action to correct a faulty habit, is also impaired. This is further impaired by

the common characteristic of fearing anything new - including new ways of understanding activities. Thus attempts to correct a faulty habit will initially feel all wrong, lead to misconceptions and not achieve the desired goal.

5.5.3 Learning to improve kinaesthetic awareness: Inhibition and Direction

Alexander also discovered that he could not operate his Primary Control by merely “willing” the muscles to work in a certain way. He called the reflexes of the body, which were either allowed not to act or allowed to act, “Inhibition and Direction” (Alexander 1932:45). Inhibition was used to describe the moment of conscious thought between the reception of a stimulus and the concomitant response. He distinguished between two stages in the process of learning Inhibition:

1. To recognise the habitual response to a certain stimulus; e.g. in bringing the flute to the mouth in order to start playing.
2. To learn to stop, or change or inhibit that habitual response.

Thus Inhibition is used to interrupt the unconscious flow of a habitual response in order to replace it with a better, more natural and relaxed Direction.

The best way to describe Direction in Alexander Technique is through Alexander's own direction in all activities: “free the neck to let the head go forward and up so that the back may lengthen and widen”. The activity is allowed to take place through the application of the Direction. This concept of “allowance”, or the concept of either doing or not-doing, is very important for every student of the Alexander Technique. After several sessions of instruction one actually feels light and tall, with an ease of movement (Kapell Loewy 1992:31).

5.6 Other techniques for relaxation of body and mind

There are several techniques for relaxation of body and mind. The so-called Quieting Response, developed by the American psychiatrist Charles Stroebe, is an appropriate example. He instructed the person to first smile, then to take two slow, deep breaths, and finally to say: “Keep my body out of this”. The act of physically

smiling actually helps the person to feel more contented; the slow, deep breathing relaxes the muscle tension in the body; and the brain gives the instruction to the body not to interfere in the process at hand (Lehrer 1979:138). This all sounds incredibly simple; which it certainly is, when we learn to *accurately* experience what our bodies are doing in responding to different impulses. In this respect it concurs with Alexander's concepts.

The technique called Autogenic Training is also based on a concept of self-regulation. This was developed by the German physician Johannes Schultz, who studied the effects of hypnosis. Under hypnosis people were to be taught the ability to achieve certain stages of relaxation by themselves, through the implementation of six standard exercises, or formulas. People were taught to concentrate passively on these formulas, saying them silently, while imagining the physical sensations; but they were instructed not to try to actually achieve these sensations. Like Alexander, Schultz realised that the very act of *trying* to achieve results can easily prevent the sensations occurring.

The Progressive Relaxation developed by Edmund Jacobson aims at teaching people how to "stop doing things" (Lehrer 1979:140). This is achieved by teaching them how to become aware of the constant muscle activity in their bodies throughout the day; activity of which we are normally not aware. Again, this technique runs parallel to Alexander's. Like with the Alexander Technique the effects of Progressive Relaxation go far beyond the muscular system.

Through psychological research it has been shown by Jacobson (Lehrer 1979:140) anxiety to have three components:

- 1) A physiological component (sweaty palms, etc.)
- 2) A cognitive component (worrying about things that could go wrong)
- 3) A behavioural component (doing things that one does not usually do; avoiding doing or thinking things that could provoke anxiety).

Progressive Relaxation attempts to address all three of these components.

Over the centuries Eastern cultures have developed and mastered techniques that engender a degree of inner calm, and they have placed great importance on the subjective experience of tension and how to control it in both their minds and their bodies. Practitioners of Yoga, Tai Chi, Aikido, Zen Buddhism, and various Eastern forms of meditation sometimes develop remarkable control over their nervous systems (Mather 1993:42). For most Westerners, the study of, and dedication to Eastern philosophical, religious and metaphysical systems still appears unacceptable, although greater acceptance has been noted over the past few decades. For the purpose of this study, I have kept to techniques that are essentially Western.

