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PERFORMANCE • ACTORS & ACTING



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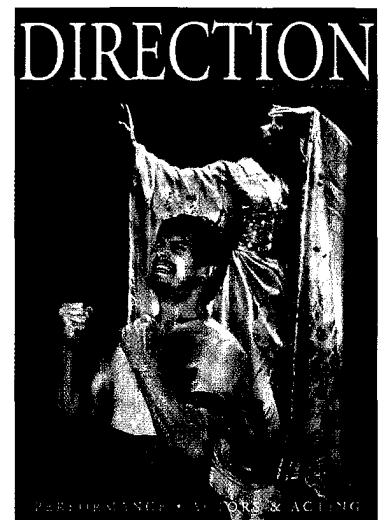
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Once again I have many people to thank for the culmination of this issue. Firstly to Dani, my assistant editor who has saved me hours of work with her talents. Jean-Louis for collecting a good selection of material, True Characters for images, Sue Laurie for dinner, David Billingham for lunch, Marcus Sly for the cuppa and to all the fantastic reviewers and contributors who faithfully support DIRECTION with their tireless work each issue. Also to Peggy Williams, Erica Whittaker, Walter Carrington, Marjory Barlow, Shirley Crawford and Ken Thompson, who appear in IAD and kindly allowed their photos to be taken whilst I visited recently. Sadly the photo of Marjory Barlow didn't turn out, and I neglected to collect a travel snap of Walter Carrington and myself...but he is here in good spirit! Thank you to all for the tremendous support I received at the recent STAT AGM in Edinburgh.

All images "courtesy University of Washington", taken from *Two Sisters and a Piano*, by Nilo Cruz, performed December 2002 for the Studio 201 series.

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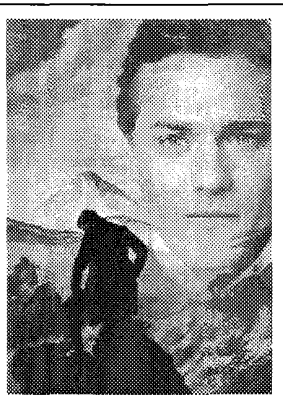


Cover Photo

Cover photo courtesy of the Stratford Festival of Canada. From *The Adventures of Pericles*, part of the 2003 season. Actors Jonathon Goad and Nazneen Contractor, photographer Gabor Jurina.

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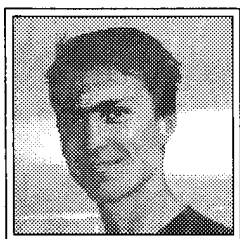
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EDITORIAL

by Paul Cook

"I couldn't ride a bike with crutches without the aid of the AT".

This priceless testimonial by a trainee actor captured my attention some months ago and I have since claimed it as a daily reminder of the importance of Alexander Technique in my own life.

My bike is, of course, DIRECTION and the crutches are my countless other altruistic intentions bubbling up under this inherited banner. But when in good health, and independent of politics, why not exploit the potential that it offers?

So many remarkable institutions around the world integrate Alexander Technique into their acting programs, but sadly, 40 pages of journal could never do all of them justice. A Performance Directory is the only way to mention them all. Instead, what we've provided in this issue is a snapshot—a show case if you like—of Alexander Technique in Performance, as it stands, 48 years on from FM's departure. Articles have been commissioned to cater for trainee and professional

actors, Directors, University faculties and Alexander teachers. Every branch of the Performing tree—I hope—will be swayed by the breeze of potential that the Alexander Technique offers.

Professionalism is gripping our community with vigour. It is a topic of contention for many, and all but a foregone conclusion for others. Marcus Sly fills our Viewpoint this issue and I really look forward to reader responses as we chart a course through these new waters...as a community.

