

## A New Paradigm for ACAT?

by Daniel Singer

A dialogue was begun at this year's ACAT-AGM on the future of our organization. My hope is that something positive comes from this discussion and that it leads to growth and the common good.

ACAT is only what its membership does. ACAT is only the activities its members undertake and sustain. The operative passion within ACAT is for training teachers. I believe this particular passion is presently sustaining the organization in a very real and beautiful way. It is this passion for training teachers that has come to define the organization at this juncture in its long and illustrious history. ACAT deserves to redefine itself to reflect this truth.

The larger community of Alexander teachers has created NASTAT to fulfill the professional functions that ACAT has for over 30 years nobly shouldered. With the establishment of a viable national professional organization, the climate and circumstances are now quite different than they used to be.

NASTAT can now handle teacher referrals, mailing lists and mailing list labels, and has an entire book service as well as basic printed matter to offer the public when inquiries are made about the Alexander Technique. ACAT has donated money to NASTAT's excellent publicity efforts. Future referrals coming into ACAT can easily be shunted to NASTAT. NASTAT was formed as an organization to represent the standards and interests of the professional Alexander community independent of any particular training. Our training program is approved by NASTAT and students receive a NASTAT certification by going through the ACAT-TCP. Most teachers trained by ACAT have chosen to join NASTAT upon graduation. It is true that a very few of our members are not predisposed to joining NASTAT. In that case, there is ATI, also a professional organization for Alexander Teachers. It too is available for professional affiliation as an alternative to NASTAT for those who wish.

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## A.T. and Musical Activity

by Patricia Benstock

On February 24, 19998, ACAT students and staff were invited to attend a lecture-demonstration given by Pedro de Alcantara. An active cellist and certified Alexander instructor, Mr. De Alcantara has recently published his first book, *Indirect Procedure: A Musician's Guide to the Alexander Technique*. This book's applications to music making was the basis for the hour and a half lecture which quite skillfully blended the elements of an Alexander lesson with a music master class.

As a musician, I came to the demonstration with understandably piqued interest. However, I was also keenly curious to know the reactions of non-musicians to thoughts about Mr. De Alcantara's work. Such will be the focus of this brief write-up.

Mr. de Alcantara centered his lecture-demonstration around "the use of the self" while performing a musical instrument (in this case the cello). Fortunately for the audience, an undergraduate cello performance major volunteered to assist with the demonstration, taking on the role of "student". She had some Alexander lessons (only since starting college this year) which allowed the entire audience (musicians and non-musicians alike) to understand firsthand how: 1) an Alexander instructor can begin working with a new student and 2) the intricacies of the job of performing a musical instrument run parallel to Alexander's principles of "good" use of the self and primary control.

As the lecture proceeded, Mr. de Alcantara went through the basic outline of a performance lesson step-by-step, carefully pointing out to the "student" as well as to the audience each musical and technical component he wished to work/comment on, and then how applying the Alexander Technique to these parts of the piece/performance could make a remarkable and noticeable improvement in the physical agility of the performer and ultimately, in the performance itself. As a string player, who understood all of the musical technical terms being used by Mr. de Alcantara, the demonstration itself

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## Notes From the TCP

by Joan Frost

**“...it is the responsibility of the teacher to provoke the pupil...”**

The Barbara Kent Fund has and is sponsoring several workshops by visiting teachers for our candidates. On February 24th, Pedro de Alcantara, author of *Indirect Procedures: A Musician's Guide to the Alexander Technique*, gave a presentation on his work with a cellist, a student of Kathy Miranda's. He gave the student an exercise to perform on her cello, and continued adding technical and movement demands (all the while asking her to free her neck, etc.) until she was pushed to the limit of her capacity to attend to it all. Pedro claims it is the responsibility of the teacher to provoke the pupil, to set up traps. Thus the student is continually challenged and learning proceeds. He said that getting the correct notes does not matter -- the gesture matters. If you have the right gesture, the notes will come. A common trap a music student gets into is trying to play something freely and correctly rather than freely and beautifully. He gave the demonstratee exercises to help dissociate right and left and work of the arms from work of the legs -- working with issues of bilateral and quadrilateral transfer. It was an intriguing demonstration, which Barbara recorded on video. The video is available to borrow from the ACAT library. Also, a reading of Pedro's book is recommended.

