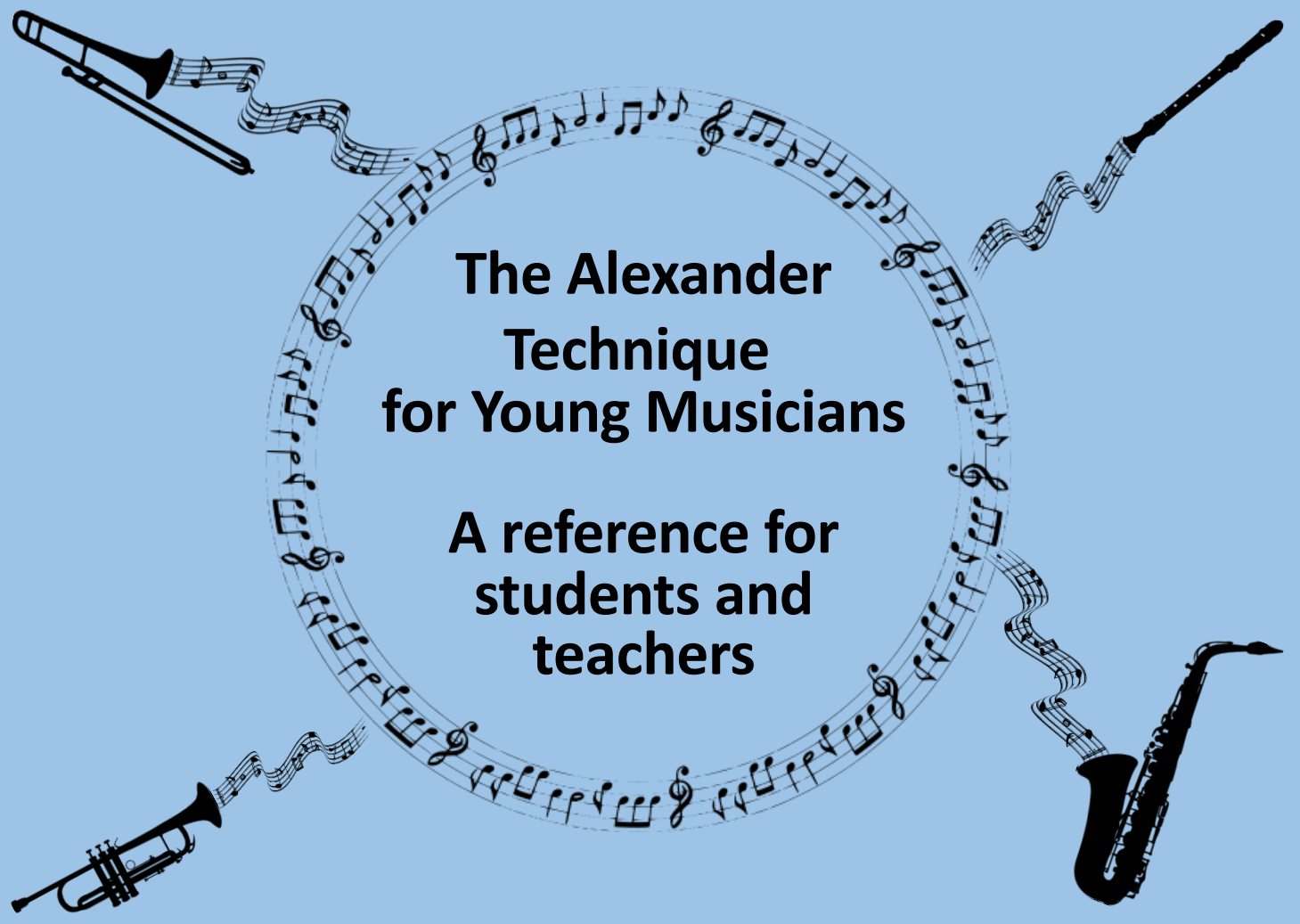


A circular graphic composed of a continuous line of musical notes and treble clefs, forming a ring. Four musical instruments are positioned around the ring: a trumpet at the top-left, a saxophone at the top-right, a trumpet at the bottom-left, and a saxophone at the bottom-right. The instruments are depicted in a stylized, black-and-white line-art manner. The background is a solid light blue color.