I implore anyone who is considering writing for DIRECTION to either: visit the website regularly to check the "future issues" page, or join our mailing list. Whilst we do consider all submissions, those arriving on a particular topic after deadline cannot be included due to our tight editorial schedule. My apologies to those who missed the boat for this issue, a consolation is in the planning stages now... another crutch in the making! ■

ISSUE EDITORIAL

by Jean-Louis Rodrigue



Aldous Huxley believed that we are in a race between survival and disaster. He wrote continuously in "Brave New World" about the necessity of our understanding the politics of media. There is no doubt that film, television, and the digital mass media have changed how we think, how we perceive, feel and move. Michael Kahn, Artistic Director of the Shakespeare Theatre in Washington, D.C., describes the situation most succinctly, "Most young actors arrive without a sense of past history of American theatre or actual theatre role models. In many cases, more physical approaches are required...they have to use their body, their physicality and their imagination". As Michael Howard, an acting teacher in New York confirms, "Mass media hurts. It encourages conventionalised character, reinforces cliché acting, sentimentality, minimalist naturalism, a gush of tears, and mindless aggression".

During the past thirty years, the Alexander Technique has been a fundamental tool in the curriculum of the major acting schools and professional acting programs at universities around the world. It has been an invaluable way to access what is authentic in the actor, get to the core of the individual, and reveal in a most astonishing way the rawness of the human condition. In all performing circumstances, there is a general consensus that psycho-physical well-being is important to an actor's imaginative growth and is essential to the development of his means of expression. And yet, there still exists a lot of debate and confusion

as to how to best use the principles of the AT to help the performer.

What I have learned from the twenty-three years of teaching the AT and the thirty-two years of working with actors and directors is very simple. The most important things in acting are having full access to your self and the world in which you live, understanding the force of habit, and how it works in everyday life, and having the bravery to live outside of habit and speak the truth. In this issue of DIRECTION, my intention is to bring into focus the different ways teachers, directors and performing artists can apply the principles of the AT to their training and performance.

In order to illuminate the subject, I have brought together an exceptional group of AT teachers to speak about their work and expertise. These teachers represent a wide cross-section of teaching styles and training backgrounds. What they have in common is excellence in their commitment and skills to teach the AT as applied to the performing arts. My decision to add Ann Stocking's story was stimulated by the extraordinary experience of working with her over the past three years. I have learned so much through this relationship about listening, sensing, and directing in a non-judgmental way. I am enormously grateful for her generosity of spirit, her sharp wit, and willingness to share her story. I hope you enjoy this article. My warm thanks to all the contributing writers of this issue and most of all to Paul Cook, for his vision and rigorous energy in publishing this wonderful journal. ■



INTEGRATED ACTOR TRAINING

by Cathy Madden

Actors and faculty alike use Alexander Technique as the glue to bind the many and diverse parts of their training program together.

"I was playing Alvaro in *The Rose Tattoo*. Now this character makes an entrance at fever pitch. He's been humiliated his whole life—insult upon insult—until he is driven off the road by a white southern salesman. Alvaro is a Sicilian immigrant. He subsequently gets in a fight with the salesman and is knocked down and further humiliated. That's just the entrance. Without the AT, I would've pushed my 'idea' of a Sicilian immigrant instead of allowing the given circumstances to affect me. The AT allows me to tolerate the moment-to-moment work that comes with good acting. I was able to be released enough to allow the operatic and comic sobs of this man railing against the world without pushing." (Bury, PATP '93)

"I currently play Princess Katherine in *Henry V* for the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. I have a scene where I stand for a long period of time while being absolutely still. I use Alexander both to help me maintain an active stillness and to prepare for my next scene. It helps me stay in character and also helps me maintain emotional availability and sensitivity." (Champion, PATP '95)

"The AT helps me past the moment of frustration when 'I can't get it right.' When I did a physically challenging Marley in *Christmas Carol*, I knew that if I squeezed down my energy, I would turn in a wooden performance. The AT allowed me to go through the physical 'workout' of the role, until I was strong enough to generate (and release) the energy necessary for the show." (Morden, PATP '93)

These three stories come from graduates of the University of Washington's Professional Actor Training Program (PATP). They give a picture of how the AT work in the program has informed their professional work. To describe the role of the AT in the PATP training, I decided to consult the experts—the students who have graduated—to tell me how the AT has been useful to them, via an alumni survey. Their stories are woven into this article to highlight our current work. I'm going to let them speak on the wide range of applications of the AT that they include in their acting process.

