

**Exploring the perceived impact of  
extensive training in the Alexander  
technique on the day-to-day lives of  
professional musicians.**

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
degree of Master of Science (MSc)

Royal College of Music

14th May 2020

Word count: 12,148

## ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to better understand the potential of the Alexander Technique (AT) for musicians through exploration of the ways in which professional musicians perceive the impact of extensive AT training, represented by completion of an AT teacher training course, on their daily lives. A qualitative methodological approach was employed. Data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with five AT trained professional musicians from a range of profiles within the western classical tradition, and analysed inductively using interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). Findings reveal a predominantly positive impact of extensive AT training on three key areas: (1) the act of making music, (2) the sense of self as musician, and (3) health and wellbeing. These are comprised of a number of themes (with their constituent sub-themes) which represent in more detail the impact of AT training: (1) 1.1 Making life as a professional possible, 1.2 The physicality of making music, 1.3 Sound and musicality, 1.4 Musical practice, and 1.5 The performance experience, (2) 2.1 Self-efficacy, 2.2 Identity and self-worth, 2.3 Motivation, and (3) 3.1 Relationships, 3.2 Coping, 3.3 Physical and mental health, and 3.4 Wellbeing. Physical changes achieved through extensive AT training contributes to the perceived impact upon the physicality of making music, physical and mental health, and wellbeing. The core AT strategy for the improvement of physical functioning, *Inhibition* and *Direction*, is compared to models of self-regulated learning, and linked to the perceived impact on musical practice, self-efficacy and peak performance experience. These findings have significant pedagogical and injury prevention implications for musicians.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank all the AT trained musicians and non musicians alike whom I have had the privilege to meet and work with over the years for stimulating my curiosity to better understand the implications of the AT work for musicians. Thanks to the participants of this study for generously and enthusiastically giving their time to share their experiences, and to Peter Buckoke for his insights and suggestions. Finally, a big thank you to Rosie Perkins for her support and academic guidance throughout the process.



# 1. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Ambitious musicians invest thousands of hours in dedicated practice and rehearsal to achieve their goal of becoming a professional (Ericsson, Krampe & Tesch-Römer, 1993). While successful professional musicians may experience high levels of life satisfaction and psychological wellbeing (Ascenso, Williamon & Perkins, 2017) it is also true that a significant number suffer from playing or performance related issues such as performance anxiety (MPA), playing related pain (PRP) and playing related musculoskeletal disorders (PRMDs) (Fishbein & Middlestadt, 1988; Kenny & Ackermann, 2015; Zaza, 1998). These issues often first manifest during advanced musical training, with high prevalence reported amongst conservatoire students (Williamon & Thomson, 2006; Wyn Parry, 2004). When it comes to PRP, usually a precursor of more serious PRMDs, there is a homogeneity across instrument groups regarding the areas of the body most commonly affected: namely the neck, shoulders, upper and lower back (Cruder et al., 2017). Music education institutions are becoming increasingly aware of the need to address such issues. It is their responsibility to provide students not only with sound guidance on how to overcome problems once they have manifested, but moreover to equip their students with the necessary knowledge and skills to know the risks and recognise warning signs, and thus prevent problems from developing.

For many students their instrumental teacher will be the first, and sometimes only person to whom they turn for help and advice, if indeed they seek help at all (Williamon & Thomson, 2006; Waters, 2019). That said, there is also an interest amongst musicians in non-musical disciplines that can be of potential benefit. The Alexander Technique (AT) is one of the more established of such disciplines. A large proportion of professional musicians report taking or having previously taken lessons (Valentine et al., 1995), and since the collaboration between first generation AT teachers Wilfred and Marjorie Barlow and the RCM in the 1960s, the AT has become possibly the most integrated of alternative disciplines to be offered to students in music colleges and conservatoires worldwide.

This thesis seeks to better understand how AT can be used to address the performance and playing related issues mentioned previously, and whether it has the potential to go further and in fact enhance the professional experience. To do this it will explore the experience of musicians who have undertaken extensive AT training, ie. those who have completed an AT teacher training course. The remainder of this chapter gives a brief overview of AT and AT teacher training, before reviewing relevant literature on the benefits of AT for people in general, and performing artists and musicians in particular. Chapter two details the methodological approach and methodologies employed in the study, and chapter three presents the results. Finally, chapter four discusses the most pertinent findings and their implications, and indicates directions for future research.

