

## EXTRA! Grad Course EXTRA!

By Pamela Anderson, Director  
Teacher Certification Program

I want to take this opportunity to inform and invite you to a course in Continuing Professional Education that ACAT is once again offering at the Abraham Goodman House this coming spring. The theme of this year's curriculum will be an exploration and deepening understanding of the Alexander Technique as it relates to back problems, breath coordination, voice and vocal production, exercise, and working with the actor. The dates and times are: Sundays, 5-8 p.m., April 9, 23, May 7, 21, and June 11th. The cost is \$135 for ACAT members and \$150 for nonmembers. The class is limited to 18 teachers, and a deposit of \$50 is due by April 1, 1989. Only full enrollments will be accepted; shares are acceptable but must be arranged privately. I hope you can attend and I look forward to greeting you.

### *Course Title, Description, Date and Instructor*

**DEALING WITH BACK PROBLEMS DURING AN ALEXANDER LESSON**  
Sunday April 9th, Room 401, Deborah Caplan, M.A., R.P.T.

This workshop will discuss and demonstrate the ways an Alexander teacher can most effectively deal with pain and other problems that arise during a lesson when the student has significant back trouble. The most common back problems seen by teachers will be discussed, including: chronic low back pain, sciatica, pinched nerves, spinal disc disorders, scoliosis, arthritis, kyphosis, lordosis, spondylolisthesis.

**BREATH AS POSTURAL PROCESS**  
Sunday April 23rd, Room 401, Ronald Dennis, Ed.D.

This session aims at leading participants toward a fuller understanding of breathing through 1) rigorous treatment of conceptual issues, 2) active contemplation of anatomical structure, and 3) practical experience. Such understanding is viewed as fundamental to "Whispered

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## Directions in Exercise\*

By Carolyn Monka Serota

*... the fundamental shortcoming underlying all human psycho-physical defects, imperfections, and peculiarities is an imperfect and often delusive sensory appreciation, and until those conditions are restored in which sensory appreciation (sense register) becomes again a more or less reliable guide, all exercises are a positive danger.*

This statement from *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* (Centerline Press, p. 99) might be said to summarize Alexander's position on physical exercise. Throughout his writings we find convincing arguments about the ineffectiveness of "physical-culture" exercises as a remedy for our human ills. It seems to me that most readers come away from Alexander's books with the impression that he was violently opposed to physical exercise. The thought that tends to remain is the emphasized portion of our opening quotation: *all exercises are a positive danger.*

But it is important to remember that in his comments on exercise Alexander was responding to the prevailing thinking on physical education and health at that time. There is no doubt that exercise, when viewed *solely* as an *alternative* to the principles of the Alexander Technique in accomplishing good use of the self and improving functioning, must fall short. However, for today's reader, the unconscious polarity set up in Alexander's books between exercise and the Technique need not be taken as an injunction against any and all exercise. I would like to suggest that we step back from this "either-or" thinking on exercise and consider it in a somewhat different perspective.

Suppose we take as an example an exercise teacher or student who has begun to study the Alexander Technique, to become aware of his habits, the importance of primary control, inhibition, and direction. Exercise no longer has to carry the burden of reeducation of the whole self.

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\*Authorized abridgment of original paper by the same title, (c) Carolyn Monka Serota 1987.

## The ACAT News

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*(Grad Course, continued from p. 1)*

Ah" and any other activity or exercise related to use of the breath. Deborah Caplan says, "I attended Ron Dennis' presentation of *Breath As Postural Process* to the ACAT faculty and found it gave me new insights into integrating breathing awareness in the Alexander process. I also found Ron's work of personal benefit as far as my own use is concerned."

### VOICE AND VOCAL PRODUCTION AS IT RELATES TO THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE

Sunday May 7th, Room 401, Barbara Kent

This workshop will deal with the use of your voice, vocal habits and any hints I can pass along about how to work with singers.

### DIRECTED EXERCISE

Sunday May 21st, Room 409, Camlyn Monka Serota

This workshop will explain how the Alexander Technique can enhance the performance of physical exercise, focusing on stretching and strengthening work. Exercise is an increasingly popular "activity" among our students; familiarity with some basic fitness principles and forms can help the Alexander teacher apply the Technique to their special needs. Wear comfortable clothing, be ready to move, and bring your fitness questions.

### STRUCTURING OF WORK WITH THE ACTOR

Sunday June 11th, Room 409, Judith Leibowitz

This workshop is an introduction for teachers into the structuring of the teaching of small classes in the Alexander Technique for actors. Emphasis will be placed on the practical exercises in the Alexander Technique which relate to the professional needs of the actor. This will include centering in the Alexander Technique, and translating this center into the physical distortions of character interpretation the actor must often deal with in performance.