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MY WORK

I am employed full-time by the University of Washington School of Drama PATP. The AT is embraced as an essential element in the means-whereby for creating theatre. I work with all areas of the faculty including the singing class, Voice, Movement, Suzuki Training, the acting process classes, dance classes, and stage combat. There are several class structures that I use to teach the AT and they have evolved over time at the University.

It helps immensely that I am trained in theatre when teaching the co-taught classes. This is where I work in conjunction with another faculty teacher. I therefore understand the processes involved. Very often, I've done and/or taught the exercise that a student is struggling to learn, or at least I've done one enough like it to understand what is happening. This is vital. I always see the AT as a tool to help the actors learn the specific things they need to learn about their voice, their movement, their acting. And I have always assumed that the teacher that I am teaching with has the same intention as I do—to help each actor be his or her most creative and powerful self. We may use vastly different terminology that we may need to negotiate with each other, but my assumption is that it's possible to use good coordination to accomplish the task at hand.

Another way of teaching has been called "ghosting" by my students. It's called ghosting because I work with each student as they are doing what they are doing without stopping them, talking to them, interrupting them. They are singing their song, or playing their scene and I am a vocally-silent partner—moving with them, helping them to ask themselves for a change in coordination. This works because they understand that their conscious participation is a prerequisite for change. Working with the actors this way provides clear moment-to-moment information.

The advantage for the students is that they have help in integrating thoughts about their coordination in their training if I'm actually there to help them. It helps

in several ways: first, I can answer their questions about the work as they have them; second, they see me in their classes so they know that their teachers support including the AT in the activity; and third, I get a broader picture of each student's habitual patterns when I get to observe them in many different circumstances.

In the recent survey, Melissa Mascara (PATP 1998) comments that this way of teaching the work was particularly helpful to her:

"I found the Alexander training was most valuable (and the results most dramatic) when I was involved in the co-teaching sessions. Alexander (and Cathy) had a much easier time with me when I was focused on Suzuki or a scene or a song. I had less energy to 'manage' my body.... The effects of those sessions seemed to be much more long-term because they became a part of my body's vocabulary with much less interference from my intellect."

Pedagogically, I find it essential to have an AT class that is separate from the co-taught classes. It is in the Alexander class that the principles of the work are consistently taught and clarified, sometimes in relationship to work we've done in the co-taught classes, and sometimes with work the students bring from other classes. The nature of the co-taught classes is that the focus is on the Voice work, the Movement work, the Acting, with the Alexander as a tool to do those tasks. In the Alexander class, the principles and application of the Alexander work is primary. Having both of these ways to teach the work is wonderful. Hugh O'Gorman (PATP 1990) says:

"I would say the AT class, coupled with the application to an activity, either acting, staging, or voice class was most important to me. But it was definitely the combination that had the greatest effect."

"I get a broad picture of each student's habitual patterns when I get to observe them in many different circumstances"

It is a remarkable education for me to help actors through the many mazes that they confront in their work. As Heath Kelts said of one unusual task he needed to do in a play:

"I could not ride a bike with crutches without the aid of the AT—I would've hurt myself."

THE GLUE OF THE PROGRAM

What is absolutely wonderful in the PATP is the commitment of the entire faculty to training actors who do not compromise their selves in order to gain some imagined theatrical end. The highly talented artists and educators of the PATP faculty have seen how the AT reveals each actor's honesty, presence and power and have absolutely supported its inclusion in all aspects of

the program. Their input, their questions, and their experiments have contributed to a deepening integration of the AT in the actor's work. Steve Pearson, Head of the PATP, has called the AT the "glue of the program". He campaigned within the University to create a full-time position for the AT because he considers its presence in the program to be essential.

Andrew Boyer, a 1995 graduate of the program phrased it this way:

"I found the AT to be perhaps the most useful tool I learned in school. Not only in practicing my craft but as a tool for learning as well. The technique allowed me a method for integrating the apparently disparate aspects of actor training I encountered. By learning that the same technique of awareness of my body applied both to the strenuous and rigid form of Suzuki, as well as to the fluid and unrestrained practice of Linklater voice technique, I was able to find common ground and enrich my understanding of all the forms I studied."

