WORKSHOPS

"Bodymind notions and stage tools for musicians"

FOR CONSERVATOIRES, MUSIC SCHOOLS, ENSEMBLES

PROPOSAL BY:

Marta Atcher Soler
Violinist & Alexander Technique teacher

JUNE 2024

Table of Contents

01 Current music performance situation

02 Proposal 1 **Chamber music Workshop**

03 Proposal 2 **Orchestra Workshop**

04 Proposal 3 **Body and stage notions for professionals and young musicians**

05 Conclusions

06 Budget

07 Appendices

08 Links & Contact

Current music performance situation

Music relies fundamentally on the physicality of musicians, profoundly influencing sound and expression. Developing healthy habits is crucial to prevent health issues elevating performance quality. Conscious awareness plays a key role in shaping musical expression, benefiting both individual musicians and ensembles.

However, despite the importance of these aspects, musicians often overlook crucial elements of their training, hindering their progress:

- **Bodymind Awareness:** Neglecting physical and mental states can lead to mechanical repetition and unwanted habits.
- **Total Movement Patterns**: Precise control over body movements is essential, always by considering the entire Bodymind as a whole.
- **Proprioception and Kinaesthetic Sense**: These senses influence self-perception and habits formation.
- **Relationship with the Instrument:** Musicians' use and their instrument relation affects sound and expression; attention to sensory perception and body organization is crucial.
- **Habits during Individual and Group Practice**: Unconscious total patterns developed during practice can lead to inefficiencies and mistakes.
- **Stage Performance:** Achieving stage presence requires pre-concert preparation, including building self-security, managing emotional stress and external factors.

While some music institutions such as the Conservatorium van Amsterdam, Helsinki Conservatory, Royal College of Music, Muzikene, and Juilliard School are beginning to integrate tools that address these needs, there remains a curriculum gap where such knowledge is either optional or sporadic.

By addressing these individual and collective needs, the educational curriculum will be significantly enriched, facilitating the improvement of musical interpretation. Musicians can achieve **a better performance quality imbued with well-being qualities, such as ease, balance, coordination, presence, full expression, or group connection, among others.**

Workshop proposal (I)

"Before the Sound" - Workshop for Chamber music groups
https://youtu.be/CzTn_8sey_M

DESCRIPTION

The workshop provides a learning experience for musical ensembles, providing key tools to reach their full potential on stage.

It consists of key elements of the ¨Before the Sound¨ program, which facilitate aspects of ensemble team work (notions of the body, entries and endings, phrasing, communication, presence, fluidity and expression, among others).

The content is based on the principles of the Alexander Technique method, which are described in more detail in the appendices for reference.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Prior registration (number of ensembles and participants, ages, musical piece to work on).
- A full day (depending on the groups registered) or organised in several days.

STRUCTURE OF THE WORKSHOP (Adapted to the course or participants interests)

PART 1 - Collective session

Guided and explanatory session: body awareness tools aimed at musical practice.
Observation of common collective responses.
Aspects observed: Beginning and end of the performance, pauses and tempo in the music, expression, flexibility and communication as a whole.

PART 2 - Orientation and application of activities and tools:

Guided sessions for each group (30 or 45 minutes recommended per group).
Participants are guided through specific activities and tools tailored to address the identified patterns.

STEP 3 - Integration of the New Conditions:

Practice workspace.
Participants integrate newly acquired awareness and tools into the ensemble dynamic, exploring new ways of communicating, developing solid response patterns, or optimizing their actions.

STEP 4 - Reflection:

The day concludes with a period of reflection where participants share experiences and knowledge acquired, encouraging group discussion, mutual support and the identification of areas for growth.
Closure with a concert.

"Before the Sound" - Workshop for Chamber music groups

Workshop proposal (II)

¨Body notions and stage tools for an orchestra¨

DESCRIPTION

The workshop provides a learning experience for professional orchestra musicians and music students, providing key tools to reach their full potential on stage.
It is organised in several parts: basic notions of the body, resting tools, vision and reading music, instrument relationship, performing in a team.
The content is based on the principles of the Alexander Technique method, which are described in more detail in the appendices for reference.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Prior registration (Specify number of participants, age and musical specialty)
- 1 day (morning and afternoon), weekend, or organised in several days.
- Group workshop and individual classes

STRUCTURE OF THE WORKSHOP

- **Collective workshop**

Students learn basic concepts of the Alexander technique applied to the act of orchestra playing through experience and observation.

