The Alexander Technique

Jacque Lynn Bell

Overview of the Alexander Technique

What is the Alexander Technique? Alexander observed that the relationship between the head, neck and torso is primary in controlling movement and function. Compressive movement habits interfere with the body's ingenious design. Education can restore the innate postural reflex – a natural, dynamic force that counters gravity and easily guides the torso upward.

Goals: To learn about your habitual patterns of thought and movement. This will increase your ability to use yourself with greater ease and efficiency. For example, dancers will learn to move more articulately and avoid injuries, actors to minimize tension, musicians and singers can unravel stressful patterns that infringe on their performance. Overall the student will have greater choice about how they think and move. Alexander Technique also offers tools to those suffering from anxiety, depression, chronic pain, neck, back and hip disorders.

Major Activities: Teaching the student to understand and apply the Alexander principles of *awareness*, *inhibition* and *direction*. Students will be taken through simple motions such as getting in and out of a chair, walking, picking up a book as well as applying the principles to more complex movements, such as playing a musical instrument, singing, vocalizing, dancing, acting. Working in partners and groups will help the students develop heightened kinesthesia and proprioception. Students will also be taught *semi-supine*, which will provide the knowledge to work on themselves.

Alexander Technique Basic Principles

1. ***Awareness*** – to notice what you are doing vs. what you think you are doing related to the tightening of your head-neck-spine in common activity.
2. ***Inhibition*** – to stop the immediate response to a stimulus before it happens. Specifically to not allow the unwanted tendencies of tightening the head-neck-spine to occur before proceeding with activities.
3. ***Direction*** – to *think* and *picture* the basic directions of the Primary Control:
   - Allow the neck to be free
   - Allow the head to release forward and up
   - Allow the back to lengthen and widen

It is important to use these tools and stay away from positioning the head-neck-spine. In the beginning, the most important aspect to work on is *Awareness*.

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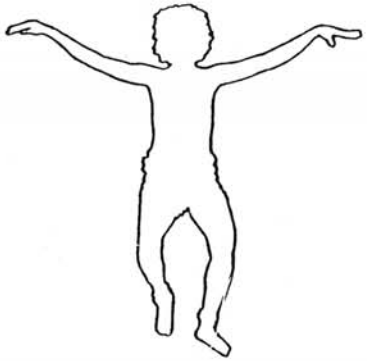
WHAT IS POISE?

Poise is a state of balanced alertness, a readiness to respond to the situation at hand.

Poise is posture, but more than just posture. A poised person is free of excess tension, alive and vibrant; not slack or slumped, but upright and present to the environment. He or she has an implicit confidence in their ability to handle what comes; they are not afraid of the unknown.

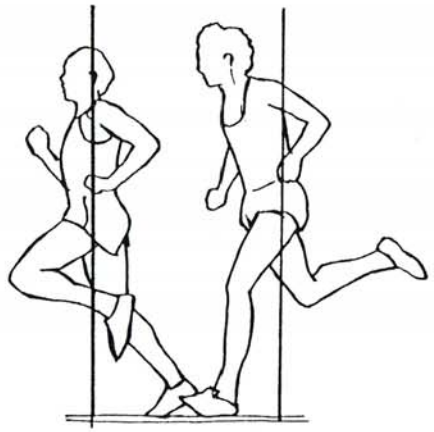


Poise is not something we ***do;*** it is ***how*** we do whatever we are doing.

Poise is necessary for the accomplished performance of any activity: a great musician, dancer or athlete, a moving speaker, a master craftsman, a charismatic leader, all have poise.

Poise is not only relevant to unusual accomplishments; everyday actions at work or play, weeding the garden, typing at a computer, can and should all be done with poise.

If we do not do something with poise, we work against ourselves. We throw ourselves out of balance and create awkward tensions. We no longer enjoy what we are doing, and we can't do it really well.



When we act without poise, we damage our bodies. We place unbalanced stress on our muscles, bones, and organs. In time, this becomes chronically knotted muscles, displaced vertebrae, pinched nerves, restricted breathing, poor digestion, bad circulation, and a host of other ills.

Local treatment, such as massage, chiropractic or drugs, may temporarily alleviate symptoms; but unless we regain our poise and stop damaging ourselves, old problems will recur or new ones arise. Much of what we refer to as "aging" is just the accumulated effect of poor posture, and can be reversed to an amazing extent.

Poise is a natural state. Wild animals, children, and many non-industrialized people have poise, which is why we see them as beautiful. True beauty emerges from poise.

Poise cannot be learned in the same way we learn to drive a car. It cannot be "done" voluntarily; trying to "stand up straight" can never be more than an imitation of good posture. Poise is controlled at the involuntary or sub-cortical levels of the brain, and can only be brought about indirectly.

Special teaching methods are needed for this; subtle, guiding touch, inner imagery, and carefully designed exercises, with an emphasis on how to ***stop*** getting in our own way.