The dual function of the AT—first, as a tool that gives actors greater freedom in using their physical and vocal instruments and second, as a tool that enhances the learning process in general—is what makes it the glue of the program.

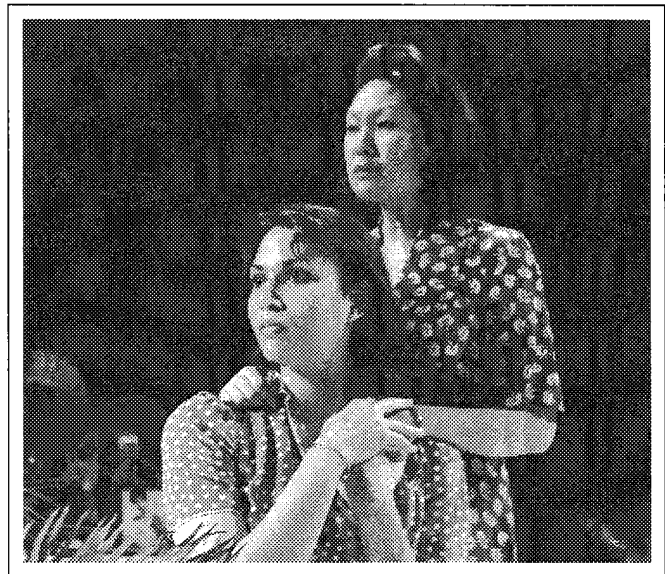
"It was like a glue to all the disciplines I was learning. It really helped my ways of thinking about an act, a sound, a simple movement. I still implement the AT when I confront new things in rehearsal and in life. The Technique allows for those new stimuli to be heard and reacted to." (Kelts, PATP 1996)

THE FACULTY SPEAK

In researching this article, I asked the other core faculty members to talk about their relationship of their work to the AT. Here is what they said:

Judy Shahn, Senior Lecturer, Voice "As a voice teacher, the Alexander work is crucial to releasing the body so the breath can work efficiently. It is a way that actors can take charge of their own letting go, balance, efficiency so that the body can do what it's meant to do and the voice can then express what it's capable of expressing. The subtle hands on work of the AT then allows the actors to transfer into their own thinking whatever shifts or adjustments are necessary. Since the vocal work is so dependent on the support of the spine so that the breathing muscles can function to their capacity, this intuitive, psychophysical work is a wonderful partner to the speaking voice."

Robyn Hunt, Associate Professor, Suzuki Training "The collaboration of Alexander with Suzuki training has caused me to rethink how one best brings actors to an understanding of Mr. Suzuki's 'inner sensibility,' and how this understanding can increase overall coordination and physical articulateness. The Alexander method's concern



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with the body's practical use and expression in three-dimensional space has inspired the invention of several new forms in training class that combine Mr. Suzuki's images ("waking as if from a hundred years' sleep, and moving toward something in the distance with far focus") with an increased interaction between the actors that encourages full use of limbs, shifting focal points, and changing speeds or dynamics. One exciting result has been an increase in gestural freedom and in those parts of training that invite improvisation. The actors are now less likely to employ habitual shapes, and seem much more open and ready to respond authentically and with greater originality in the moment."

"I could not ride a bike with crutches without the aid of the Alexander Technique"

Mark Jenkins, Associate Professor, Acting "The primary occupational disease of the actor is self consciousness that leads to a physical response of muscles tightening. This psychophysical cycle precludes real freedom for creativity. The AT as practiced by Cathy Madden is the only system that I have witnessed and experienced that addresses this problem head on and effectively. In my 35 years as an actor and 15 as an acting teacher no other way of dealing with the inefficiency resulting from muscle tightening even comes close to the AT in its simplicity, specificity, logic and usefulness, (not abstractly or in off stage preparation but) while the actor is acting. In simple terms, the AT provides a kind of 'lubrication' so the actor's use of self is efficient and free. Further, the technique seems to unlock habitual psychic blocks in many actors as a by product of physical release. It seems often to be a

catalyst for releasing old muscle memory resulting in improved quality of life. It is a remarkable tool for performers."

