

HOW STUDYING THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE HAS HELPED ME

By Susan MacKillican

After having studied the Alexander Technique with Tasha Miller for the past nine years, I decided to write this article. I have taken lessons regularly, usually once a week, except during Christmas, Easter and summer breaks.

I was first introduced to the Alexander Technique at music college. I had been suffering from tendonitis in my arms, and my violin teacher had suggested that I should take Alexander Technique lessons. I did so, and indeed have done so ever since, such is the benefit I have found from the Technique. Below are some of the ways in which the Alexander Technique has helped me:

The tendonitis, which was the reason I started to study the Alexander Technique, has now gone. Also, I have found that it has become more and more comfortable to hold the violin and bow. In fact, everything which was previously technically difficult has become much easier, and various things which were previously technically impossible for me are no longer impossible.

One of the other benefits that I have noticed has been to do with nerves – before and during a performance. As I have studied the technique for a longer and longer period of time I have found that nerves have become less of a problem. The bow no longer shakes and I am able to control the bow, in spite of feeling nervous. I no longer feel tense, particularly where I am in contact with the violin or bow, i.e. my shoulder underneath the violin, or my left hand fingers on the strings. I have also noticed that since the problems with nerves have become less and less, and what I can expect to happen during the performance has become more consistent – I have gained in confidence. I enjoy the performance.

It is also the case that as my co-ordination has improved, so has my intonation. As the Alexander Technique works as a whole, rather than by just isolating specific functions, I found that applying this line of thinking to intonation was very effective. Instead of playing a few notes repeatedly, each time trying to move my fingers better in tune, probably causing extra tension in my effort to try to play more in tune, I decided not to repeat the passage, there and then, and that, when I came to play it again, on a different day, my fingers (whole body) had remembered the slight adjustments needed to be made to make it more in tune, and made the adjustments automatically, without me needing to do anything.

I have found this way of thinking very effective with all other aspects of my violin playing. And, indeed, I have also found this way of thinking very effective in teaching the violin.

I have discovered the study of the Alexander Technique to be a gradual and ongoing process, with benefits and rewards which I could never have imagined.