- **Explored elements**

-Stopping, organizing and directing: fundamentals of the Musical Body care.
-Constructive rest: rest and prevention tools before and after the rehearsals.
-Space awareness applied to the orchestra section and as a whole group.
-Orchestra habits (sitting, moving, reading, leading, listening, multitasking).

- **Individual sessions**

-Possibility of personalized attention, aside to the collective work
-Work with and without an instrument.
-Observation and integration of psychophysical tools in some specific situation of interest.

¨Body and stage notions, tools for an orchestra¨

Workshop proposal (III)

¨Body and stage notions, tools for professionals and young musicians¨

https://youtu.be/swXbWD4qMxk

DESCRIPTION

The workshop provides a learning experience for professional musicians and music students, providing key tools to reach their full potential on stage.
It is organised in several parts: basic notions of the body, the main principles, resting and prevention tools, breathing, instrument relationship, sound projection, performing.
The content is based on the principles of the Alexander Technique method, which are described in more detail in the appendices for reference.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Prior registration (Specify number of participants, age and musical specialty)
- 1 day (morning and afternoon), weekend, or organised in several days.
- Group workshop and individual classes

STRUCTURE OF THE WORKSHOP

- **Collective workshop**

Students learn basic concepts of the Alexander technique applied to the act of making music through experience and observation.

- **Explored elements**

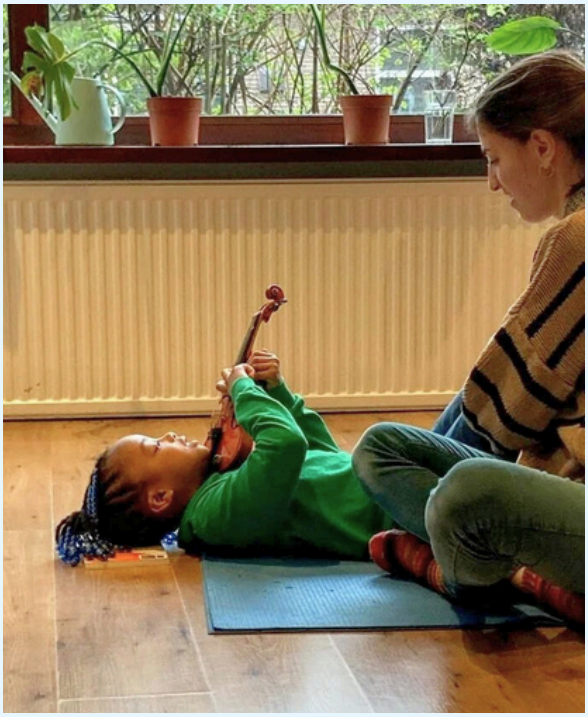
-Stopping, organizing and directing: improving study effectiveness.
-Constructive rest: rest and prevention tool.
-"Body mapping" focused on various specializations (string instruments, wind, percussion, conducting).
-Breathing
-Instrument relationship
-Practicing tools
-Presence and connection: how do we communicate from the study space to the stage

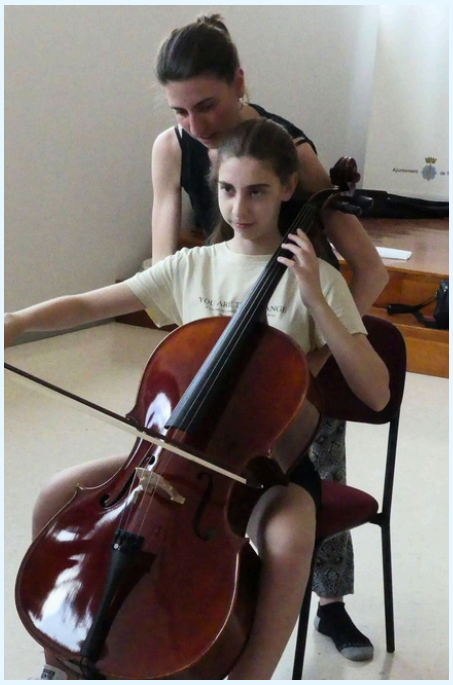
- **Individual sessions**

-Personalized attention.
-Work with and without an instrument.
-Observation and integration of psychophysical tools in some specific situation of interest (preparation before the concert or audition, resolution of technical or musical conflicts, among others).