Recently, Ann Mathews came and worked with our candidates on her procedures in giving lying down lessons on the floor. She made a very good case for choosing floor work over table work, as it increases the movement challenge for the teacher, utilizing squats and crawling, and offers additional ways of working with the legs and arms. I found of interest how she works with each arm over the head, engaging the

spiraling musculature from the latissimus dorsi all the way through to the fingers and then lets the arm rest, on pillows if necessary, to encourage the opening of the shoulder girdle and arms in a way that doesn't ordinarily get exercised in daily life.

Our Winter Term assembly was organized by candidate Naina Dewan. She gathered together a number of our candidates for a morning of performances followed by some dialog of how their study of the AT has influenced the creative and performance process. Naina and Emily Fraenkel performed a traditional Korean dance about the exorcism of evil; Ralph Zito rendered an excerpt from *Romeo and Juliet*; Loren Shlaes played a ballad on the guitar; Clare Maxwell created an improvisation using audience members as participants; Bou Nishijima danced an improvisation that we all contributed to by calling out "Bou" whenever and however we wished; and Kecia Chin brought some Jamaican carnival music and had us all dancing and waving colorful "scarves" over our heads in Jamaican marathon dance style. It was an enlivening morning.

Jane Kosminsky is back with us again this Spring and we have a new volunteer faculty member: recent graduate, Allison Foley. We do have additional positions for volunteer faculty if anyone is interested in returning to ACAT in that capacity. Please contact me (Joan Frost) for further information.

Our search for a new space continues and we hope to have some real news by the next Newsletter! §

*(A New Paradigm for ACAT, continued from page 1)*

Over the years, many people have believed that ACAT should do this or that as a professional organization, but very few suggestions have gotten realized. Yes, some have, but relatively few active projects take place for members. Why? Well, most folks are not available to do the work or follow through on ideas or projects they themselves or others suggest. That's not blaming anyone. That's just an energetic fact, a truth. I myself have had many ideas that I have not followed through with. My experience is that people find the time to do what they most need to do or, for one reason or another, care deeply about. Certainly, some people have given incredible time and energy to ACAT. They have been and continue to be the heart of the organization. Some have given years, some have given decades of their lives to tireless service to ACAT. However, they usually get burned out. Some leave and put their energies elsewhere.

This repeated pattern is very hard on people and is, over time, also quite debilitating to an organization, it's strivings, and it's vision. Since we don't have much money, ACAT has to rely on volunteers

from its interested and motivated members. It can be noted here that at the last ACAT-AGM, it was hard to find enough candidates willing to serve on the Board.

I suggest, therefore, that we choose happiness and growth as an organization and as a community. ACAT has a long and profound legacy of change and growth. At ACAT there's plenty of love, energy, interest and commitment available for training teachers. I urge the membership and the board to redefine ACAT as the superb training program that it is and leave the professional affiliation, organization, and duties to NASTAT.

So let's move on and strengthen ACAT. Let's help its legacy transform and evolve. Let us allow ACAT to be a superb training program. Let's stop duplicating dues for services that NASTAT also provides to its members. I believe redefining ACAT will walk this organization into the new millennium in the most life-affirming way. It will refresh ACAT with a new sense of attainable and sustainable purpose and vision simply aligned with our present and our future. §

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## Notes From the Chair

by Thomas Vasiliades

The top priority this past year has been to find a home for ACAT. We are continuing our search and will have one as soon as possible.

In the past year we have received and given financial support for these programs and funds that support and benefit our organization:

- We received \$500 from Judy Stern for the Judith Leibowitz Fund in the name of her father, Allan Cohen
- We received \$5,000 from Deborah Caplan to create the Alma Frank Fund. This will be a scholarship fund for trainees enrolled in the teacher certification program.
- ACAT gave a \$2,000 Donation to the NASTAT Marketing and Public Relations committee.
- ACAT donated \$500 to IRDEAT for the publication of F.M. Alexander's four books in one volume.

The annual meeting was held on March 15 at the Musical Theater Works. Buzz Gummere regaled us with stories and thoughts on FM. Reports were given by Jane Tomkiewicz, the Executive Director and Joan Frost for the Teacher Certification Program. The membership had a discussion on the future of ACAT.