The Alexander Technique for Young Musicians

**A reference for
students and
teachers**

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Judith Kleinman and Peter Buckoke.

Edited By: Harry Buckoke

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WHAT IS THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE?

Recognising Habit

Acknowledging Faulty Sensory Awareness

Inhibition

Direction

Attention and Awareness

Primary Control

WHAT IS THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE?

“The Alexander Technique is a practical philosophy that helps you develop the skills to choose how you use your body and mind, and develop a connection with the world around you. This helps you to feel calm and confident”



What makes a good performer?

“Learning to be good under pressure, learning to be good at concentrating on what you are doing, not minding making mistakes and learning from them”

Joshua Bell.

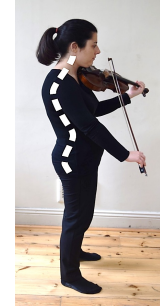
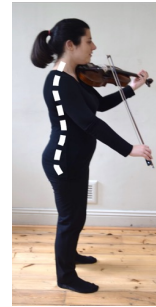
RECOGNISING HABIT

Alexander work starts with the recognition of what you are doing in the moment of doing it. You can easily carry out many activities without conscious awareness of what you are doing. Identify your habits, whatever they are. They will be both positive and negative.

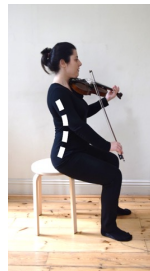
We have probably all tried to change habits and know how hard that can be, for example, changing the way we hold our instrument or the way we stand, or sit on a chair. You can change habits for the better by **constructive thought**.



Your instrumental or vocal technique is a collection of learnt habits, hopefully most of them are good habits but sometimes they need changing.



The thinking starts a process that changes the way your body responds and the habit is gradually undermined, weakened and eventually removed from your life, leaving you with improved coordination.



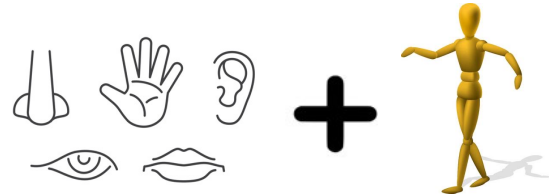
ACKNOWLEDGING FAULTY SENSORY AWARENESS



Alexander discovered that our sensory feedback is not necessarily reliable, what he called 'Faulty Sensory Awareness', through this discovery he realised that some of our habits may not be as good as they feel, they may even be damaging.

Think of Faulty Sensory Awareness as Fake News from your senses.

As you work on your Use (body, mind and emotions), your sensory awareness becomes more reliable. Sensory awareness includes the 'Five senses', sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch but it also includes your sixth sense, the 'kinaesthetic' sense - your body, your movement and your spatial awareness.