"Body and stage notions, tools for professional musicians"

"Body and stage notions, tools for young musicians"





Resources and Functions

ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES

For effective implementation, music institutions need to allocate specific resources as follows:

- **Facilities:**
  - Stage hall for at least two out of five group sessions.
  - Large, spacious room for remaining sessions, enabling movement, instrument playing, and constructive rest practice.

- **Equipment:**
  - Mattresses for constructive rest practice.
  - Music stands for ensemble rehearsals.
  - Video camera for session recording for self-assessment and evaluation.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- **Main Teacher**
  - Qualifications: Alexander Technique teacher with a music master diploma.
  - Responsibilities: Guiding group and individual sessions, providing verbal and hands-on guidance, and conducting final assessments of students' progress.

- **Participants**
  - Requirement: Enrollment and adherence to scheduled dates.
  - Expectation: Mandatory attendance of all sessions.
  - Encouragement: Practice of learned tools between sessions and maintenance of a personal progress diary.

Conclusion

To conclude, the analysis of the current performing and educative panorama suggests several key insights:

Many relevant topics of interest often remain unaddressed due to time constraints and other priorities. Hence, it would be beneficial to explore more adaptable formats, such as guided workshops throughout the academic year, designated safe spaces for group expression, or individualized, high-quality attention throughout the educational journey. By doing so, the quality of music and the well-being of individuals and the collective within the department could be enhanced. It's imperative that such methodologies are integrated from the early stages of musical education.

Results of the "Before the Sound" program and Body Awareness Workshops:

- By providing these tools, **positive change** can occur both individually and collectively in a relatively short period of time.
- The principles of the Alexander Technique encourage **reflection, decision-making, and general expanded attention.** The observed changes were significant both musically and from a Cosment perspective.
- The program provides a **supportive framework** for musicians and introduces educational approaches that could stimulate a paradigm shift in the current music education system.
- The fusion of ensemble performance and psychophysical approaches shows **satisfactory compatibility.** This fusion enhances the expression, sonority, self-awareness and connection of the group, while introducing clarity and spontaneity to the desired musical goals.

Thus, "Before the Sound" symbolizes the importance of self-awareness and care within oneself and the music collective.

It is my fervent hope that through initiatives like this, we can collectively build a better future for music education and performance.

Budget

The budget for the Before the Sound program will be further discussed and negotiated with the institution, ensuring that it covers essential expenses to facilitate the program's successful implementation.

The budget must at least encompass:

- **Professional Guidance:** Allocation of funds to compensate professional instructor for their time and expertise in delivering the program's educational content and guidance to participants.
- **Delivered Written Tools and Audioguides:** Funding to cover the production of tools provided to participants to support their learning and practice outside of session times.
- **Transport:** Provision for transportation expenses.

Potential sources of funding:

Additionally, to supplement the budget and ensure financial sustainability, support may be sought from external funding institutions.

- Cultuurparticipatie (cultuurparticipatie.nl)
- NICAS Small Project Grants (nicas-research.nl/small-project-grants/)

By leveraging support from funding institutions, the program can access additional financial resources to enhance its scope and impact, ensuring that it remains accessible and beneficial to participants.

APPENDICES

Biography

Marta was born in Manresa in 1994. She is a baroque violinist and Alexander Technique teacher based in the Netherlands since 2013. She embarked on this journey with the aim of developing her music career and personal growth.

In 2018, she obtained a Bachelor in classical violin from the Maastricht Conservatory under the guidance of Kyoko Yonemoto. At the same time, she delved into the fascinating world of early music, passionate about the sonority of the baroque violin. In 2024 she has obtained a master's degree in baroque violin with violinists Emmanuel Resche-Caserta and Sayuri Yamagata at the Conservatorium van Amsterdam.

At the same time, she has been participating in several ensembles, drawing inspiration from music academies such as Prangins Baroque, Gli Incogniti, Abbaye aux Dames, Tafelmusik, while developing personal projects throughout Europe, in particular with the ensemble I Cucchiai.

Immersing herself in the Bodymind world, she became an Alexander Technique teacher, graduating from ATCA Amsterdam Center in 2021. This strong foundation and inspiration are integrated into her musical journey and expression, dedicated to contributing to the well-being of the collective of musicians. She has taught as a substitute teacher in Conservatorium van Amsterdam, currently she teaches at the Amsterdam AT Center, and also she leads workshops for musicians around Europe.

Marta has participated in various chamber ensembles and orchestras across Spain, Catalonia, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, and Romania. In venues such as Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, Muziekgebouw aan 't ij, Tivoli Vredenburg in Utrecht or Leidse Schouwburg zaal in Leiden, among others.

