

as teachers, it will soon be possible to meet these demands more satisfactorily. But in order to do so larger premises are essential. The problem is now to find a means of raising money for the Trust Fund, and Mr. Alexander and his students are attempting to do so by performing "The Merchant of Venice."

Mr. Alexander's technique is not concerned with acting as such. What he is endeavouring to teach his students is how to direct an improved use of themselves and through this to develop a greater awareness of what they are doing and an ability to control their reaction in new and unfamiliar situations. Thus another reason for deciding to produce *The Merchant of Venice* was to give the students the opportunity to apply the principles of Mr. Alexander's technique in a field of activity wholly new to them. For it must be understood that, with the exception of Mr. Alexander himself, none of the cast has had any previous acting experience or training. All the students are taking part, whether they have any natural acting ability or not, and since their number was only just sufficient to fill the necessary parts there were none of the ordinary opportunities for selection. None of them intend to take up acting as a career, and they therefore hope that they will not be judged on any professional standard, but on their success in applying themselves to something that is quite new to them and on their manner of using themselves in interpreting the different characters. The actor's instrument is himself, and it is the problem of how to direct and control the use of this instrument that the students are faced with in their acting. If in this field they can successfully apply a technique which makes for such control, the experience gained will certainly stand them in good stead not only in their work as teachers but in all the activities of life.

Mr. Alexander, who at the age of 64, is attempting a come-back in the character of Shylock, has not appeared in public for thirty years. He will therefore be depending in his performance, not upon recent stage experience, but upon the experience he has gained throughout these years in putting his technique into practice in daily life.

All enquiries should be addressed to The Secretary, 16, Ashley Place, S.W.1.

A Trainee's Viewpoint

No Column This Issue

From The Coordinator

I have put out the word to all training programs. I have not received any responses. Please send your submission to Tom Vasiliades, 117 State Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201 (718) 522-3043.

From The Editor

I was quite surprised when I learned from Tom that no trainee had stepped forward with an article for this issue. I find it particularly odd because since the training experience is so challenging and stimulating, I would have thought that at least one trainee from somewhere would want to contribute their ideas. I know that when I was training, immersed in daily study of the Technique, there was an ongoing, thought provoking dialogue about the learning experience. I am sure the entire NASTAT community is interested in what our trainees are thinking about these days.

Music

Breathing For Flutists

By Alex Murray

Alex Murray was certified by Walter Carrington and currently is Co-Director of the Urbana Center for the Alexander Technique.

The first time I became aware of a "method" of breathing was during the few months prior to study at the Royal College of Music when I read a small book 'Flute Technique' by F.B.Chapman. The first section was entitled *Breath Control*. Under the heading, "The conditions for obtaining and maintaining an adequate air supply," the following instructions are given:

"In order that the lungs may be free to expand, a good position when playing is absolutely necessary. The student should stand or sit in a comfortable and upright but not rigid attitude, the chest remaining raised all the time and the shoulder-blades held rather more firmly and a little nearer together than usual. Energy is not then dissipated in raising the chest every time a good inspiration is taken and the principles of healthy (and easy) breathing can be observed. For similar reasons the elbows should be kept well away from the body and any tendency to stoop forward or to lean against the back of the chair should be resisted. The head should be held up and all unnecessary movements of any kind avoided...." We are then told that the action of the diaphragm controls the air supply. "...To test this muscular action the fingers should be placed in the triangle formed by the branching off of the ribs on either side; the muscular contraction will then push the fingers out when the breath is taken in.... It will also be noticed that the ribs move upwards and outwards during inspiration, and that this action is reversed during exhalation. There is no movement of the shoulders in either case."

Some years later, when I was a student in Paris, a teacher whom I respected greatly, recommended moving the shoulders forward at the end of inspiration in order to increase the volume of air available. As far as I can remember now, some forty years later, when I began my Alexander lessons, these were the "erroneous preconceived ideas" which I brought with me. When I began lessons, I was principal flute of the Royal Opera, a strenuous occupation, entailing long rehearsals (10am-3pm) on occasion with performances every evening and an afternoon performance on Saturday. During the rehearsals in the orchestra pit, there was frequently a cold breeze blowing through the theater while the scenery was being transported to and from the stage (from the street). I had a tendency to bronchitis which was aggravated by such working conditions. At that time I was sharing an apartment with a scientist who, having completed a Ph.D. in Psychology, was in the final stages of a Ph.D. in Physiology. The experimental research in which he was involved (the effects of stress on the production of adrenaline) had brought him in contact with Charles Neil, one of the members of Alexander's first training course. My friend suggested that Neil might be able to help with my respiratory problems and I began a three year course of lessons. I regret to say that what I learned at that time is not what I now understand to be the Alexander Technique. When Charles Neil died in 1958, my Alexander lessons began, and with them, the process of change in my conception of the Technique, my use and of course, my Breathing.

My earliest recollections of applying what I was learning to

playing was (and continues to be) to rid the mind of "taking a breath" to play. This is an important aspect of all my practising. If I wish to play a long phrase, I first exhale, then allow the breath to return (through the nostrils, silently) and then play when the breath is ready to move out. When playing continuously, I always take time to breathe, even if it means stopping the flow of the music. Naturally, this applies to practise. When one is performing, one does what the music requires with whatever means one has at the time.