ALUMNAE TESTIMONIALS

When I received the alumnae surveys in the mail, I was awed by the descriptions of how the Alexander work had and continued to have on all aspects of acting, creative and business. The next sections speak on different acting topics. If you are not familiar with theatre, some terminology may be unfamiliar. Hopefully, that will not prevent you from getting some idea of how useful the Technique can be at every stage of the acting process.

ON THE ACTING PROCESS AND THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE:

"The AT helped tremendously with not pushing emotion—to allow more ease with the emotional expression." (Campbell, PATP '95)

"Bringing characters to life, physically, has changed for me. Before being introduced to the AT I would make physical adjustments, to realise characters no matter how those adjustments felt. AT showed me that it's possible to make these adjustments in a more comfortable way." (Hill, PATP '93)

"People talk about Meisner repetitions as a key to real listening onstage. I wonder if these repetitions are useless without the AT. Whole body listening and response are what both seek." (Kelts, PATP '96)

"By encouraging me to trust fully the psychological, physical and emotional impulses I may be having, the AT taught me that I have it all in me." (Lockwood, PATP '97)

ON FOCUS AND CONCENTRATION

"I guess I would call it 'ease in activation'. Prior to Alexander I always felt that ease was an opposite force to action: that in activity, focusing on an intention the introduction of ease would cause loss of focus, fuzziness. With Alexander, I found the opposite was true. Ease increases focus, and with it action, and intention, and the sharpness of the scene." (Ludwig, PATP '93)

"I think the use of the AT helped me realise the difference between trying to see an image onstage, or recall a character's specific memory, and believing I can see or recall. Alexander also helped my concentration; the energy not expended on tension can be used to focus." (Mercouffer, PATP '95)

ON STAGE FRIGHT AND OTHER FEAR

"I integrate the AT in every aspect of my process. I remember once filming a big scene for Melrose Place and I started to get this sweat going on. I couldn't stop the feeling and began to sweat even more. It hit me then, I was pulling down, pinched off, and that was causing me to restrict my body's ability to be at rest. I began to think forward and up. Within minutes I had stopped sweating, and was cool as a cucumber. The make-up

lady didn't know what I did, but she was grateful." (Reiser, PATP, '94)

ON SUZUKI TRAINING

The theatre work of Tadashi Suzuki is a part of the training at the University of Washington. It is characterised by exploration of wide ranges of movement, some quite strenuous, in combination with continual practice in creating and reacting to images, the building blocks of the imaginative world. While the world image is often thought to be a visual world, it is important to note that as we use it at UW, images come from the whole self—thought, movement, all of the senses.

"In Suzuki training in particular I found the contrast between the seemingly rigidity of the form vs. keeping fluid and aligned using the AT to be an extremely useful metaphor." (McAdams, PATP '97)

ON VOICE AND SINGING

"A tenor can't hit good high notes while pushing down; yet that's what fear does when one gets into "high" territory. Free up your larynx, free up purer, higher, FULLER notes." (Ludwig, PATP '93)

"In my acting, the AT had its greatest impact on my breath/voice work, which, for me is also generally where I find my character. In one piece I played several widely different character which I needed to shift into quickly and easily. As soon as I was offstage as one character, I would remind myself of the various spaces in my body, got my breath anchored using both Alexander and Suzuki cues and the new character could just slip right in, easy as pie. My body and voice would literally become someone else with these very simple reminders and I was back onstage as another person." (Segal, PATP '90)

ON UNIFIED FIELD OF ATTENTION

"You told once me a very wise thing 'allow the audience to come to you.' There is so much wisdom in that remark and I remind myself of that before every audition, interview, and performance." (Reeves, PATP '95) ■

ABOUT THE WRITER

Catherine Madden is Associate Professor for the University of Washington School of Drama, and does workshops and classes in her private studio. She has been a guest at teacher training schools, and has done teacher refresher courses in England, Germany, Japan, and Switzerland. She was a Congress Teacher at the International Congress held in Sydney in 1994 and a featured speaker at the 1999 International Congress in Freiburg, Germany. Cathy studied with Marjorie Barstow for over 15 years and served as her assistant in workshops for over ten years. Cathy is the Chair of Alexander Technique International (ATI).



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