She defines herself as a constant learner, combining teaching and performing as sources of inspiration, sharing, and growth.

APPENDICES

The AT method

What is the AT?

The Alexander Technique (AT) originated in the early 20th century, developed by the Australian actor Frederick Matthias Alexander (1869-1955), who faced persistent vocal and respiratory issues while performing on stage. Through self-observation and experimentation, Alexander discovered that his difficulties were rooted in his overall manner of using his body, leading to a method of re-education aimed at improving coordination and reducing stress. His findings were documented in several books and laid the foundation for the technique's widespread adoption and teaching.

This practical method enables individuals to relearn their daily activities with greater consciousness, fostering a body-mind connection and promoting overall well-being. During lessons, the teacher guides simple daily movements with verbal instructions and skilled hands-on touch, allowing the student to become aware of habitual emotional, physical, or mental patterns that may unknowingly hinder their actions or goals, particularly in the context of musicians aiming to perform or express music.

Each individual, including musicians, possesses unique needs and patterns. What's intriguing is that through these lessons, students can begin to make different choices and acquire the tools to establish new ways of being and doing.

This may result in refining their body perception and kinaesthetic sense, addressing harmful psychomotor habits, and improving overall functioning. It is relevant to mention the insights gained, including increased confidence, enhanced clarity, improved practice techniques, better balance, ease, coordination, and a deeper connection to music, sound, colleagues, and the audience.

Today, the Alexander Technique is recognized worldwide, with scientific research supporting its effectiveness, and it is integrated into the curriculum of many music and drama institutions.

APPENDICES

The AT method

Key principles

- **The Psychophysical Self:** Body and mind are interconnected; therefore, in any activity, especially in education, it is essential to treat them as a unified entity.
- **Use and Functioning:** Human beings are interrelated organisms where structure, function, and use work collaboratively. The choices we make in life stem from how we use ourselves in various situations.
- **Sensory Appreciation:** This involves understanding the relationship between proprioception and kinaesthetic senses and how they inform our body parts and movements within a given space. Faulty sensory appreciation can impact our manner of use.
- **Inhibition and Non-Doing:** The initial step in AT to enhance sensory appreciation. When a certain action could interfere with a desired end, there the conscious thought of not proceeding about it. This state of balance occurs without activating body mechanisms.
- **Primary Control:** It's the dynamic and natural relationship between the use of the neck and head concerning the rest of the body, relative to gravity. When functioning optimally, it enhances sensory appreciation, positively affecting posture, movement, and overall well-being.
- **Direction:** The means to recover a natural use of the Primary Control. By reacting to stimuli satisfactorily, it is possible to stop interferences and, substitute an unreasoned psychophysical direction. These are mental directives traveling from the brain to specific body parts.
- **Means-Whereby:** A conscious approach to achieving goals by attending the tools of inhibition and direction in the present moment.

APPENDICES

Testimonials

¨The most enjoyable part for me was the silence before the performance and when the music started.¨

¨The program has given us the opportunity to connect as a group and to feel each other's presence, even without looking.¨

¨The program was very helpful. Normally, I go straight to my instrument on stage, but when I felt the big space around me, my body was comfortable and, my breathing was deep.¨

"Space" was the keyword in this program for me.¨

"Before starting these lessons, I had been longing for ways to improve my posture and my relationship with my instrument. Throughout the lessons, I have acquired new tools and exercises that have allowed me to naturally improve my posture with ease.¨

¨The most significant aspect for me has been feeling acceptance and freedom in my body. I don’t have to change it; I simply need to provide it with the right support."

Links

- **Before the Sound - Video presentation**
https://youtu.be/mq8NQqPvMwA

- **AT Lessons by Marta Atcher**
https://youtu.be/swXbWD4qMxk

- **Musicians & AT - Testimonials**
https://youtu.be/URLA7fsQQUE

- **The Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique**
https://alexandertechnique.co.uk/

- **How the AT can help musicians**
https://alexandertechnique.com/musicians/

- **The health and wellbeing of professional musicians and music creators in the EU**
https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/35056e64-922f-11ed-b508-01aa75ed71a1/language-en

- **Science and Alexander Technique**
https://alexandertechniquescience.com

Contact

Email — matchersoler@gmail.com

Website — www.martaatcher.com

Phone — 34 628841742 / 31 618590371