A concern of the board and of mine, was what is ACAT and what do we want to become. As I see it, even though ACAT is a membership organization it operates essentially as a training course. We do offer some services to the members - referrals, labels, a newsletter. We have monthly lecture demonstrations thanks to the hard work of Diane Young and Brooke Leib. However, we make most of our revenue from the training program.

*(continued from page 1)*

was extremely clear and forward, affirming what I already know to be true about the physical aspects of performing a string instrument. My greatest satisfaction with the lecture demonstration came afterwards, however, when other non-musician members of the audience affirmed to me their perception of the demonstration's lucidity, and of how the musical "upgrade" which Mr. de Alcantara was trying to draw forth from the "student" was immediately apparent to a layperson's ears.

All in all, ACAT members who attended Mr. de Alcantara's lecture demonstration were treated to an afternoon of very fine speaking /thinking/performing. A performing artist himself, I would venture to say that F.M. Alexander would have been quite pleased to see such a direct and thought-out application of his Technique, one hundred years after its inception. Kudos to Mr. de Alcantara and to all thinking musicians. §

When I agreed to run for the chair position last spring I had hopes of building ACAT into a viable organization, more a center for the Alexander work than only a training program. My hopes were for a post graduate training program, a speaker's bureau, lectures and classes for the public, etc. Around the beginning of this year I had informal conversations with some of the members, mentioning some of the ideas I had for building ACAT. I asked if they would be interested in helping with any of these projects, or had some ideas they would like to bring to fruition.

All the members gave various reasons why they were not able to give time to work on these projects. I am not critical of anyone. However, I did have to take a look at what was possible to accomplish. In the weeks that followed I thought about what ACAT is and what it can become. 1) I thought the membership didn't have the time to advance ACAT (again, I'm not being critical). 2) ACAT doesn't have the financial capability to hire someone to do the work needed.

I felt that what we are is a training course that does a few things unrelated to the training course. ACAT was a viable training program and will continue to be so. That said, it was not what I wanted to do. I announced to the member present that I will resign from the board effective the end of July. I will continue to help with the space search and organizing the move to our new location. I will continue to serve ACAT.

I want to thank all the board members I have worked with over the past years. It was a pleasure to work with you. Also, I'd like to thank the membership for the opportunity to serve on the board of ACAT. §

**"I thought the membership didn't have the time to advance ACAT"**

## Allison Foley to Join the ACAT Board

Allison Foley was certified by ACAT in 1997. She taught a workshop in the Dance Department at Hunter College this spring and continues group and private lessons in her home in Williamsburg.

Her previous history includes a lifetime of dancing and performing, 10 years of choreographing dances presented in NYC as well as Japan, organizing improvisation events for dancers and musicians, and most recently making a video that documented her life while training at ACAT. §

## Up and Away

by Buzz Gummere

In 1994 my wife Peg and I attended the 4th International Congress of Alexander Teachers at Sydney, Australia. On the final day, we chose the option of flying to the island of Tasmania to see a new play about young F. Matthias Alexander. He was born and grew to young manhood in the small town of Wynyard on the northwest coast, less than an hour's flight south from Sydney. If we'd flown further on down, our next stop would have been Antarctica. In Tasmania you sense you're on The Edge. But we could climb to the top of Table Cape, a spectacular promontory looming over the Wynyard scene, and feel heroic. It points north like a finger, up and away - towards what?

During the middle of the past century, the Alexanders owned and farmed most of the land on Table Cape, which we estimated at about 2,000 acres. They'd cleared it of forest. Its rich soil has supported horses, sheep and crops. We saw it covered with poppies. Down below, with the bravura that had brought them to Tasmania, the family gave the settlement around their store and hotel the name Alexandria. They bought a trading vessel and christened her Alexander.

At the tip of the Cape we found a lighthouse built in the 1880s. Peg and I, being romantics, imagined a teenager standing close to the edge of the cliff gazing out over Bass Strait and the Pacific - towards a challenging world. On a boulder we read a bronze plaque: Frederick Matthias Alexander, 1869-1955. We've forgotten the sentence underneath. What would you have written? Try it. Australia had just added his name to the list of her 200 most illustrious citizens.