The Alexander Technique is the only method in existence which focuses entirely on teaching poise. It uses a highly specialized and unique approach. It has stood the test of time, having been in existence for almost 100 years, and is taught in many schools of music and drama. Among its many famous students are John Dewey, educator and philosopher; Paul Newman; and James Gallway, flautist.

Personal Health | Jane E. Brody

A technique to shed muscle tension habits helps people suffering from chronic pain.

It would come as no surprise to teachers of the Alexander technique, a method of adjusting body postures to relieve damaging stresses, to hear that my neck is plagued by perpetual tension, occasional pain and even crippling spasms.

There is hardly a moment that I don't unconsciously tense the muscles between my head and upper back: when I read, write, drive, work at a computer, cook, sew, garden, play tennis, swim, cycle, dance, sit, stand, walk, talk on the phone, carry my groceries and even sleep.

Alexander teachers say the demands of modern life have fostered a virtual epidemic of neck, back and other problems related to misaligned posture and improperly tensed muscles. Their technique is finding an ever-widening role among people with chronic pain and tension. Basically, it helps people shed long-established habits and relearn how to use their bodies with ease and grace, as they once did in childhood.

Judith Leibowitz, a leading trainer of Alexander teachers, notes that muscle tension habits begin early, often in first graders learning to write. Ms. Leibowitz is the director of the teaching program at the American Center for the Alexander Technique in New York and is the co-author with Bill Connington of "The Alexander Technique," to be published in August (Harper & Row, $19.95).

What It Can Do

While not construed as a therapy, the Alexander technique has nonetheless proved therapeutic for countless people, most of whom seek help only after they are in pain or unable to perform their usual activities properly. "By teaching people better body mechanics," said Dr. Jack Stern, professor of neurosurgery at the New York Medical College, "it frequently enables patients to do away with pain — even the pain of a herniated disk — without having to undergo surgery."

The technique has long been appreciated by performing artists — dancers, musicians and actors, who use it to counter occupational tightness and injuries and to produce more fluid performances. In the last few years the technique has gained the attention of a growing number of ordinary people, many of whom have failed repeatedly to get permanent relief from conventional health professionals.

Randi Adler, for example, had been suffering from neck spasms for more than a decade. No one, from masseuse to physiatrist, had been able to relieve for more than a day the pain that she said began when she worked as a typesetter.

"I couldn't sit through a movie, couldn't go out to dinner, couldn't play cards, I was so uncomfortable all the time," she recalled.

Then a friend recommended the Alexander technique. In the first session, she said, she realized it had promise; she began to see how her misuse of her muscles was contributing to her problem. Gradually, through weekly sessions with Carole Crewdson, an Alexander teacher in Brooklyn, she gained a new awareness of her body and how she moved it.

Now, 10 months later, Mrs. Adler has shed her old neck-crippling habits and replaced them with more balanced and appropriate postures. She can now move without pain.

The Alexander technique helped Kathleen Usadi to undo the hunched posture she had assumed for 42 years until she developed back pain so disabling she could not carry a few books or groceries without pain. Within three and a half months of weekly Alexander training sessions, she said, she had a healthy back for the first time in five years.

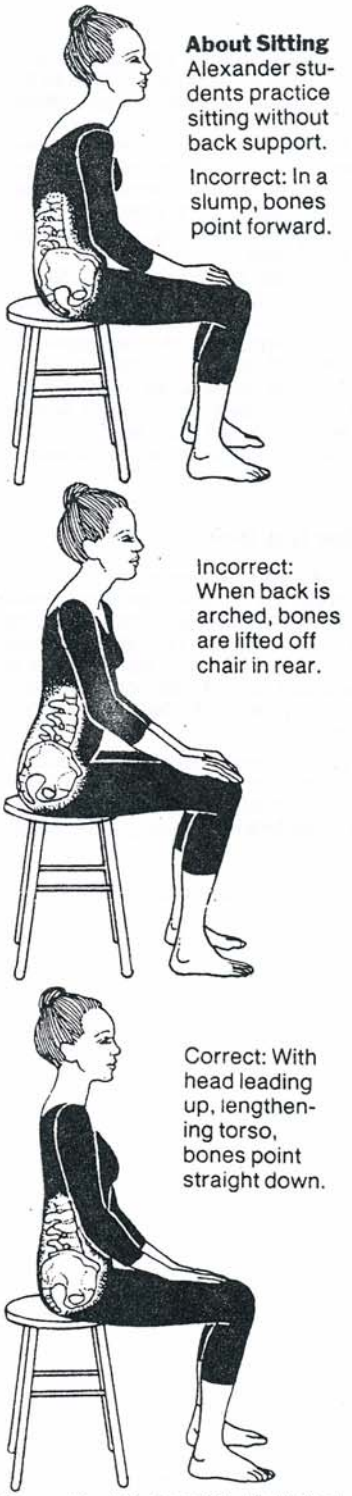
After listening to Alexander students, a critical consumer might be tempted to dismiss the technique as a panacea promoted by fringe therapists who subject desperate patients to unproved remedies.

