

Alexander Technique

Juilliard faculty member Lori Schiff shares more about the practice of Alexander Technique and what students can expect.

Some people may not know exactly what Alexander Technique is, or how it might be helpful for singers. How would you describe Alexander Technique and its potential benefits for singers to a person unfamiliar with the technique?

The Alexander Technique is a method for learning how to use your self. It's a mental and kinesthetic "user's guide" for anyone who is interested in moving through life more efficiently and easily. For singers, as they are their instrument, the work is invaluable for recognizing their presence in their body, for all aspects of movement, breathing, and the postural and vocal benefits that evolve through better use.

What is your musical background and how did it lead to your work in Alexander Technique?

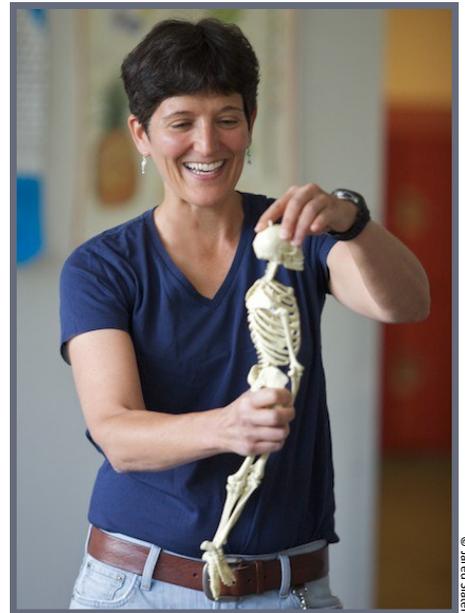
My college degrees are in trumpet performance from Northwestern University and Manhattan School of Music. I worked as a freelance musician in Chicago for a short while and later in New York. While studying trumpet at Northwestern University, I saw an introductory master class in the Alexander Technique. During the class, the Alexander Technique teacher worked with three instrumentalists: trumpet, violin and snare drum. All three improved very noticeably with a bit of help from the teacher.



© Jared Slater

He helped them improve overall coordination rather than talking about specific instrumental technique. It was very impressive. After that class, I started taking private Alexander Technique lessons. In a very short time, my playing improved along with my ability to take instruction more easily. I started sleeping better and was also performing better.

From the first lesson I was interested in learning to teach the Alexander Technique. Years later, I completed a three year teacher certification course and pursued post graduate studies in London for several years with teachers trained by F.M. Alexander.



© Jared Slater

What about the Alexander Technique distinguishes it from other practices?

The Alexander Technique is mental work. It is a method that yields ease and efficiency, to be put into practice virtually any time one is awake and making choices. No special outfits, postures, positions or exercises are needed. Conscious neuromuscular inhibition and the particular attention to the relationship of head and spine are unique aspects of the work.

Some singers will be experiencing Alexander Technique for the first time this semester. What advice do you have for someone walking into their first Alexander Technique session?

Come with an open mind. Know that the introductory sessions are really only that. Wear comfortable, regular clothes, not gym attire.

What are some invaluable Alexander Technique resources that our students could use to further their study?

"Hands on" lessons or classes with a trained and certified Alexander Technique Teacher are absolutely the best way to learn about the work and to make it useful. To learn about the work, the book *Body Learning*, by Michael Gelb is a good introduction to the Alexander Technique. There is also a short video on YouTube that features some familiar faces at this [link](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwKkbl-EzfQ): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwKkbl-EzfQ>