5.7 The use of the Alexander Technique in situations of tension and interference

As music does not come only from the instruments involved, but also from within, musical growth also implies coping with problems of the self, such as stage fright and other kinds of performance problems that interfere with the ability to express emotions. To achieve power, sensitivity, balance and harmony as a musician, musical growth also involves work on the inner self. As Brian Warren (1992:11) states:

I teach musicians, actors and people from all walks of life, but what being a professional flute-player especially gives you is an understanding of how difficult it is to stand up and play in front of other people. You can be quite relaxed working in an office or at home, but once you get on stage you tend to use the body in different ways and that is precisely what Alexander found. He was an actor who developed voice problems [...] who did all kinds of things to his head and neck which interfered with his voice production. That is precisely what flute players do too.

Awareness of what we really do with our bodies in a situation of anxiety is a very important factor in the process of being a successful interpreter of music in front of an audience. Heifetz, one of the great violinists of our time, was said not to be "doing" very much when he picked up the violin to play: "he turned the head slightly and played [...] without any extras" (Warren 1992:11).

To play music is as much a spiritual and emotional endeavour as it is a physical one. Nevertheless, to focus on the physical aspect is useful, because what people do with their bodies is relatively easy to observe. The difficulties encountered by musicians are stated by Paul Linden (1992:26), specialist in body and movement awareness education, to fall into three interrelated categories. These are:

- Physical strain
- Anxiety
- Non-specific performance inability.

He agrees with Alexander in declaring that although there is really no separation between mind, body and spirit, choices of how to be and how to act are intimately connected with posture and movement.

5.7.1 Physical strain

Physical strain is said by Paul Linden (1992:26) to include several elements, such as general postural problems - caused by sitting or standing for hours while practising or playing - or physical tension caused by anxiety. Musicians incur a variety of differing physical problems; for instance, the sore pedal foot of the organist, the dull backache of the double bass player, or the tiredness in a bowing arm. A musician who is also a student of the Alexander Technique has to allow the awareness of the body and its muscles to "grow on its own"; it takes time. Once the student has the feel of the Technique in his or her normal movements, the connections and applications will emerge of their own accord. During the first twenty Alexander lessons the students should actually only think about how the Technique is affecting them in a general physical sense, not how it is specifically affecting their playing.

Linden (1992:26) describes the physical problems that musicians face as stemming from some form of separation from the self. It could be, for instance, that a musician is failing to realise that it is past fears that are the performance inhibiting factors and the cause of physical straining. He (Linden 1992:26) further states that:

- Not feeling the things that are going on in the mind and body is the root cause of performance difficulties, and finding union with the self is the basis for finding union with the instrument, the music, fellow musicians, and the audience.

The body is the concrete aspect of the self, therefore body awareness is useful in learning about the whole self. Students of any form of body awareness technique learn to say exactly *what* they feel in their bodies and *where* they feel it. This is called “physical thinking” by Linden (1992:27). This helps people to notice the sensory details of their experience by teaching them to find and develop a pattern of self-monitoring - with the focus on details of, for instance, breathing, muscle tone, posture and movement. He advises pupils to try the following: consciously tighten the abdomen, anal sphincter muscles and genitals, and then walk around, noticing how stiff and strained the legs, hips and lower back are. The movement as a whole is inhibited by the holding of tension in these body areas. If the pupil thinks only about treating the muscular activity as surface activity, then it is obvious that the deeper, inner layers of muscular activity are not being penetrated (Craig 1978:22). Holding tension in these body areas while singing or playing an instrument makes it quite impossible to perform optimally.

5.7.3 Non-specific performance inability

Again, parallels with the Alexander Technique are readily evident.