And not surprisingly, the technique, which was originated by an actor, has been all but ignored (although not denounced) by the medical profession. Only a relative handful of physicians, mostly orthopedic surgeons, refer patients to Alexander teachers.

How It Began

A hundred years ago F. Matthias Alexander, a young Australian actor, discovered that unconscious habits of posture and movement can interfere with the performance of normal activities.

It all started because he was losing his ability to speak on stage. Distraught by the failure of medical consultants to restore his voice, he took matters into his own hands. Using mirrors, he analyzed his body movements as he recited Shakespeare and found that his voice was poorest when he adopted certain postures that seemed right for the part but were not right for his voice muscles. Gradually he worked out a new stance, retraining the action of his muscles until he had regained control of his voice.



Source: "Back Trouble," (Triad Publishing)
The New York Times/Illustrations by Wendy Frost

Posture errors often affect head, neck, shoulders and back.

Encouraged by a physician familiar with his method and motivated by observations that many people abuse their muscles when they stand, sit and move, Alexander began teaching people how to use their muscles properly. He also wrote extensively about the technique and trained others to teach it in Australia, Britain the United States.

Hundreds of therapists in North America have completed long courses to become certified Alexander teachers, and the technique is now part of required course work in a number of schools for performing artists, including the Juilliard School in New York and the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco.

How It Is Done

Alexander teachers start by observing the student's posture, movements and muscular tensions during various activities. Through touch and words, the student is made aware of muscular habits that can interfere with natural poise and smooth performance.

For example, Eleanor Rosenthal, an Alexander teacher from San Francisco, tells of violist whose left shoulder kept locking, causing pain, numbness in the hand and inability to move the head and arm. The problem made it nearly impossible for her to play.

The violist reported: "After my first lesson I noticed immediate improvement in the left shoulder area. The shoulder never locked again after the second lesson, and I have probably increased the number of hours I play."

The focal point of Alexander therapy is the positioning of the head, 10 to 15 percent of the body's total weight perched atop a slender rod, the spinal column. With two-thirds of the head's weight in front of the spine, it tends to fall forward (as it does when you doze off sitting up). The muscles in the back of the neck must keep it balanced. Some people adopt a military posture: chest out, shoulders back, chin in. Others tilt their heads back and lead with their chins. Still others bend their heads forward and hunch their shoulders. All such abnormal postures create undue stress on the spine and its supporting tissues.

The Alexander method teaches a more relaxed and natural posture and movement patterns that balance the head while relaxing the neck muscles. It also strives to free the neck from having to participate in every move the body makes.

Finding a Teacher

Teachers of the Alexander Technique vary widely in costs and methods. Typically, students attend weekly 30-to-50-minute sessions, at about $25 to $60 each, for a few weeks to several months.

Look for a teacher who has completed a recognized course and who has been certified by an Alexander training center, like the American Center for the Alexander Technique Inc., at 129 West 67th Street, New York, N.Y. 10023. The North American Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique, at Box 806, Ansonia Station, New York, N.Y. 10023, phone (212) 866-5640, maintains a list of certified members.

Books on the technique include "Back Trouble," by Deborah Caplan, at $9.95 from the Triad Publishing Company, 1110 Northwest Eighth Avenue, Gainesville, Fla. 32601, and "The Alexander Technique," by Judith Leibowitz and Bill Connington, at $19.95 from Harper and Row, due in August.

Developing Power And Sensitivity Through Movement Awareness Training

by Paul Linden

FROM "AMERICAN MUSIC TEACHER"

Performance difficulties are marvelous opportunities for learning. Music comes not only from the instrument, but also from *within*, and performance problems point to aspects of the self that interfere with musical growth. Therefore, musical growth involves not only honing technical skills but also working on the inner self to achieve power, sensitivity, balance, and harmony. By focusing on performance problems, discovering what weaknesses they reveal, and learning to replace weakness with strength, musicians can reach their highest potentials in music making.

As one example of this process, a pianist I worked with experienced pain in her right wrist when she played at the right end of the keyboard. I noticed that when she reached to the left with her left hand, she moved in a fluid, sinuous way, shifting her weight onto her right sitbone. However, when she reached to the right with her right hand, she tipped to the right like a flag pole falling, again putting all the weight on her right sitbone. To resist falling to the right, she stiffened her torso and automatically stiffened her whole right arm and hand as well. Naturally, when she executed precise, rapid movements with rigid joints and muscles, the result was discomfort and pain.

Rather than simply try to teach her the correct way to use her right hand, I had her play the wrong way, feeling small details of breathing, muscle tone, and body feeling. In a surprised voice she exclaimed that she felt afraid. I showed her how to go deeply into the body sensations she was feeling, and she realized she was re-experiencing the fear she felt towards her first piano teacher, her mother, who sat to her right and yelled at her when she made mistakes. In the end, the pianist associated feelings of fear with the right end of the piano and moved toward it in a stiff, fearful way.