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## **1.1 The Alexander Technique**

### **1.1.1 What is the AT?**

The aim of the Alexander technique is the improvement of a person's use of themselves in its most comprehensive sense, applying to the general coordination and working of the body (Alexander, 1932/1987). This aim stems from the premise that use affects functioning, where functioning implies not only the efficacy with which a particular movement or activity is achieved, but more fundamentally the good functioning of the whole human organism. The improvement of use is gradual and is brought about by the conscious application of two basic processes: inhibition and direction. Inhibition may be defined as the withholding of consent for action in order to interrupt the habitual physical response pattern to a given stimulus. Direction is a two tier process. The first level works as a counterpart to inhibition and involves a basic set of instructions to optimise the positional and tensional relationship between the head and the trunk:

*Let the neck be free*

*To let the head go forward and up*

*To let the back lengthen and widen*

The emphasis on axial behaviour (ie. the elongation of the spine to achieve balance, suppleness and integrity of the trunk) is consistent and paramount, and underpins the effectiveness of the second level of direction, which Alexander describes as *“the process involved*

*in projecting messages from the brain to the mechanisms and in conducting the energy necessary to the use of these mechanisms”* (Alexander, 1932/87. p.35). (For a more detailed description of inhibition and direction, and the pedagogy of AT see Cacciatore et al., 2005).

One of the biggest impediments to a person’s improvement of their own use is the result of what Alexander terms ‘faulty sensory appreciation,’ or in other words unreliable feeling; what you perceive yourself to be doing with your body is not necessarily an accurate mental representation of what is actually happening. For this reason hands-on guidance from a trained AT teacher who can act as a source of external feedback is usually required. The goal however is for the student to achieve sufficient understanding and proficiency in the application of inhibition and direction that they might be equipped to explore and improve their use independently, and over time develop a more reliable sensory awareness.

### **1.1.2 AT teacher training**

There is no fundamental difference in aim for the training of AT teachers than that described above. What a training course offers is a more intense rhythm of work and increased opportunities for experiences that can help a person develop their understanding of use. The majority of STAT (Society for Teachers of the Alexander Technique, the AT regulatory body in the UK) approved teacher training courses follow a similar format: a 1600 hour course completed over a minimum of 3 years, 3 - 4 hours per day spread over 4 - 5 days per week, in which 80% of training time is dedicated to practical application of Alexander work ([stat.org.uk](http://stat.org.uk)). This usually includes a period for individual work with an experienced AT teacher, time to explore independently or with fellow students, and hands-on training to learn how to guide and provide feedback to others. The inclusion of other work such as the study of anatomy, body mapping, other movement or voice work is dependent on the particular interests of the head of training, but is always included as an aid to develop the skills and understanding of inhibition, direction and use.

AT therefore is a primarily mental discipline, and provides a framework within which people can improve their standard of physical coordination. It is an essentially individual process, and training to become a teacher of AT is achieved through increasing the intensity of engagement with the work.

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## 1.2 Benefits of AT

The majority of people first engage with AT as a means to resolve physical or postural complaints (Eldred et al., 2015). In what follows, literature on the general clinical and postural benefits of AT will be discussed, before focussing on the literature relevant to performing artists and musicians in particular.

### 1.2.1 *Clinical and postural benefits of AT*

Clinical implications of training in the AT with relevance for musicians stems from its believed ability to improve postural coordination. Common coordination deficits are often reported in subjects with lower back pain (LBP), which training in the AT has been shown to improve accompanied by a reduction in reported pain severity and frequency (Cacciatore et al., 2005). There is convincing evidence of the long-term effectiveness of AT training for patients with chronic or recurrent LBP (Little et al., 2008), whether through AT lessons alone or through increasing the effectiveness of engaging in other forms of physical exercise. Participants in that particular study reported increased self-efficacy in their ability to manage their back pain after AT lessons (Yardley et al., 2010), a result replicated in another smaller scale study (MacLean, Brilleman & Wye, 2015). The use of AT in the treatment of chronic neck pain has also produced important clinical outcomes. It has been shown as significantly more beneficial than usual care, again with long-term benefits attributed to patients improved self-efficacy (MacPherson et al., 2015). While most studies have relied on one-to-one AT lessons, a smaller feasibility study exploring the potential of group AT classes indicates similar trends in their results (Becker et al., 2018). A further group of studies have found benefits of AT lessons for movement coordination and balance in Parkinson's patients and older adults (Stallibrass, Sissons & Chalmers, 2002; Cohen, Gurfinkel, Kwak, Warden & Horak, 2015; Cohen et al., 2020). While this may not seem immediately relevant for musicians, a report by the Musicians' Union highlights how the vast majority of performing musicians may be required to continue working well beyond retirement age for financial reasons (van der Maas & Hallam, 2012). In light of this, the potential to maintain mobility with advancing age garners more importance.