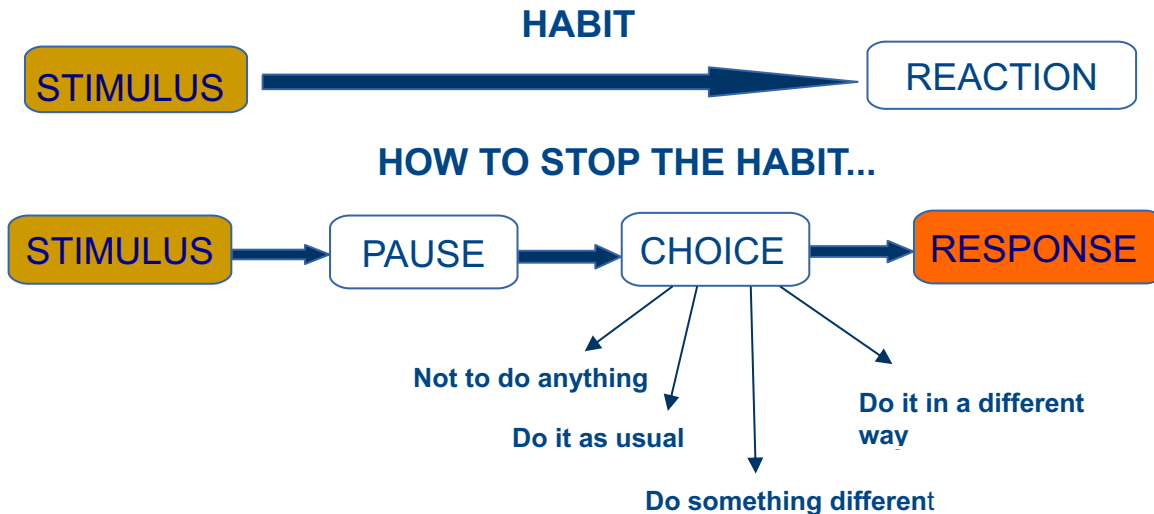


Reliable sensory awareness is a great asset for musicians!

INHIBITION – PAUSE TO THINK

Alexander discovered the power of stopping in order to choose how we engage in an activity. He called this 'Inhibition'. You need to stop doing the old habit before you can easily change to something new.

Inhibition allows you to have more choices. If you do not have conscious choices available, you cannot make constructive changes. Without conscious choices you cannot be spontaneous, you are in the grip of subconscious habit. Inhibition helps you develop the freedom to change.



DIRECTION

Direction is a thought or intention, a will or wish to contradict the unhelpful habit. Direction contradicts the negative tendencies of too much tension or over-relaxation and helps develop a more reliable sensory awareness. We are looking to be in a condition of re-balancing and ease rather than in a position.

Directions can be words:

- Allow the neck to be free
- Let the head go forward and up in such a way that the back can lengthen and widen
- Send the knees forwards and away
- Sense your feet on the floor

Directions can be images:

- Think of your head floating like a balloon
- Head up like a rocket
- Imagine your head being like a ball bobbling about on the top of a fountain of water

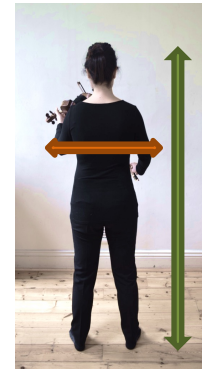
Directions can be subtle movements:

Move the head up but do it delicately.

Opposition in direction:

We can benefit from using opposing directions that encourage the body to expand rather than contract.

- The head moves away from the feet, as the feet move away from the head
- The shoulders move away from each other

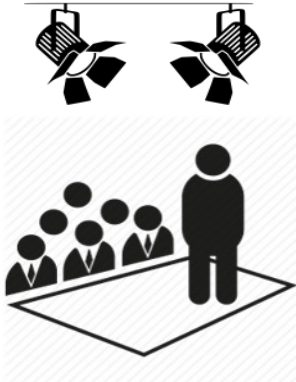


ATTENTION AND AWARENESS

“Awareness, as I conceive it, is a general, unfocused condition in which a person is wide awake and alert to whatever may be going on without being concentrated on anything in particular. Attention on the other hand is focussed on some particular aspect in the field. It has been compared to a spotlight on a dark stage”.

F. P. Jones

- Be where you are – be present
- Direct your attention away from the voice in your head
- You can choose the balance of your awareness and attention.
- Your mind and body continuously affect each other.
- Be aware of your whole self and the world around you



Internal awareness: to maintain a good sense of yourself and your instrumental technique

External awareness: to interact with your colleagues

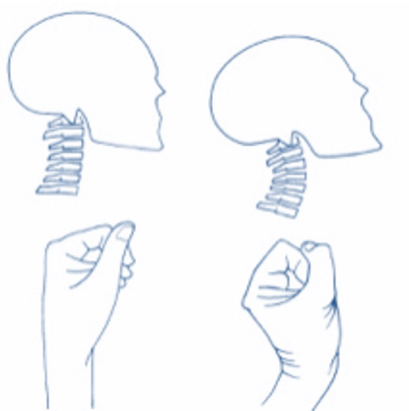
Spatial awareness: expand your awareness to include the space around you and the audience

We can intelligently balance our awareness and attention to bring ourselves into the ideal state for playing music.