Performance difficulties can be viewed as good opportunities for learning. By identifying performance problems and discussing what weaknesses they reveal, musicians become able to reach their highest potential. Musical enjoyment is

5.7.2 Anxiety

In musical performance certain tensions can, however, also play a positive role. The player must be able to create enough energy and spark. But when too much stress and misguided energy is involved, a lesser performance is usually the result (Kapell Loewy 1992:31). Involved in this is the fear of being judged, with the consequence of negative self-criticism. Both students and performers “have to be aware of their intrinsic worth, regardless of their current evidence of ability and must realise that in a deeply self-confident way in order to perform well” (Kapell Loewy 1992:31). A most important point to always be kept in mind by any performer is that slow, careful practice with a positive attitude is the best way to counter the above-mentioned kind of self-criticism. Amongst many other authorities it was Isidore Phillip, the great piano teacher who wrote that: “Too much stress cannot be laid upon the usefulness, the necessity of slow work” (Kapell Loewy 1992:31). The great performers seem to agree on this. Heifetz was said to be a great master at working the fingers slowly on the strings, without bowing, for up to eight hours a day (Warren 1992:11).

As already mentioned, there are several techniques for relaxation of body and mind. As Westerners often suffer from excessive trying - too much of the "do it yourself" factor. We have to learn to reach the point of balance between tension and relaxation. The harmful tensions caused by too much concern about our ego, along with its obsessions, fears, rigidity and resentments, must not be allowed to arise (Mather 1993:43). Once we can let go of these egoistic fears, the minimum necessary tension replaces the old excessive tension to give us new energy and life. Alexander's basic teaching of body awareness does help the student to let go of these mental anxieties. His basic commands to: "Let my neck be free, let my body go forward and up, let my torso lengthen and widen, let my legs release away from my torso, and let my shoulders widen out to the side" (Alexander 1941:47) will lead to a lessening of mental tension and anxiety.

5.7.3 Non-specific performance inability

Performance difficulties can be viewed as good opportunities for learning. By focusing on performance problems and discovering what weaknesses they reveal, musicians become able to reach their highest potential through replacing the revealed weaknesses with strengths (Linden 1992:26).

Jacobson (Lehrer 1979:151) states that the major behavioral effect of anxiety is that it makes us avoid doing things; for instance, when we avoid thinking of the concert that will occur in a few weeks time. This may perhaps cause a student to spend more time on the easier passages that he can play well, while avoiding work on the more difficult passages. Psychologically, it is better *not* to stay away from a threatening situation, for the anxiety that accompanies it eventually becomes far greater. A behaviorally successful technique for circumventing this type of anxiety is to perform very frequently. Although it can also be good for an artist to give himself time to think and rethink his technique and understanding of music, it is done at the risk of increasing performance anxiety as the deadline approaches (Lehrer 1979:151).

A certain amount of anxiety will always be with us. Nevertheless, it need not always be a source of fear. None of the various techniques of thinking, different kinds of meditation, nor other techniques for treating the physiological components of anxiety and stress are going to enable musicians to totally eliminate them. As a musician, one has to learn to live with an amount of tension, while ensuring, through kinesthetic monitoring, that it remains within bounds. Over-tense muscles become exhausted after years of undue wear and tear, leading to the situation where a musician's technical and expressive skills can become prematurely exhausted. However, through learning the Alexander Technique, whatever the problems a specific person has to cope with, the powers of mental direction are developed. It may be a long and painstaking path from an over-tense human being to one with a more natural, long-term healthy approach to coping with the difficulties of being a performing artist, but the journey is well worth the effort.

Then, begin by incorporating this into the practice. Music is not a static activity, it is a dynamic one, and it is important to incorporate the Alexander Technique into the practicing sessions. Ultimately, it can be worth what it takes to release tension in certain parts of the body before one begins to practice.

In the author's own experience, the flute teacher that took more of the presence of an Alexander teacher was most useful, because the teacher was able to be present while the student was playing a specific passage. The Alexander teacher would comment on any unusual tension noticed while the student was playing, and the passage would be repeated with the Alexander teacher during the next session. The area of the student's body that needed to be released would be identified, and the student would try to enact this independently, maintaining awareness while playing. In this way, the flute teacher and the Alexander teacher could solve tension problems as they arose.