This example illustrates how fundamental mind-body awareness work is. What the pianist had felt and experienced as a girl was literally stored in her body, out of her conscious awareness, and was affecting her current playing. Very often, what look like simple problems in musical performance are inextricably bound up with deep emotional and spiritual issues and cannot be addressed without dealing with the whole person. It is therefore crucial that musicians attend to the whole person as they practice, perform, and teach.

The pianist and I worked with breathing and movement exercises to help her find this internal state and use it to overcome her emotional and spiritual blocks and play in a way that fulfilled more of her musical potential.

Problems Musicians Face

The difficulties that musicians encounter fall into three interrelated categories — physical strain, anxiety, and non-specific performance inability. Physical strain includes a number of elements, such as general postural problems from sitting or standing for hours while playing; instrument-specific problems such as pain in the bowing arm or pedal foot; or physical tension caused by anxiety.

Anxiety can stem from such sources as being intimidated by audiences, feeling intimidated by the instrument, or feeling unable to communicate freely with fellow performers. Fears of exposing weaknesses or of failing certainly are part of the anxieties performers face. In addition, experiencing physical strain can cause anxiety about performing. A non-specific problem that often presents itself is falling short of performance goals. The musician may perform very well, but without being able to identify any specific difficulty, simply cannot achieve the control and refinement she desires.

The various forms of difficulties that musicians face are interconnected. There really is no separation between mind, body, and spirit. Choices about what to be and how to act in the world are intimately connected with a person's overall habits of posture and movement. Thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and intentions *shape* and are *shaped by* muscle tone, breathing, body alignment, energy flow, and movement.

In the deepest sense, the problems musicians face stem from some form of separation from the self. For example, that could be failing to feel or notice that a particular posture was causing physical strain and damage to a specific joint. Or it could be failing to realize that past fears are inhibiting present performance. In any case, not feeling 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.

Body Awareness And Physical Thinking

Body awareness is an effective tool for addressing and learning about the *whole* self. Music is as much an emotional and spiritual endeavor as a physical one, but focusing on the physical aspect of music is useful because what people do with their bodies is easily observable. The body is the concrete aspect of the self and offers a tangible way of examining and overcoming restrictive patterns.

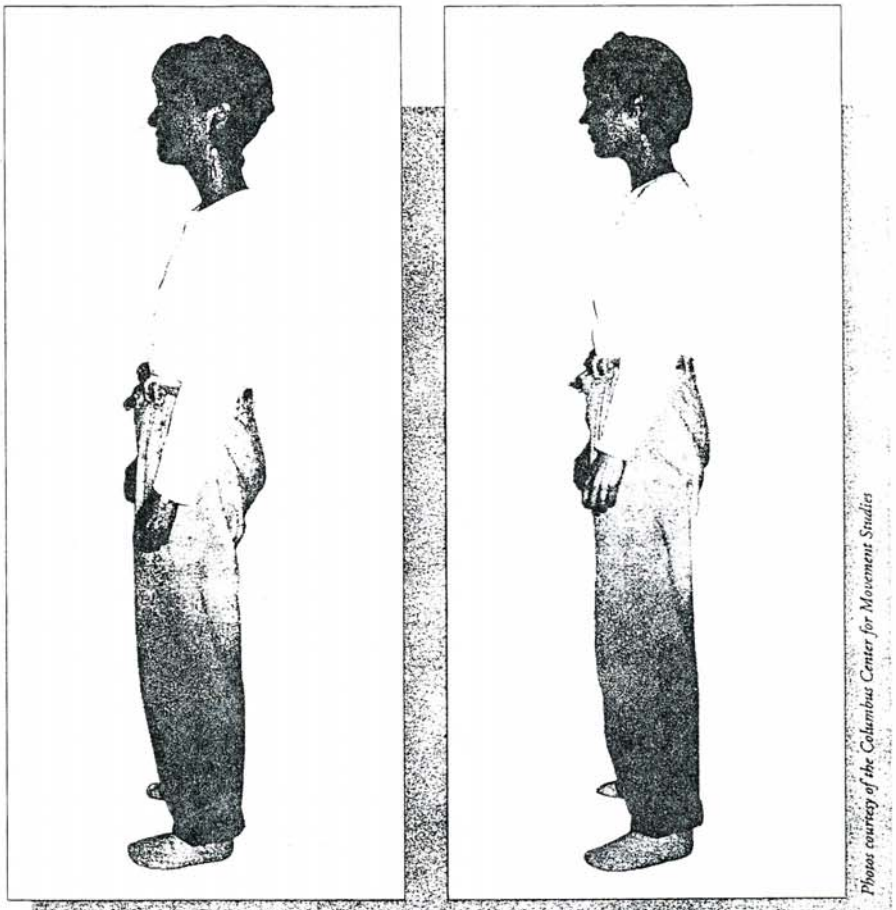
Paul Linden is a specialist in body and movement awareness education and a co-founder of the Columbus Center for Movement Studies in Columbus, Ohio. He has his Ph.D. in physical education, is an authorized instructor of the Feldenkrais Method®, holds black belts in Aikido and Karate, and is the developer of Being In Movement® training.