The ideal state is a spotlight on a well-lit stage. Then we can remain truly present.

PRIMARY CONTROL

Alexander discovered that the relationship between your head and the rest of your body (Primary Control) has a profound influence on your overall coordination. The head is programmed to rebalance many times every second. If you fix your head in a position, rebalancing is not possible so your coordination suffers. The ideal state is a free, rebalancing equilibrium in the Primary Control.



Head in a
balancing state
forward and up

Head pulled
back and down,
neck dropping
forwards

Don't pull your head towards your instrument



Direct your head forward and up

You are not looking for a position that is fixed in relation to your instrument. It is good to have a dynamic relationship that allows the head to be free to rebalance while you are playing.

BODY MAPPING

Arms and shoulders

Spine

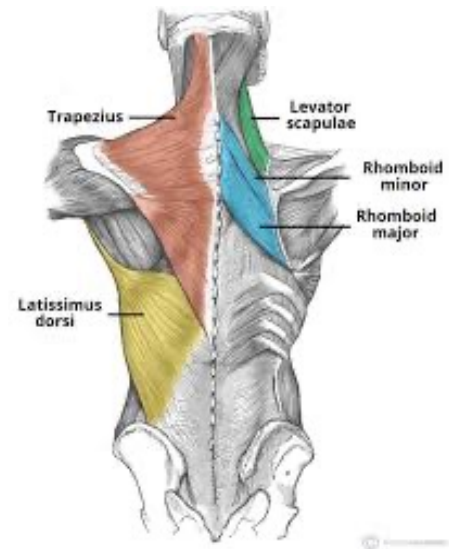
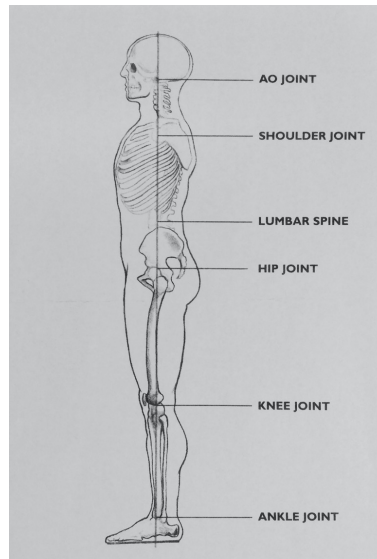
Balancing

Breathing

Eyes and Vision

WHAT IS BODY MAPPING?

A person's body map is their perception, understanding and experience of their own body. The study of Body Mapping includes understanding where the joints are and how the body moves. When the map of your body is accurate, your coordination and overall well-being improves.

