

STAT news

The Newsletter from the Society of
Teachers of the Alexander Technique

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The beginning of a new chapter...



So yes! Registration is open!
www.now2022.de

Alexander Technique is now a fixture on the curriculum of Krakow's famous Academy of Music,
and Dorota Orczyk shares her experience from initial proposal to running the course (see p12)

The beginning of a new chapter...

Dorota Orczyk recounts staging posts on her AT journey and the evolution towards her current role at The Academy of Music in Krakow

It began over twenty years ago and it has been a fascinating journey ever since...

Each step along the way was a bold new life experience; first as a passionate enthusiast of AT, then later enrolling at the teacher training program in New York City and finally obtaining my certificate at the Alexander Technique Centre Vienna. But my life dream has always been to go back to my hometown of Krakow, Poland and teach the technique at my *alma mater*, The Academy of Music. And now I can say that I've made that dream a reality!

I first encountered the Alexander Technique in 1999 while reading "The Art Practicing" by Madeline Bruser. The author dedicated one paragraph to the technique which sounded quite intriguing but at the same time, somehow very familiar to me as a musician. Playing an instrument is a highly complex activity which requires physical coordination and very refined control of body movements. Most musicians instinctively look for ease and freedom of movement which will later translate to freedom of playing. I quickly realized that I needed to learn more about this technique and search for that freedom.

And so I decided to embark on this journey and signed up for my first lesson in New York. However, the path of life does not always follow a straight line and my full-time enrollment in a teacher training program would not happen for another fifteen years. But the spark that ignited my curiosity after that first lesson never faded and it was worth waiting to pursue my dream.

At the beginning of my training, I decided to put all my insights and memories on paper and this continued through to the end of my training. I would change my colourful notebooks every season. In addition to documenting almost every day of my journey I added stories I'd heard to my own. And this habit of journaling has continued to this day as my library of colourful notebooks grows.

An early entry from my diary: "June 2014, toward the end of my first term. A hot Spring day in NY..."

I was sitting in a chair by the door, facing the window in our studio on 39th Street waiting for my turn with John Nicholls.

It was my favorite spot. The view wasn't the most captivating. A typical grey, office building, common in this area of Manhattan. But if I "stretched my eyes" a little to the right I could glimpse a bit of the sky which was crystal blue that day.

As I learned later on, by keeping my eyes flexible and looking beyond that grey building I could see so much more. I became more aware not only of the environment around me but also of the world outside. Suddenly the scenery I was watching every day wasn't boring anymore and seemed to be more appealing. By developing panoramic vision I no longer had to "stretch my eyes".



Students enrolled to learn about AT at The Academy of Music

During the turn I would often ask John many questions and he would begin by saying; "You see Dorota..." His replies were lessons in themselves; he would refer to his studies and conversations he had had with the first generation teachers; those few privileged enough to learn directly from FM Alexander. It was always fascinating to listen to John. I was overwhelmed by new feelings, unfamiliar sensations and sometimes confusing instructions which would eventually make sense. My old instincts were still strong and deceptive, tied to many years of habits. I knew I shouldn't trust them because they would only prevent me from changing. But it would take time to develop the new and more reliable sensory appreciation to connect the words of the directions with their kinesthetic meaning and awaken the lost sixth sense.

Sometimes we would be silent, having a quiet conversation between two nervous systems. He would guide me from standing to sitting a few times with his gentle but firm hands, conveying a clear message.

This very common, everyday activity can reveal a lot about the person's use. To some degree how you sit and stand is going to carry over into everything you do.

As Alexander wrote;

"People will think I am teaching them to get in and out of chairs. It is nothing of the sort. I am teaching them to inhibit a reaction to a stimulus that always puts them wrong and learn how to deal with it."

Every day was exciting, full of new discoveries and possibilities that opened



The Academy of Music

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the path in my search for that freedom and gave me liberation from subconscious patterns of thinking. Even though it was just the beginning of my own exploration and experimentation with the technique, I knew I wanted to one day work with musicians. As a pianist and organist I understood and appreciated the value of the technique and was keen to share my new approach with other musicians.

And then one morning in January of 2015 my world turned upside down with an abrupt announcement from John. He told the class that he would be closing his school in NYC to return to England at the end of the year. I wasn't the only one in class who couldn't hold back tears that day.

The next couple of months were very productive but there was a cloud of uncertainty hanging over me as we finished the year in John's studio on the Upper West Side. His departure was bittersweet; on one hand I was extremely happy for him, but on the other, I was losing my teacher and a mentor.

I continued my training in New York for a while and eventually traveled to Vienna to work with Michael Parkinson. That period with him and other teachers was a very rewarding experience which only broadened my knowledge and perspectives. I graduated in 2017 and over the next few months worked hard in planning ahead for the future in Krakow.

Success came in the Spring of 2018 when I gave my first lecture to music teachers and students in Krakow. I was very excited to go back to my hometown this time as an AT teacher. I came back the following year for another lecture inviting Michael Parkinson as my guest and partner.

All the workshops were successful; the students were curious and wanted to learn more. I was thrilled by the positive feedback and started planning future workshops. But as happened before, my plans were put on hold.

Proposing the course

The year of 2020 was very difficult for obvious reasons but not completely wasted and uneventful. Despite the fact that my lectures were cancelled and the entire world came to a halt because of the pandemic, a very important meeting took place in the Fall of 2020 at The Academy of Music with the newly elected Vice Rector Professor Jan Jazownik. My proposal that the Alexander Technique be included in the curriculum at The Academy was received with great enthusiasm among the faculty. After a follow-up meeting in the Spring of 2021 it was approved and I am happy to announce that the AT was added to the core curriculum as a faculty subject.

I created a ten-week program which was available for undergraduate students beginning in October 2021. The course covered the basics of the technique. The two-hour classes were taken weekly in groups of up to 10 students

which allowed for some "hands on" work and discussions of the main principles and concepts of FM's work. We were exploring a new theme each week and setting the ground for a more detailed and comprehensive study of FM's work in the future. I hope that this introductory course gives the students a better understanding of the technique and they will develop their own curiosity and continue their own self-observation and exploration.

And with time, they will appreciate and embody the wonderful integration of the human structure, functioning, thinking and feeling as a part of their daily experience.

I am deeply grateful to HM Rector of the Academy, Professor Wojciech Widlak and to all those who supported this project and recognize the importance of the AT. While the Academy stands amongst the most prestigious music institutions in Europe, it is our shared goal and vision that the introduction of this program will provide valuable resources to fill an important missing "gap" in a student's general education.

By building on the work of previous AT teachers, we hope that students will learn and apply Alexander Principles that can help them make conscious choices, take control of every aspect of their lives and cultivate a wellbeing culture. The Alexander Technique did change my posture but it was only a "side effect" of something much greater, it changed my 'attitude'. And the initially confusing directions became very clear intentions in my life; to stay open, accept, allow it to happen rather than resist.

I will continue to add to this chapter and look forward to sharing with you my discoveries, thoughts and new memories in the near future.

I would like to conclude this article with a quote I used in my last lecture by Galileo Galilei:

"You cannot teach a man anything; you can only help him find it within himself".

My role as a teacher is to simply ignite the spark.

To be continued...