Taking their cue from the AT emphasis on axial behaviour (ie. the integrity and balance of the trunk through the optimal tensile relationship between the head and the spine), a group of

studies carried out by Cacciatore et al. sought to explain the postural changes associated with AT training and their implications for control and quality of movement. They compared adults with long-term AT training, ie. those who have completed a 1600 hour teacher training course, with matched healthy control subjects. Their investigations demonstrate that those with long-term AT training have a significantly increased capacity to dynamically regulate postural tone in response to changing relationships between different parts of the body (Cacciatore et al., 2010). This capacity for regulation of postural tone is thought to be a determining factor in the ability to control the speed and smoothness of whole body movements, such as sit-to-stand, something which healthy controls were unable to do (Cacciatore et al., 2011; Cacciatore et al., 2014).

### ***1.2.2 Benefits of AT for performing artists and musicians***

Considering that a sizeable proportion of those who take AT lessons do so for help with performance related issues (Eldred et al., 2015), and the fact that AT provision is embedded in many performing arts institutions worldwide, there is a relative paucity of empirical, peer-reviewed research exploring the impact of AT and the ways in which performing artists experience their engagement with it. One of the few published papers involving dancers is a qualitative study exploring the perceived impact of 20 one-to-one AT lessons on the participants' professional career and daily life (Fortin & Girard, 2005). Through analysis of interview transcripts and diary entries, the authors were able to illuminate subtle changes in the language participants used to express their experience of movement, such as moving from concepts of individual body parts to a more global concept of whole self over the course of lessons, reflecting a shift in thinking about themselves brought about by the AT training. The study highlighted, however, the challenges in applying AT in the professional sphere, with participants expressing the need for considerable time without the pressure to seek immediate results in order to explore and integrate AT principles. Although of short duration and involving only 2 participants, this study gives valuable insight into the potential impact of AT training for performing artists, as well as making clear that the process is most likely to be gradual.

Studies investigating AT and musicians are comparatively numerous, though many are based primarily on quantitative inquiry and fail to provide conclusive results (for a review see Klein et al., 2014). Early studies perhaps suffered from the desire to prove that AT did something, without necessarily having the tools to measure effectively or a robust design to support claims.

The earliest study by Barlow (1956) falls into this category as he both administered the intervention, devised the rating scale for postural faults, and conducted the analysis himself, thereby reducing the validity of the study despite its claims made in support of AT. In others, the choice of variables often do not accurately represent the aims of AT training, or the elements of AT training that are most interesting or relevant for musicians, eg. measuring changes in peak respiratory flow or height with inconclusive results (Dennis, 1987; Valentine et al., 1995).

The lack of demonstrable outcomes from quantitative studies is also due in large part to the limited AT input and short duration of interventions. Most have consisted of between 12 and 20 one-to-one lessons administered over a period of 8 to 16 weeks, which is generally considered insufficient to fully integrate AT principles, and especially in complex activities such as instrumental playing (Dennis, 1987; Neilsen, 1988; Valentine, 1995; Egner & Gruzelier 2003; Valentine & Williamon 2003; Mozeiko, 2011). Reflecting the observation of the dancers in Fortin & Girarde (2005) that integrating AT in rehearsal and performance is challenging, Valentine et al. (1995) found that positive outcomes for measures of technical and musical quality, self-rated anxiety and positive attitude to performance were restricted to low stress situations only. Mozeiko (2011) similarly found a disparity between the results of quantitative measures for pain and general wellbeing and the qualitative reflections of her participants regarding their perceived improvement with respect to these two variables. In general, in those studies that have included a qualitative element (ie. Davies, 2019a, 2019b; Mozeiko, 2011; Valentine et al., 1995; Valentine & Williamon, 2003), the qualitative data reveals a more profound experience than the lack of statistical significance in the quantitative data would imply.