The first reward from practising in this way came to me during a performance of Beethoven's 7th Symphony. After 3 years in the Opera, I became principal flute with the London Symphony. At that time (the late '50's) we did an annual Beethoven Cycle with Josef Krips in the Festival Hall. I still remember those occasions, but in particular, what must have been my third year in the orchestra. I found that I was able to play a loud, continuous section of the first Allegro without being aware of "taking a breath." The breath was returning in the brief intervals between the rhythmic figures. Some idea of what happens when you stop the interference can be experienced if you exhale quickly, blowing out the cheeks. Repeat this rhythmically several times and you will notice that the breath returns with a sort of 'elastic recoil.'

The next memorable experience was triggered by FM's 1906 article in which he names the great principle to be *Antagonistic Action*. The other clue in this article was "many people can acquire fair chest pose at the end of inspiration, but...at the end of the expiration the mechanism is absolutely disorganized." I was practising at the time, using two mirrors, and was preparing for a recording with Pierre Mantoux of "L'Apres-midi d'un Faune." In my customary way, I divided the long opening phrase into sub-phrases, played them with time for breaths and then, finally, decided to "deflate" and "inflate" myself several times prior to playing the whole phrase in one breath. As I got to the end of the phrase, I saw myself visibly shorten - the pelvis moving forward over the feet, the back "narrowing in the loins". This was the first time in my practise that I had really made an unusual demand on my respiratory capacity and I saw in what way my mechanism was "absolutely disorganized." I remembered FM's account in the Use of the Self in which he writes "the three tendencies I had already noticed became specially marked when I was reciting passages in which unusual demands were made upon my voice." I then played the same passage but inhibited the movement forward of the pelvis, maintaining my length, and found that I had just as much air as before, but that at the end of the expiration the inspiration took place by "elastic recoil". This to me exemplified *Antagonistic Action*.

This phase in my understanding began in 1959 and although many changes have taken place since then, none of them have made a comparable impression on me until I began to trace the development of Alexander's teaching from his arrival on the London scene as "the Breathing Man." Some years ago (1985-the Bach Centenary Year) I had my gall-bladder removed. The surgery on the abdominal musculature made playing the flute slightly more difficult. My first performance within a few weeks of leaving hospital was the Bach B minor Suite which requires a healthy supply of air. Over time, I gradually regained what was my "normal" capacity, but more recently after a particularly persistent "cold," I began to think that the effects of "aging"

were beginning to tell on me. I seemed to have a shorter breath span.

The clue to my latest step forward in the continuous process of understanding Alexander's genius came to me from an unexpected quarter. Jeroen Staring, a Dutch Sociologist who has written extensively in Dutch on Alexander, called me to discuss a letter of John Dewey. He has written a Biography of FM up to 1910 which covers an extensive verbal exchange between Alexander and Scanes Spicer, the Ear, Nose and Throat specialist who sponsored F.M. in 1904 and plagiarized him five years later. Through Staring I have obtained the Spicer articles and through them have uncovered more of my "erroneous pre-conceived ideas."

Before reading these articles, I had always avoided "taking a deep breath" from my earliest contact with the Technique and had consequently elided part of the "mobility of the thorax" from my experience. Early in my lessons, I was told "not to raise the chest." But there are different ways of raising the chest. On the one hand, there is raising the chest (military fashion, shoulders back). On the other hand, there is raising the chest as a consequence of spinal extension. As a result of experimenting with the description of Scanes Spicer's *New Cardinal Principle*, I find I can play "L'Apres-midi" to order, without "pumping myself up."

Interestingly enough, the type of respiration against which FM (and Spicer) were railing, appeared in print in the latest (March 1994) Flute Talk, from the pen of a distinguished flutist. Describing preparation for "L'Apres Midi" in an article entitled, *Playing Long Phrases*, the author writes: "try sitting with the lower back reclining against the lower portion of the chair, with the abdominal muscles pushed out while the feet are planted firmly for additional support," followed by, "expel every ounce of air...ending with collapsed chest, low shoulders and concave abdomen."

I would like to close with a thought from the pen of Alan Watts:

"Don't cling to your breath, you'll get purple in the face and suffocate. You have to let your breath out. That's the act of faith, to breathe out, and it will come back. The Buddhist word Nirvana actually means to breathe out; letting go is the fundamental attitude of faith."

Dance

Currents, Cross-Currents And Common Threads

By Laurie Currie

Laurie Currie received her certification from ACAT-New York in June, 1993. She currently teaches in New York City.

The quest for perfection. Countless dancers are coaxed and prodded along this path, often relentlessly, throughout their training and careers. What drives such a quest may be impossible to pin down. But those who are in positions of some influence -- teachers, choreographers, audiences -- often do much to keep the current of this quest moving strongly. And there is often an internal desire or drive operating within the dancers themselves, that gives the current an added momentum. Professional dancers are frequently likened to athletes. For those who hold this view, perhaps one common