What got him there? When an English antiquarian, Martin Scott, delved through the early 19th century records of the town of Ramsbury, in the county of Wiltshire, the irrepressible Alexanders caught his eye. The misery of England's working classes then was unspeakable. The Industrial Revolution had exploded and was putting many thousands of cottage weavers and small farmers out of work. First, the destitute weavers began the retaliation as followers of John Ludd. They demolished equipment in the factories and sometimes burned them down, until the army was called out and a few Luddites were hung. (Today's Luddites hate the computer almost that much.) In the 1830's the farmers struck when an insurgent called Captain Swing led them in "Swing Riots."

F.M. Alexander's grandfather, Matthias, who was called a woodsman, had brown hair, blue eyes, and moustachios. One day, aged all of 18 (some say 20),

he watched a formidable contraption clattering along on the fields of a wealthy mill owner. Picture Matthias, armed with his sledge hammer, joining an angry mob which advanced on the offending farm. "Ya should've seen young Alexander smashed the 'ole bloomin' blitherin' threshin' machine to pieces." "Aye, and I seen his brother Joe eggin' 'im on, I 'ave."

Witnesses identified both in court. A magistrate sentences the brothers to seven years. In Portsmouth they were packed on board the Eliza with 224 other convicts for a voyage of 112 days to Hobart, Tasmania. The prison colony there was at least as brutal as the infamous Botany Bay on the mainland. Who has read the tragic book by Richard Hughes, *Fatal Shore*, about those two purgatories? Strolling along the harbour of Sydney we passed the author's name set in bronze on the pavement of the promenade.

Hughes writes that mainly to escape from England many convicts committed far smaller crimes - the theft of a loaf of bread, say - than the robust sabotage of Matthias Alexander. "Nothin' nowhere could be 'alf as bad as this blinkin' country." A couple of years later, Edward Alexander, the father of Matthias and Joseph - and our F.M.'s great grandfather, got up his nerve and was transported to Tasmania for the theft of a pig. And in a few years, Matthias married Mary Redden, whose trial had been held in the Old Bailey. She was sent down for stealing a gown.

But John, the youngest of the three, showed what Alexanders could do when given a chance. He got himself shipped off to Hobart. Folks around Wiltshire said "e only wanted to be with 'is brothers." But once freed in 1846, John took off to America for the California Gold Rush. He returned for another around Ballarat, Victoria then appropriately called "Australia Felix" - i.e. "Happy." John had accumulated enough gold to return home and buy up most of Table Cape. He found it heavily timbered, and since the gold boom on the Continent was escalating Tasmanian exports for construction, may we assume F.M.'s Great Uncle John made a killing?

Matthias sired fourteen children. His son John, named after the adventurous uncle, was a blacksmith and the father of F.M. Alexander. He had brought his bride, Betsy Brown, from her nearby town to live in Table Cape. According to F.M.'s brother Albert Redden Alexander (usually called "A.R.") their father was a dreamer who would stand silently on the veranda, gazing over the landscape

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for long spells. Was he dreaming that one of his own eight children might rise in the world?

Albert Redden Alexander - remember Great Aunt Mary Redding, who made off with the gown? - wanted in his own way to compensate for the horrors that had humiliated his forebears. First he, too, took off on a gold rush to a field discovered in the 1890's far out in Western Australia. An attack of typhoid fever permanently weakened his eyes. But still game, he leapt on his horse to canter off with the Australian Rough Riders to join the British in the Boer War in South Africa. Even smaller than his brother, A.R. became one of the top jockeys of Australia.

Now you might wonder why he rode off to fight for the British, once the family's Nemesis. Well, you've seen those dashing hats Australian soldiers wear with the brim turned up on one side and down on the other. One day, in a South African city, A.R. told me, the edgy regiment could hear the taunt of English spectators that these Aussies looked rather pretty for a bunch of convicts. "What did you do?" I asked. "We trashed the town." "And those hecklers?" "We beat the buggahs up."

"Alexander The Play," for which we'd flown to Wynyard, features characters not included in the canonical lore about F.M.'s early life. The authors, Maggie Young, an Alexander teacher, and Ian Macfarlane, a retired union official, both of Wynyard, had been hobnobbing with old timers and poring over recently surfaced documents. Maggie directed; and, in a lustrous Victorian gown, she took the part of Aunt Fannie, one of the teeming family of old Matthias, reading several affectionate letters to Fred, her favorite nephew. Then when Fred was about to board ship for London, enter George Easton, a crony from boyhood, with bottles of wine and cheese.