### *Biographical Material*

**Deborah Caplan** received her Alexander certification in 1953 from Alma Frank, and her MA in Physical Therapy from NYU in 1956. She studied with F. M. Alexander, and is a founding member of ACAT, where she is a Senior Faculty member of the Teacher Certification Program. Deborah was affiliated with NYU Medical Center for eight years, and lectures extensively to physical therapists throughout the country on the Alexander Technique. She is the author of *Back Trouble: A New Approach to Prevention and Recovery Based on the Alexander Technique* (Triad, 1987). Deborah specializes in teaching the Alexander Technique to people with back problems.

**Ron Dennis** received his certification from ACAT in 1979 and has taught in the certification program since 1982. He earned B.M.E. (59) and M.M. (64) degrees from Drake University, and an Ed.D. (87) from Teachers College, Columbia University. Principal Clarinet with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra from 1970-77, he is currently Executive Director of ACAT and has been on the Board of Directors since 1980 as well as editing *The Alexandrian*, 1981-85. He is on the faculty of the Juilliard School and is a special consultant for the Miller Institute for Performing Artists of Roosevelt Hospital.

**Barbara Kent** is a Certified Teacher of the Alexander Technique and a singer. She came to the Technique 28 years ago when she was studying voice with Gladys Lea in New York. She sang professionally for many years and became certified in the Alexander Technique in 1971 at ACAT. Since then she has been combining these two areas in her private practice and continues to sing on a non-professional basis. Barbara has taught in the Teacher Certification Program since 1972 and was the Director of the Teacher Certification Program from 1981-87. She is currently on the Senior Faculty of ACAT.

**Camlyn Monka Serota** studied, performed, and taught modern dance for over a decade before her interests shifted to exercise in the early 1980's. Since then, she has worked in the fitness and body therapy fields, designing and teaching exercise programs for private students as well as small groups. From 1983-86 she developed and taught *Fitness for You*, a choreographed aerobics and exercise program. In the fall of 1988, she conducted a workshop for fitness instructors on using the Alexander principles in their work, and designed an exercise cool-down for *Health* magazine. She became a certified teacher of the Alexander Technique in June 1987 from ACAT.

**Judith Leibowitz** received her certification from Lulie Westfeld in 1950, and took further work with Alma Frank and F. M. Alexander. She holds a B.A. in Science from Brooklyn College. She started her first training class in 1958 and was a founding member of ACAT which had its inception in 1964. She was the Director of the Teacher Training Program from 1966-81 and was given the title of Director Emerita, Teacher Training Program, in 1982. She was a member of the Executive Committee of the 1st International Congress of the Alexander Technique in 1986. She has been on the Faculty of the Drama Division of the Juilliard School where she introduced the Alexander Technique since 1968. She has also introduced and taught the Alexander Technique to many theater companies and universities, including Arena Stage, A.C.T., Temple University, North Carolina School of the Arts, and Stratford Shakespeare Festival. She also maintains a private practice in New York City.

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*(Directions, continued from p. 1)*

Instead of evaluating exercise as a potential cure-all, we are free to consider it (1) as one of the many activities of life in which good use can be practiced and (2) as an activity which has a unique contribution to make. Then we can begin to explore some of the ways in which the practice of the Alexander Technique and the performance of physical exercises might be mutually beneficial.

For the past seven years, I have been teaching exercise to groups and individuals, designing fitness programs for both. I have found the Alexander Technique and the performance of exercises extraordinarily complementary. In fact, Alexander thinking behind the exercise design and instruction can rectify some of the potential defects which Alexander so eloquently brought to light.\*

For example, the concept of primary control can be explained to students as well as used as an organizing principle in developing movement for an exercise program. Most exercises can be devised so that the head leads and the spine follows. Arms and legs can be worked--and worked hard--without compromising the lengthening central axis of the spine and the poise of the head. Muscle targeting--the relative isolation of a muscle or muscle group for the purpose of stretching or strengthening--actually becomes easier as overall body use improves. The thought of the limbs lengthening out from torso is very important, as this tends to release any residual tension in the joint about to be used. Even more important, lengthening prior to contracting utilizes the stretch reflex to prepare the targeted muscle to work.

The return to a neutral resting state is vital both during and after exercise. The student should frequently be encouraged to pause and reorganize during an exercise session. The concept of a cool-down can be more than the literal lowering of body temperature and heart-rate. For example, I always end a session with the students on the floor doing slow, gentle exercises that they must "think through." Very much like self-lessons, these cool-downs release any remaining excess muscle tension and bring students back to a resting state and awareness of body organization. Exercise, taught in this fashion, *must* engage the student's awareness and thought; it need not be a purely mechanical experience.

It is fairly evident that Alexander's discoveries can be of great benefit to those who exercise. Can physical exercise be of use to the Alexander teacher or student? I think that in certain cases it can be utilized to support our goals of improving functioning, teaching good use, and "attacking mental habit." If, for example, a student

\*A comprehensive summary of Alexander's views on exercise can be found in the original version of this paper.

is habitually contracted through his lumbar spine and has a weak, protruding abdomen, strengthening the abdominal muscles--which probably involves stretching the antagonistic back muscles--can contribute to his ability to release the back tension. As the abdominals become more active, he can let go of locking in the hip joints and "holding himself up" with his low back and buttocks. Hopefully this would occur anyway in his course of Alexander lessons--but why not help it along?