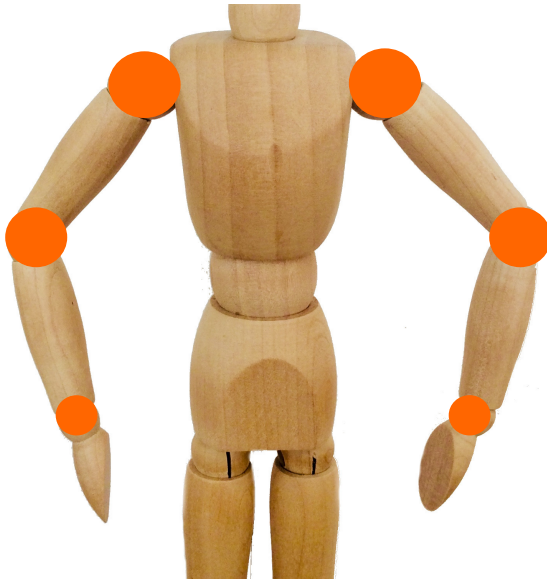


ARMS AND SHOULDERS

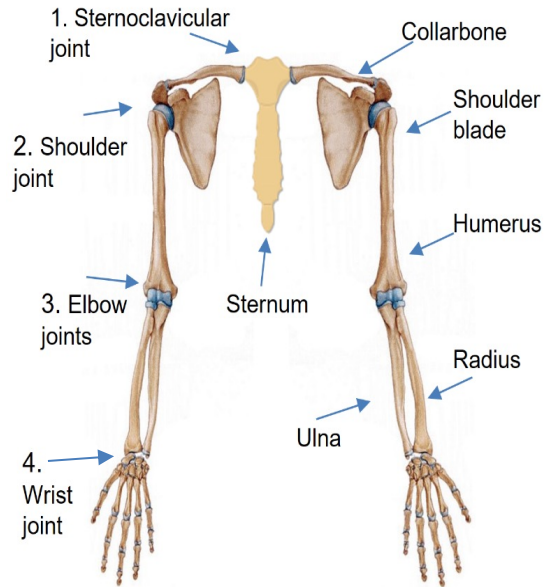
How many joints does your arm have? **4 Joints!**

Your arm does not stop at your shoulder joint, it also includes the collarbone, shoulder blade and the sternoclavicular joint. Body map all the joints you use to play your instrument.

BAD MAP

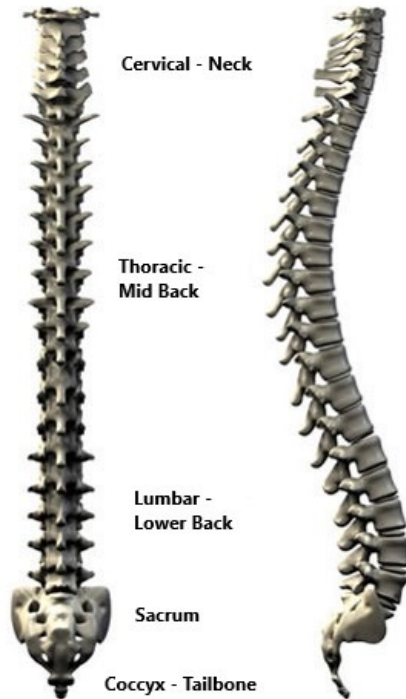


GOOD MAP



SPINE

Your spine is your central support structure. It is mobile and strong.

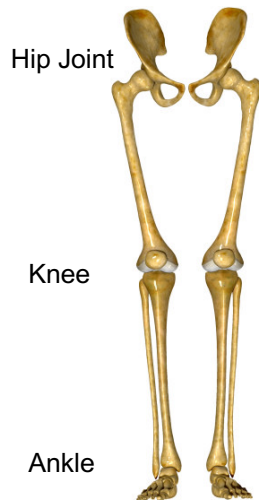


- The spine is curved, not straight, so that it can absorb impact and that supports your mobile, balancing head,
- Your spine is also segmented so that the torso can move in any direction – forward, backward, sideways, spiralling, and twisting.
- Your spine is also mobile up and down. It lengthens and gathers in movement.
- This lengthening and gathering is reflexive, and it will happen thousands of times a day as we breathe and move if we are not constricting the movement.

BALANCING

Balancing is completely different from being static. Being in balance is an efficient use of the body in relation to gravity. If you are in 'balance' there will be some postural tone that is on-going and necessary. You will sense that core support as lightness and ease not as effort. In balance, you will be comfortable and your coordination will be easy.

BALANCE IN STANDING



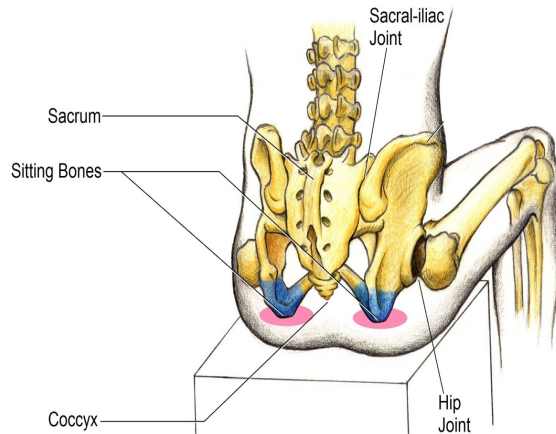
The three main contact points of the feet

Allow your feet to spread on the floor

Balance in standing with the instrument:

- Do you stiffen your legs when you lift your instrument?
- Can you release your shoulders?
- Do you raise your chest?
- Are you breathing freely?
- Do you fix your eyes?
- Can you unlock your hips, knees and ankles?
- Do you push your pelvis forward?
- Is your head floating up?