As Ian Macfarlane drove Peg and me around the Wynyard area, he intrigued us with his theory of an Indian Connection. Last century, a group of executives from the British East India Company had retired to Wynyard for its quiet beauty. Ian imagines Fred Alexander passing the time among young people in homes with India's art on the wall and her classics on the shelves.

Of course, F.M.'s longtime aide Ethel Webb admitted she'd never seen him reading, but A.R. described his brother, in his youth, "always with his nose in the pages of a book" - why not a translation of the Upanishads or a volume of Indian scripture from F. Max Mueller's *Sacred Books of the East*? He

could have remembered in the ancient poetry and philosophy of India the principle that he must not try to understand the universe until he understood himself - when he'd understand the universe anyway. "Go within and study what you are not. Nothing else matters" - Nisagardatta. "All I will ever know in the world is when I am wrong." - Alexander.

Whatever the merits of Ian Macfarlane's Indian hypothesis, F.M. Alexander's initiative was stunning enough to rank him with the world's movers. He found out that the unruly larynx that ended his career in the theater signified not an affliction he suffered but a habit he had learned. The catastrophe did not happen to him - he invited it. He had made a discovery as simple and seminal (the word comes from the Latin for seed) as the heresy of Hippocrates: that illness serves as discipline, not of gods or spirits, but of Nature and life.

The sources of Alexander's accomplishment include not only frontier cussedness, a compulsion to get back on stage, and an elephantine ego but also the old family gallery of hyperactive mavericks. Their audacity may have been the most powerful of those influences. And the most Australian. Who would be more likely to turn centuries of medical science upside down than an eccentric from Down Under?

One of the most beautiful constructions in the world is the Sydney Opera House. Looking across the harbour at twilight, we imagined it was the ghost of a windjammer under full sail - could it be Eliza? We recalled the thousands of England's irrepressible poor, crowded into such vessels and terrified by the storms as they sailed around Cape Horn to endure the atrocity of bondage. Tried in that crucible, they became the cornerstone in the building of a great nation. §

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*Prepared for the 1998 Annual Meeting of the American Center for the Alexander Technique (ACAT) and revised for Commencement at the Alexander Foundation in Philadelphia..*

*Roslyn McLeod describes much of the social and economic background of these early Alexanders in Tasmania in Up from Down Under, P.O. Box 277, Canterbury, Victoria, Australia 3126.*

## News from the Center

The following are new additions to the library: *The Control of Tension: A New Field for Prevention* by Theodore Dimon, Jr. (Donated to our library by **Ted Dimon** - who directs a training course in Cambridge), *The Books of F. Matthias Alexander* published by IRDEAT (This is a collection of Alexander's four works in one volume), *F. Matthias Alexander and the Creative Advance of the Individual* by George C. Burden (a photocopy of this book was donated to the library by **Roberto Mainetti**). The following videotapes are also available:

**Pedro de Alcantara's** workshop at ACAT (described in this newsletter). *The Alexander Technique: An Interview with Elizabeth Huebner* (donated to our library by **Elizabeth Huebner**). As well as the new publications and videos there are the latest editions of the *STAT Newsletter*, the *NASTAT newsletter*, *Alternative Therapies*, *Natural Health*, *Yoga*, *Somatics*. There are copies of recent articles

from *Saxophone Journal*, *Fitness Swimmer* and a copy of the sections on Alexander Technique from the *Encyclopedia of Healing Therapies* by Anne Woodham and Dr. David Peters.

**Deborah Caplan** contributed to the publication *The Alternative Advisor: The Complete Guide to Natural Therapies and Alternative Treatments*, Time Life Books, 1997. Either a copy of the book or at least a copy of the section on the Alexander Technique will be in the Library soon.

**Connie Serchuk** gave a lecture demonstration at the *Institute of Expressive Analysis*. Trainees Kecia Chin and Anke Fröhlich attended. It was well attended and well received. At the conclusion of the lecture Connie was presented with 2 dozen roses.

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