Carefully selected, gentle exercises can introduce a student to his or her own joint functions. There are students who have never moved in such a way as to experience the full range of motion in the ball and socket joint of the hip, or the shoulder joint, or the available motion of the lower leg at the ankle joint. Such experiential knowledge of joint location and range of motion can support the student's Alexander work, particularly if he or she has never done much in the way of movement.

Many students want to know what they can do to work on themselves between lessons. Answering this question is a bit of a quandary for the Alexander teacher. On the one hand, one of the most important aspects of the Alexander Technique is the concept of non-doing. Another is that of application of the Alexander principles to everything one does. We all want to be careful not to compromise on these issues. On the other hand, we also, at some point, usually teach the student a self-lesson. Exercises can be given in the same spirit as a self-lesson, and taught as a dynamic way for the student to practice inhibition and thinking in activity. It is necessary, of course, to emphasize that the exercises are *not* the Alexander Technique, but rather specific activities for the employment of inhibition and direction.

A final observation: there is the implication in Alexander that physical exercise is unnecessary and even superfluous if an individual employs the technique in his everyday activities. As he wrote, "In the practice of my technique the boredom of performing exercises for a given time daily is avoided, and . . . our ordinary daily activities can be made a constant means of psychophysical development in its fullest sense" (*The Universal Constant in Living*, Centerline Press, p. 66). For Alexander himself this was no doubt true, but I think we need to question it as a prescription for everybody, to ask whether for many there is not a very real need to move fully and largely, to actively exercise as well as to direct and inhibit. Our world is becoming increasingly civilized, technological, sedentary. The old fitness saying "If you don't use it, you lose it" is more worthy of consideration than ever. So as Alexander teachers, in our thinking about exercise, let's not only acknowledge, as Alexander did, the potential pitfalls; let's also keep an open mind to the special benefits exercise might offer.

## A Message from the Board

In addition to regular mailing to the ACAT membership, this issue of the *News* is being sent to all ACAT graduates and to NASTAT and STAT members in the New York metro area. We wish, first of all, to let as many teachers as possible know about the Graduate Course being offered at ACAT this spring. This course provides a tremendous amount of specialized expertise at a very reasonable price.

Secondly, we wish to acquaint the community with the "new" *ACAT News*, which, through the aid of desktop publishing, hopes to present stories and articles of broader significance, such as that of Carolyn Monka Serota in this issue, as well as the local news and an up-to-date calendar of forthcoming events. To these ends we heartily solicit your manuscripts, news, and calendar items. Ultimately, the *News* can be as relevant and as timely as you wish to make it through your contributions. Please note the closing dates published in the masthead (bottom of page 1).

Finally, we would like to make *The ACAT News* regularly available to those wishing it. In the past, it has been available only as part of the ACAT membership package. Now, we feel it appropriate to offer three issues annually for a contribution of \$10, tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law.

We would also be happy to receive applications from qualified teachers for full ACAT membership, which includes voting rights and representation on ACAT's list of certified member-teachers. You may call or write the Center for details.

As you will notice from the sticker on this issue's address panel, 1989 marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of ACAT in 1964. The Summer *News* will feature a history of the Center by Bill Connington in association with Judith Leibowitz.

## News

**Sarnie Ogun** gave a lecture-demonstration in December 1988 for master's candidates in the Dance Education Program at Teachers College, Columbia University. Sarnie's presentation was very well received and she has been invited back for an encore later this spring.

Any teacher interested in giving a demonstration or short series in AT for the Continuing Education Dept. of Hofstra University (Long Island) may contact: Lewis Shana, U.C.C.E. Memorial Hall Room 232, Hempstead, NY 11550 (516) 560-5992.

**Annual Meeting Highlights:** Held March 5, 1989, at the residence of Pearl Ansel, to whom many thanks. The quorum requirement was amply met by 21 members present in person and 19 by proxy, out of a total membership of 64. Elected to the Board of Directors were **Marta Friedland** and **Rebecca Flannery** for 2 and 3 year terms, respectively. By unanimous action, the annual dues were raised to \$50, effective January 1, 1990. Agreed to pursue development of a new ACAT logo, with use of the current one authorized for the interim. A new Membership Committee was formed, consisting of **Michele Arsenault**, **Posie Green**, **Tom Koch** (contact person), **Melanie Nevis**, **Cindy Reynolds**, and **Annette Werhahn-Cantor**. The primary function of this committee will be to organize projects of a participatory nature, such as workshops with visiting teachers, to benefit the membership in addition to the professional support regularly handled by the Center office. **Ron Dennis**, Executive Director, reported that the fees or fee ranges of the ACAT membership run from \$25 to \$65, with an average of 37.70. Members responding to the survey indicated 75 inquiries coming from the list of certified member-teachers in 1988, and 362 lessons given as a result of these inquiries. These figures suggest that income in excess of \$13,467 was earned in 1988 by ACAT members as a direct result of Center professional support.

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