In teaching individuals how to perform better, I try to identify the performance situations that they find threatening, confusing, irritating, or awkward. In order to help people monitor what they are doing and feeling in these situations, I teach them how to report their experiences in language that refers to specific body sensations and events. This concrete way of thinking and speaking means pinning down both mental and physical elements by defining them in terms of observable, physical response patterns and tangible physical sensations. Students learn to specify what they are feeling and doing by giving detailed and complete statements of precisely *what* they are feeling in their bodies and *where* in their bodies they feel it. I call this "physical thinking."

Physical thinking helps people notice the sensory contents of their experience by forcing them to maintain a pattern of self-monitoring, focusing on details of breathing, muscle tone, posture, and movement. This allows them to pin down the specific experiences they attach to the vague words we usually use to talk about ourselves.

Physical thinking also forces people to notice that their responses are *actions* that they choose and do, thereby enabling them to assume responsibility for themselves. It also allows people to begin taking a new relation to their own experience. Rather than being overwhelmed by negative feelings or negative performance results, people stay focused on simply observing what they are doing inside of themselves. Most importantly, physical thinking allows people to evaluate and change their responses.

Once musicians can monitor their responses, they then need to construct new responses which will be *effective* in producing a better sound and more *comfortable* to perform. "Center" is the key to comfortable, effective performance. "Center" is equally an emotional, spiritual, and physical state. The same principles describe emotional or spiritual center and centered use of the skeleton and muscles. "Center" is balanced and open, a fusion of power and sensitivity. This state can be approached through physical training processes, some of which are described in the next sections.



Photos courtesy of the Columbus Center for Movement Studies

The photo on the left shows habitual body use, with the weight on the heels and the back collapsed. The photo on the right shows how even distribution of weight on feet, legs, and back provide more efficient support.

Developing Sensitivity

Sensitivity involves softness, awareness, adaptability, mobility, and fluidity. Power involves solidity, weight, decision-making, determination, and stability. Power and sensitivity are intimately connected. Power that is not balanced by sensitivity will be harsh, tense, and uncontrolled, and sensitivity that is not balanced by power will be weak and ineffective. Balancing and integrating power and sensitivity allows comfortable, effective, and graceful action.

Sensitivity involves softening, being ready to receive and feel. If you are physically or emotionally tense and armored, you will find it difficult to feel yourself, to move freely, to communicate effectively with your fellow performers and the audience, and to feel the music itself. Sensitivity is therefore the foundation for effective and appropriate action. Looking at sensitivity from a body awareness perspective, the development of sensitivity involves softening the pelvic area, the abdomen, the breath, and the chest.

Pelvic Opening

How do you use the muscles in your pelvis and abdomen? Many people breathe shallowly and hold their abdomen and pelvic musculature tense and sucked in, which produces a feeling of physical and emotional constraint and weakness (though it may be so familiar that they never notice).

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In order to increase your awareness of how you hold these body elements, consciously tighten your abdomen, anal sphincter muscles, and genitals, and then walk around. Notice how stiff and strained this makes your legs, hips, and lower back — your movement as a whole. Holding tension in these body areas while singing or playing an instrument makes it impossible to move freely and perform well.

Now stand and alternately tighten your abdomen and relax it. Let it plop out when you relax it. Next, stand and release your abdomen without tightening it beforehand. People generally experience a noticeable release even though they had not first tightened their abdomens consciously. They realize that they had been unconsciously holding themselves tightly. For greater relaxation, allow your genital and anal muscles to relax along with your abdomen.

As a further step, touch your abdomen and experiment with your breathing until you discover how to soften your abdomen and let your breathing drop into the pit of your abdomen, expanding both your abdomen and lower back as you inhale. This is frequently a novel sensation since many people suck in their abdomen as they inhale, thereby constraining the free operation of the diaphragm and rigidifying the chest and back.

When people try walking or moving in this overall state of pelvic release, they generally feel that their movement is easier, better balanced, more graceful, more coordinated, and more solidly connected to the ground. This new physical state allows freer and more relaxed performance.

In addition to the physical benefits, this internal physical softness creates a psychological state of relaxed alertness as well. If you examine what happens when you feel nervous or anxious about some element of your performance, you will feel the physical components of that anxiety. Feelings of fear, anger, anxiety, and confusion always involve some form of constriction and twisting in muscles, breathing, posture, and movement. These responses are generally both the physical core of the experience of anxiety and ways to cope with anxiety-producing situations. When people feel vulnerable and threatened, they twist away from the situation, restrict their breathing, and stiffen themselves to reduce the feelings of anxiety. However, constriction and twisting render the person unable to act freely and effectively to deal with the situation, and feeling incapable of effective action increases and perpetuates the anxiety.