BALANCE IN SITTING



Balance in sitting with the instrument:

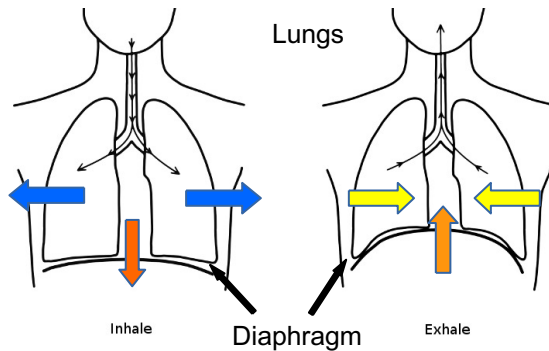
- Sit on your sitting bones
- Don't try to 'sit up straight'; you will probably lose freedom in the hips!
- Think of your head being free and send it up
- Send your knees in the direction your toes are pointing
- Soften your feet so they spread out onto the floor
- Tip forward at the hips when page turning

If you sit or stand to play your instrument, how you sit and stand is part of your instrumental technique. Remember you can practise sitting and standing in balance at anytime, away from your instrument as well as when you are playing.

BREATHING

'Watching the movement that occurs throughout the whole torso in free breathing is like watching the waves on the beach. Feeling the movement that occurs throughout the torso in free breathing is like being the ocean and the beach'.

Barbara Conable.



- Breathing is a natural reflex activity
- The diaphragm is the main muscle in breathing. It works on the in-breath but it doesn't feel like work. It relaxes on the out-breath
- Breathing can feel easy in activity
- Breathing is movement, let your ribcage move!

Experiment

- Can you let your Whole Self respond to your breathing?
- Let your feet spread onto the floor
- Don't lock your legs
- Freeing your legs can free up your breathing
- Direct your back to widen on the in-breath
- Direct your head up on the out-breath

Breathing freely improves your sense of pulse and rhythm

EYES AND VISION

Your vision has a profound effect on your perception of the world, your emotional state, your coordination and your communication. Vision affects general health. It dramatically affects your practice and performance.



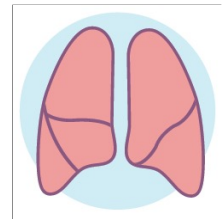
'Panoramic vision' is seeing the whole picture of your present environment. 'Panoramic' includes height, width and depth as well as movement.

- Enjoy seeing
- Use panoramic vision in a sight-reading situation
- Be visually present to connect with the world around you
- 95% of your vision is panoramic, 5% is for focused vision. Let go of over-focusing!



Eyes and breathing

Your vision and breathing are interconnected. You need plenty of oxygen in the blood for the eyes and brain to work well. Restrict your breathing and your vision suffers. Fix your eyes and your breathing suffers. If you don't fix your eyes and allow your breathing to be free, your playing can be coordinated and emotional.



ENJOY YOUR PRACTICE

What is good practice?

Warm up – warm down

Activities to do every day

Constructive rest, Semi-supine

WHAT IS GOOD PRACTICE?

Practice is one of the challenges of learning a musical instrument.

Possible structure for 1 hour's practice



20 - 10
20 - 10

Good practice is efficient

Good practice improves something

Be aware of what you have changed for future use

You should be physically comfortable during and after the practice

Feel good about what you have done!

Elements of good practice:

- Clear structure with a balance between playing (20 min) and non-playing (10 min), maybe using semi-supine (see page 20) when analysing and planning
- Mind and body awareness throughout the practice
- Awareness of the balance between attention to detail and keeping an overview of the big picture
- Awareness that you can choose to be present
- Continuous rebalancing of the primary control
- Clear and accurate 'body map' when playing
- Efficient and free breathing
- Good use of the visual mechanism

WARM UP – WARM DOWN

Before tuning your instrument, tune up your body with these easy movements.

After your practise, warm down in a similar way to release any tension you have built up.