When an Alexander teacher who is willing to assist some flute players can be found, this can only add to the quality of the instruction. Although there is normally only limited time for this sort of co-operation it is, nevertheless, a better way to ensure that the student becomes aware of the tension areas and learns to release them, than leaving it to the student's own powers of observation to detect the tensions, and their own will-power to change the tension areas.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Not all teachers can afford to take a complete Alexander Technique course. They may not have the time nor the desire; they may not be suitable candidates, nor in the right age group to be enlisted for the exacting training to be an Alexander teacher. The only practical alternative method is for music teachers to work in conjunction with Alexander teachers, communicating to them the difficulties and problems encountered in the music students. Once a music student gets started on taking Alexander lessons, the music teacher can suggest to the student that the Alexander teacher be asked to teach the “whispered aah” or the “Monkey”. The student can then benefit by incorporating this into the practical music lessons and, most importantly, into the practising sessions. Ultimately, it can be learnt what it feels like to release tension in certain parts of the body before and while playing.

In the author’s own experience, the flute teaching that took place in the presence of an Alexander teacher was most useful, because the muscle use could be observed while the student was playing a specific passage. The Alexander teacher would first comment on any unusual tension noticed while the student was playing; then the passage would be repeated with the Alexander teacher placing her hands on the area of the student’s body that needed to be released while playing. Subsequently, the student would try to enact this independently, maintaining the release while playing. In this way, the flute teacher and the Alexander teacher could deal with tension problems as they arose.

When an Alexander teacher who is willing to attend some flute lessons can be found, this can only add to the quality of the teaching. Although there is normally only limited time for this sort of co-operation it is, nevertheless, a quicker way to ensure that the student becomes aware of the tension areas and learns to release them, than leaving it to the student’s own powers of observation to detect the tensions, and their own will-power to change the tension habits.

Regular lessons in the Alexander Technique help the flute player in the following ways (Lloyd 1986:130):

1 Muscles that are too tense to give feedback to the brain begin to release their tension and begin to respond to mental direction.

2 Directing mental instructions to certain muscles in the breath support system is the first step towards gaining control over these muscles.

3 Energy can then follow thought, and the muscle begins to play a role in producing improved flute tone.

4 Increased body awareness and power of mental direction benefit the flutist in every aspect of acquiring flute playing skills and is put to constructive use at every stage of the process.

5 Undoing the tension helps the flutist become aware of the natural reflexes of the body and this enables him to make as much use as possible of the natural flow of energy before deciding how much *doing* is necessary in the breath support system.

6 Awareness can be used constructively to examine the reasons for changing habitual tensions, instead of the common situation of living with recurring faults. To undo the tension facilitates the solving of recurring playing faults and makes the recognition of them a more positive process.

7 The student becomes aware of how much support is necessary to create the required flow of breath for the quality of tone desired.

The practice of applying the techniques in order to reap these benefits grows with each lesson. As outlined in the author's own experience of trying to combine the Alexander Technique with flute playing (see Chapter 3), it is necessary to put what the flute teacher explains together with the newly acquired insight in muscle use gained from the Alexander lessons.

The flute teacher and the Alexander teacher become aware of the student's development in the process of studying the Alexander Technique, and can help the student to put this to constructive use. There is no point in asking a student to be flexible in the lower back until the flexibility comes to those muscles by the student himself learning awareness of their existence and of the tension in them. Once there are signs that the student can exercise some mental control in this area for example, the teacher can issue advice about how and when to use these muscles.

It is not possible to overstate the increased powers of communication that a teacher can gain by going to Alexander sessions; and especially by training as an Alexander teacher. The results of the training are very satisfying. One's powers of observation are very much increased; one's deeper understanding of body mechanics helps with the understanding of the blowing technique of the flute; and one's ability to identify the muscles that are not working properly or optimally becomes a vital tool in both one's own playing and in the students' playing.

The most important fact is that one becomes able to actually change the posture for the better in those students whose performance and, especially, flute tone are being hindered by habitual postural imbalance.

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