If you use the physical techniques for pelvic softening when you feel anxious about a performance situation, you will find that you are able to create and maintain a relaxed and alert mental and physical state. Whatever difficulty you face will feel much less threatening and uncomfortable, and this will enable you to deal with the situation more effectively, thereby further reducing the anxiety you feel. Playing an instrument or singing from this state of pelvic release is much freer, more spontaneous, and more outgoing.

Softening The Chest

What is the relationship between your abdomen and your chest? Try elevating (puffing up) your chest and relaxing your abdomen at the same time. Notice that elevating your chest results in tension in your chest, back, and abdomen. Relaxing your abdomen and your breathing necessarily involves softening your chest and letting it fall into its natural alignment. Many people try to "stand tall" by elongating and elevating the front of their bodies, but that prevents soft breathing and is contrary to what is needed for comfortable and effective body use.

Another important aspect of sensitivity has to do with a particular feeling in the chest. This can be experienced through working with imagery and body responses. Everyone has something or someone — perhaps a friend, a lover, a child, a flower, or a work of art — that makes their heart smile. Stand with your eyes closed, imagine whatever makes your heart smile, and notice the changes in your body. Most people experience a softening and warmth in their chests, and a "freeing up" over their whole bodies. These sensations of being "warm-hearted" or "tender-hearted" are the bodily manifestations of love or compassion.

Now imagine someone or something that is a constant source of irritation and obstruction. Notice what happens in your body now. Negative feelings such as fear, anger, and surprise produce constriction, hardness, and imbalance in breathing and in the chest. Creating the sensation of love in the chest is a way of replacing such feelings with love. In this physical state, people will indeed act in genuinely loving ways, and acting from this state is an effective means of smoothing out the difficult interpersonal situations that often arise in performance situations.

Power

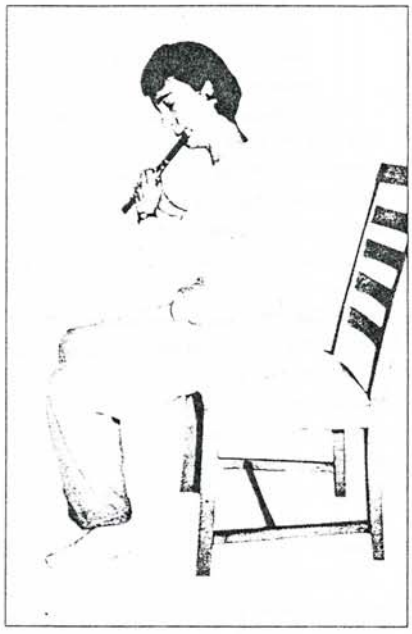
Power involves such qualities of body organization as solidity, weight, rootedness, resoluteness, and tenacity. Power is involved with the elements of force and control. Without power, you cannot effectively carry out your decisions. Physical and emotional power are rooted in a particular way of using the pelvis, spinal column, arms, and legs.

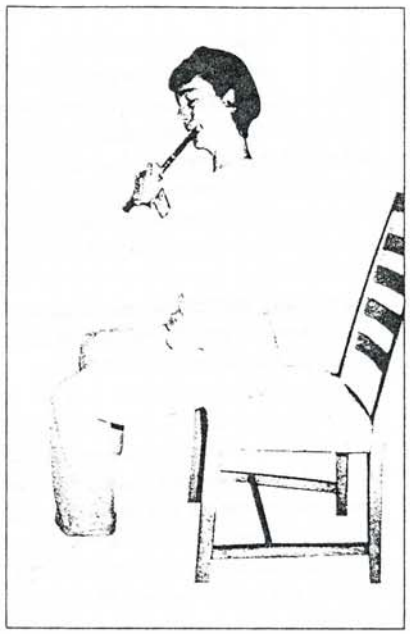
Pelvic Alignment

Learning how to align the pelvis and spinal column for efficient support involves rotating the pelvis. Sit on a firm, flat chair (one with as little bucket or lean as possible) without leaning against the back support is the best position for working on this.

Slump down and sit up straight. What part of your body do you move to create the action of rising up out of the slump or of falling down into it? Most people believe that they straighten themselves by throwing their shoulders back or straightening their back, but this is really a function of pelvic rotation. When the pelvis rotates backward, the stack of vertebrae has no foundation on which to rest causing it to curve and slump down. (The pelvis can be thought of as a bowl which contains the viscera, and "backward" is the direction the bowl would rotate to spill out the viscera toward the back of the body).

Slump down, feeling how your chest caves in, your head falls forward and down, and your back rounds itself. Then try rotat-





Photos courtesy of the Columbus Center for Movement Studies

During the flutist's body awareness lesson, she realized how she habitually "collapsed," as shown in the photo on the left, with the weight falling on the rear edge of the pelvis. In the photo on the right, the torso is placed on top of the pelvis, providing support.

ing your pelvis forward. You will feel how rotating the pelvis forward to the correct position provides a foundation for the spinal column and the torso as a whole, thereby creating upright posture.