3 easy swings

While standing, transfer your weight from side to side with easy arms as you swing.



Swing in 3 ways:

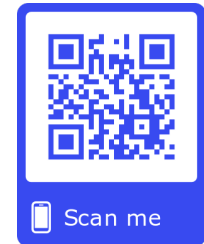
1. Feet straight forward.
2. Feet turning out from the heel.
3. Pivot on the balls of your feet to bring your heels into the centre



Arms up and out:

Breathing with your arm movement

- Breathing in – leading with the finger tips look up at the ceiling
- Breathing out – circle your arms around and down to your side three times this way and then the opposite way
- Look at the videos to check these movements out.



SEMI-SUPINE – CONSTRUCTIVE REST

Lying down in semi-supine is a very good way to recover from intense practice or rehearsing. Put your head on a book to align your neck with the rest of your spine. Allow your spine to lengthen and your back to widen. As you lie on the floor notice the effect of the gravity in this position. Direct your body to expand in all directions, tune into your breathing (without trying to correct it) and let gravity return your whole system to neutral. After directing, allow your mind to be quiet. Then, if you like, review how your practice has been going and plan what to do next.



ACTIVITIES TO DO EVERY DAY: 3 CONSTRUCTIVE MOVEMENTS

These movements are fundamental elements of great use; individually, they give us the building blocks for fluent, coordinated movement while playing.



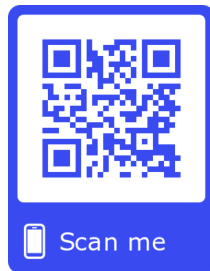
Monkey

This is the ideal way for us to bend, that is, using the hip, knee and ankle joints.

Feet hip-width apart, release the hips, knees and ankles. Allow your legs to bend and torso, led by the head, to tilt forwards.

Lunge

This movement works on shifting weight in a powerful and gentle way that acknowledges the design of the body. Place one foot forward and one back (at an angle of 45 degrees). You can transfer weight forward and backwards between the legs by bending the knees as you shift the weight. Explore the movement on both sides.



Hands on the wall

This movement will raise your awareness of the connection between your arms and your back, which is relevant to every instrument. Stand back from the wall with your arms up and palms on the wall. You can then gently lean in towards the wall by bending your elbows. This can give you a strong sense of the back staying back, and the opposition between your hands and your back.



ALEXANDER TIPS FOR POWERFUL PERFORMANCE

Dealing with Performance Anxiety

Primary Control

3 Useful Questions

Useful Ideas Before the Concert

DEALING WITH PERFORMANCE ANXIETY

'Our emotional condition is far more influential than hours and hours of practice'.

F.P.Jones

The symptoms of performance anxiety are virtually identical to the startle pattern, also known as the fight or flight response.

Frank Pierce Jones describes the pattern: "It begins with an eye-blink; the head is then thrust forward; the shoulders are raised and the arms stiffened; abdominal muscles shorten; breathing stops and the knees are flexed."



The startle pattern is an automatic response built into all of us; chemicals are released into the system to increase the heart rate and when we start breathing again we breathe shallower and faster, this makes us more powerful and alert. This is all useful if we are in danger, for example having to escape from a burning building, but not such a good state if we are going to play in a concert. If we recognise our emotions we can work with them.

If, on the day of the concert, you notice the developing symptoms, you have a chance to change your response. Starting with freeing your neck, you can break the chain of reactions, leaving yourself calm, confident and more in control of the situation.

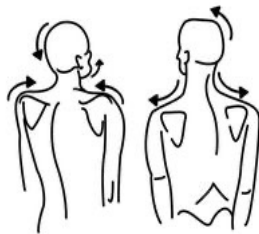
PRIMARY CONTROL

The relationship between your head and the rest of your body is always of critical importance when dealing with performance anxiety. Is your head moveable and rebalancing on top of the spine?

How to let go of tension

When you are nervous you express it with tension, often in critical muscles where you need fine motor control. Trumpet players might create lip tension or wobble; violinists might lift their shoulders and tighten their arm and hand muscles; pianists might lose freedom in the hips.

First, you need to be aware of your pattern. Ask yourself if there is unnecessary tension especially in areas you have found it in the past. Bring your attention to your symptoms of nervousness – accepting them starts to transform them. If you try to ignore them or just hope they will go away you are not taking control of the situation. When you recognise unnecessary tension, think a **direction** that contradicts it.



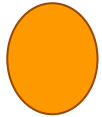
- **If you are raising your shoulders...**

Allow your shoulders to widen away from each other.
This allows your arms to be free

- **If your lips are wobbling...**

Free your tongue when it is not involved in playing
Release your jaw and allow your throat to be free
Soften your eyes

3 USEFUL QUESTIONS - BEING PRESENT



Are you Seeing?

When under stress and suffering from performance anxiety you will tend to be over-focusing and less flexible in performance. When you allow panoramic vision you increase coordination and communication.



Are you Breathing?

If your breathing is normal you will feel normal! Experiment with extending your exhale to calm the body, focus the mind and allow freedom in your voice. Your inhale is a natural reflex. Breathing easily allows you to have less performance anxiety and increases your confidence.



Are you Balancing?

Balancing is completely different from being static. Being in balance is an efficient use of the body in relation to gravity. Balancing involves constant subtle movements, fine adjustments that are keeping your body moveable which helps you with powerful-poised performance.



PREPARING FOR A POWERFUL PERFORMANCE

You have two instruments. Think of yourself as the first instrument.
Practise being 'in tune' with yourself so you can feel confident on stage.



Here are a few useful ideas to have in mind before the concert:

- Some people find it best to be quiet before the performance. Some other people find chatting and maybe even sharing a joke with a friend works for them. Find out what works best for you!
- Beware of contracting your body – let go and be expansive! A series of gentle movements can be a good warm-up.
- Be present rather than involved in detailed analysis or mental chatter.
- Less judgement and more awareness is good preparation for your concert..

AS WELL AS PRACTISING, PRACTISE PERFORMING!

Take every opportunity to practise performing:

- If you have a pet, perform to them.
- Find a friend (perhaps a musical friend) and try performing in different ways, make it a game.
- Perform some pieces well within your comfort zone so you aren't worried about your technique.
- If you feel nervous, that's great, you're learning to deal with it. If not, run up and down the stairs so you're out of breath and then try a 'performance'.
- Both hearing and seeing can be over-focused or more usefully panoramic. Practise panoramic listening and seeing when you practise performance.
- Use your mobile or tablet to video yourself performing, watch the recording, then write two positive things about your performance followed by any constructive ideas.
- Practise performing whilst pretending to be your favorite musician.
- Prepare for a flexible performance, don't aim for the perfect performance.
- Practise enjoying performing.

RESOURCES

Some information contained in this handbook also appears in:

The Alexander Technique for Musicians.

Judith Kleinman and Peter Buckoke.

Bloomsbury, London 2013.

Other sources:

Freedom to Change 3rd Ed.

Frank Pierce Jones

Mouritz London 2003,

What Every Musician Needs to Know About the Body.

Barbara H. Conable and Benjamin J. Conable.

Andover Press, 1998.



Fuensanta Zambrana is a Violinist and Alexander Teacher with a passion for training all performers in an integrated balance between the instrument and the player. Fuensanta teaches violin at Junior Trinity Laban in London and runs Alexander workshops for music teachers and performers.



Judith Kleinman is a Musician and Alexander teacher. She teaches at The Royal College of Music London and the Junior Royal Academy of Music as well as Training Alexander teachers at LCATT Training school in London. Judith also teaches Tai Chi and Yoga to Musicians.



Peter Buckoke has created the series of courses that are threaded through the BMus and Masters degrees at the Royal College of Music (London). He has spent thirty-six years playing his double bass in chamber music groups including The Schubert Ensemble, The Nash Ensemble and his cabaret duo 'A Man a Woman and a Double Bass.'

The Alexander Technique helps musicians develop:

Powerful Performance

Confidence

Comfort

Effective Practice

And

Musical Awareness

This book helps students and teachers apply the Alexander Technique to their music making in practice, rehearsal and performance