There are two very different ways of rotating the pelvis forward. The most effective and comfortable form of forward rotation uses muscles deep in the core of the body rather than muscles along the surface of the back. To understand this, consider that there are basically two ways to tip a bowl forward — lifting the rear edge or lowering the front edge. Using the extensor muscles of the back to lift the rear edge of the pelvis arches the back and creates tension and discomfort, and this is why everyone will sit up "straight" for a minute when exhorted to and then give it up as uncomfortable. Using the deep, internal psoas muscle (which runs between the head of the thighbone and the front of the spinal column) to create a movement which in effect drops the front edge of the pelvis creates a very strong and comfortable physical organization of the pelvis and spinal column.

There is a movement experiment which may help you find this new pelvic movement. Sit toward the front edge of a firm, flat chair with your knees spread apart, your feet flat on the ground, and your lower legs perpendicular to the ground (not tucked underneath you or stretched way out in front). Now, instead of moving your pelvis forward by shortening or pulling in your lower back, roll your pelvis forward by moving your genitals forward and down so that they point toward the floor. You will almost have the feeling that you are going to sit on top of your genitals. This movement takes place in the creases at the top of your thighs (which is where the hip sockets are). Your back and shoulders will not be actively engaged in muscular work but will move simply as a result of the pelvic rotation. If this hint isn't enough for you to find the new movement, try not to feel frustrated. It can be a difficult skill to learn on your own.

Using the deep core of the body rather than the back to organize your sitting produces an experience of effortless physical strength and stability, and it indicates how movements can be strong, stable, and comfortable when they are executed with correct relaxation and biomechanics. This form of body organization also produces a psychological feeling of personal stability and strength of will. The sensation of power is crucial in developing an ability to handle the personal challenges of performing.

Speaking more specifically, many musicians experience back and neck strain from playing for hours in a seated position. This new form of body organization allows the bones to support the weight of the body in an architecturally optimal manner. The weight of the body is placed on a line through the head and torso and rests squarely on the sitbones, and this vastly decreases the muscular effort and strain involved in sitting. Beyond making long periods of sitting more comfortable, it allows musicians to use more of their energy for the performance itself.

Leg Use

Another problem that musicians frequently experience involves strain produced by the legs not supporting the back. When you are sitting, it may not be obvious that your legs do support the back, but certainly it is clear that they do when you stand. Examining the movement of walking is helpful in understanding how the legs support the back in all positions.

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Why does your body move forward across the floor when you walk? Many people believe that they move because they pick up a leg, move it forward, and then drop their weight onto it. To develop awareness of what you do when you walk, try standing and pushing on a wall, with your feet far enough from the wall that your body inclines forward quite a bit. Usually people believe that they are pushing on the wall with their arms and shoulders, unaware of the contribution of legs and hips.

Try bending your knees deeply and then straightening your legs rapidly — as though you were trying to push the floor away from the wall. Notice that when you do this, the push on the wall from your hands increases. Actually, it is the traction of your feet on the floor and the shove back and down with your legs that create the forward shove on the wall.

After this experiment, many people notice for the first time the power of the lower half of their bodies. Our culture tends to value the top half of the body as the source of manipulation and control, while ignoring the power of the lower body. However, without being fully alive in the pelvis and legs, people won't access the full flow of their creative life energy, and they will feel that they cannot find solid ground on which to stand.

This awareness can transform your walking style. As you walk, step forward by pressing down and back with the ball of your back foot. Feel how the back/down energy of the foot reflects off the floor into a forward/up movement of the body. When they walk this way, people generally experience that they have a ground to stand on and a foundation for themselves. Their posture opens upward. Their walk becomes more erect, clearer, and more energetic. When people conceive of walking as falling down onto their forward foot rather than pushing off their back foot, they sag and fall down as they walk. They droop. The new way of moving is mechanically more efficient and powerful, and it is also more confident and alert.

Performing in a spirit of sensitivity and power, people find that they can maintain a strong and compassionate connection to themselves, their fellow performers, the audience, and the music.

This new way of moving produces the feeling that the body is more "knit together." By feeling and working with the legs as the support for the torso, people can move in more effective and comfortable ways. If musicians are fully alive in their legs when they are moving, their pelvis and lower back will not sag. Their whole torso will be energized and supported, and that will improve their overall posture and their playing. When they sing or play an instrument in a standing position, understanding how to effectively support their body on their legs will result in better performance.

Arm Use

Arm strain is a significant problem for many musicians, but arm strain is always part of an overall body problem. There is a simple exercise to demonstrate how pelvic functioning affects arm use. Sit on a flat chair without touching the backrest, and then raise and lower your arms in front of you. Now slump and feel how your pelvis rolls back and the torso collapses. Notice how your collar bones and shoulders roll forward and down; try raising your arms forward and up from this position. Most people feel that the range of motion of the arms is restricted. The top of the upper arm hits a "barrier," resulting in considerable tension in the neck.

Next adopt a straight "military" posture, throwing back your shoulders and straightening your back. Raising their arms from this position, most people feel that the bottom of the upper arm (near the armpit) is pulled down. Again the arms cannot move freely upward, and people experience considerable tension in the middle of the back and neck as well.

Returning to the anatomically proper pelvic alignment, people feel that their backs are relaxed and free and that they can raise their arms farther with less effort. This is important in playing any instrument. If the arms are freer, there will be less fatigue in playing. The arms will feel lighter and more powerful, improving the musician's control and the resulting sound.

Beyond freedom of movement, pelvic use is also important in actively generating power in arm movements. When the pelvis is not used correctly, arm movements requiring power will be weak, strained, and fatiguing. Two examples of arm movements requiring power are holding up weights and pressing down with force. These actions can be seen in holding up instruments such as a flute or violin, and pressing down forcefully to produce loud sounds by striking piano keys or bowing cello strings.

When people hold a weight in front of their bodies, they generally counterbalance the forward and down force of the weight by leaning their head and shoulders back. You can observe this pattern by asking someone to stand and pick up a weight and hold it at arm's length. However, that way of supporting the weight creates a swayback curve and compresses the lower back, which results in strain and fatigue both in the arms and the back. Instead,

aligning the pelvis correctly and sticking the tailbone slightly back and out allows the pelvis and lower torso rather than the shoulders and upper torso to act as the counterbalance to the forward weight. This opens and lengthens the back and frees up the hips and legs. It also allows the weight to be supported by leg muscles rather than by the weaker back and arm muscles. All this results in much easier and stronger weight support as well as better balance and freedom of movement.

The legs and pelvis also energize the arms in delivering power. To demonstrate this process, imagine the similarity between chopping a log with an ax and striking a piano key. When the whole body is involved and the pelvis is grounded, there is a powerful and penetrating, yet relaxed and smooth quality, to the power delivery. The power does not bounce off the surface of the log or key but penetrates deep within. If the strong muscles of the legs and pelvis do not contribute their power to the arm movements, then the arm muscles will have to act alone. The arms will become strained and tense, and the sound thus produced will reflect the fatigue and strain the musician experiences. The insecurity or hesitancy of a power stroke produced by just the arms can be clearly heard in the lack of richness and depth of sound produced. However, performing with integrated movements results in a full-bodied power stroke and a rich and full sound.

Movement Awareness Methods

The teaching approach described in this article is part of a field which over the last twenty years has been emerging as a unified profession. It is called by the people working within it "somatic education." This term was introduced by Thomas Hanna, who in 1976 established the journal *Somatics*. He was a philosophy professor and a practitioner of the Feldenkrais Method of movement awareness training, and more than anyone else, he provided the overarching conceptual framework which began the process of coalescing a wide range of bodywork and movement disciplines into a single coherent field.

Somatic education is an educational process which examines the structure and function of the body as a process of lived experience, perception, and consciousness. Somatic education methods work with the whole human being at once, though different methods focus in different ways and to different degrees on each of the elements of body, mind, and spirit. Generally speaking, somatic methods teach students to observe, understand, and deal with objective facts of posture and movement as both manifestations and causes of subjective states of awareness. Both in the teaching itself and in related literature, there tends to be a dialogue between objective, third-person language and subjective, first-person language.

There are a broad variety of somatic methods, which take very different approaches. Among the older, more influential methods are Alexander Work, the Feldenkrais Method, Rolfing, Laban Movement Analysis, and Charlotte Selver's Sensory Awareness. There are many other somatic methods, such as Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen's Body/Mind Centering, Emilie Conrad Da'Oud's Continuum Work, Hellerwork, Aston Patterning, Trager Work, Hanna Somatic Education, Rosen Work, and Pauls' Ortho-Bionomy.

The material in this article derives from Paul Linden's work, called Being In Movement. His work grew from a problem he experienced twenty years ago as he was teaching Aikido (a non-violent Japanese martial art). He was examining the relation between attentional focus in self-defense techniques and postural balance. Though to understand this he had to develop his own tools for investigating the body as a process of consciousness, his work is philosophically tied to Aikido in the focus on balance, stability, mobility, power, love, and harmony.

Conclusion

Habits of body and movement affect performance. Tense, unbalanced patterns of action block the ability to play. The self-awareness and self-control procedures described in this article allow people to monitor themselves and create a state in which they can concentrate well, move freely, perceive sensitively, and exert efficient power.

Performing in a spirit of sensitivity and power, people find that they can maintain a strong and compassionate connection to themselves, their fellow performers, the audience, and the music. They find that their movements are softer, more graceful, stronger, more economical, and more effective. They find that their sound has a depth, richness, and intimacy that provides a new dimension to the music. They can actually create more music with less effort. Playing from the whole self makes the music whole. *AMT*

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