The two most recent studies into AT and musicians (Davies, 2019a, 2019b; Fung Ying et al., 2015) have taken a different approach and provided AT interventions in group format, which more closely represents the modality in which AT is currently provided in most music education institutions. Results from a 14 week group AT intervention for student pianists (Fung Ying et al., 2015) indicated a positive effect of AT training, with a significant reduction in self-rated tension reported relative to the pre-test survey. It is unfortunate however that participants were not randomly selected, and that no control group was established. Davies (2019a, 2019b) similarly conducted a 14 week group AT intervention with instrumental students, and findings show that participants rated AT classes as very beneficial for posture and tension, quite-to-very beneficial

for PR pain, instrumental technique and performance level, and slightly-to-quite beneficial for practice effectiveness, non-PR pain, stress and performance anxiety. Further, using pre- and post-intervention video recordings rated by both students and their teachers (Davies, 2019b), improvement was demonstrated in terms of excess muscle tension, posture and instrumental technique, breathing (for wind players), instrumental tone and movement efficiency and fluidity, with quantitative results strengthened by the reporting of qualitative data in the form of comments and observations made by teachers and students during the video assessment process. While the teacher evaluators are reported as having no prior experience of the AT, they were not blinded to the purpose of the study, and establishment of a matched control group of students from the same teachers was unfortunately unsuccessful. Therefore it is difficult to fully attribute improvements to the AT intervention alone. And again, these were short term interventions in which the improvement of posture and the reduction of tension was clearly a priority, which would naturally skew the positive results towards those outcomes.

Taken together, these studies do support the potential of AT to benefit performing artists and musicians in particular, even though they are not necessarily able to pin-point exactly how or explain why. Perhaps what they demonstrate most clearly is the difficulty of integrating AT in high stress situations such as musical performance, especially in such a short period of time. But it is also an unquestioned assumption that this should even be possible with long-term training.

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### **1.3 Research Question**

It is time for research into the AT and musicians to take a step back from its need to quantitatively prove that the AT has an effect, and begin to grasp instead through empirical research the full breadth of musicians' experience with AT. An important starting point, based upon the work of Cacciatore et al. discussed previously, is to explore the experiences of those with long-term AT training. There are a vast number of musicians who have undertaken extensive AT training to become certified teachers of the AT, and this is a population whose experiences have never before undergone empirical investigation. This study therefore asks the question:

*In what ways do professional musicians perceive the impact of extensive training in the Alexander technique (AT) on their day-to-day lives?*

## 2. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The intention of this study was to explore the perceived impact of extensive AT training on the day-to-day lives of professional musicians. Similar to other studies that have investigated the implications of long-term AT training, completion of a 1600 hour STAT certified AT teacher training course was selected as a baseline for extensive AT training, though it is recognised that participants will have engaged in varying amounts of additional AT training pre- and post- teacher training. To the best of our knowledge this is the first academic research to examine the impact of extensive AT training on musicians, and the first to specifically target a population of musicians who have successfully pursued a professional career in music as well as training in AT. Literature to date has investigated the outcomes of short-term AT interventions only, and as a result there is insufficient understanding of how musicians experience AT to inform an adequate experimental research design or for any one theoretical framework to be applied. Therefore, a constructionist epistemological approach was deemed most appropriate for this research. Constructionism departs from the assumption that there is no absolute truth, rather meaning is constructed through people's interactions with their social world and is subjective in nature. The experience of a particular phenomena may hold different meaning for different people, and all are equally valid and worthy of study. A constructionist approach seeks to capture the nuance of the individual perspective, thereby constructing knowledge that reflects the complexity of the real world (Williamon, Ginsborg & Perkins, in press).

The goal of understanding the perceived impact of extensive AT training most readily suggests a phenomenological theoretical perspective; that is, understanding the *phenomena* of AT training through interpretation of the participants lived experience of it (Cresswell, 2014). Phenomenology suggests an inductive research approach in which the researcher must first question their own biases or assumptions, a process known as 'bracketing' (Spencer, Pryce & Walsh, 2014), in order to make way for the participants' perspective. Capturing the complexity of lived experience inherently implies the use of qualitative methodologies which can provide rich, context-specific data. For this study, the use of semi-structured interviews as opposed to other



forms of data collection such as diaries or observation was considered the most appropriate method in order to capture not only the perceived impact of extensive AT training on current day-to-day life, but important life history that would allow the perceived impact to be situated and understood within the context of the participants' individual realities.

For analysis, the choice of a phenomenological strategy such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith & Osborne, 2004) permits the detailed study of participants' lived experience, with a focus on their subjective and every-day experiences. As a trained musician and AT teacher, the researcher shares the same profile as the subjects of the study, and while this is considered advantageous in understanding and interpreting the subtleties of participants' experiences, care has been taken to bracket that existing understanding during the analysis and interpretation phase in order to see the phenomena from the perspective of the participants.

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## 2.1 Participants

Active professional musicians who have completed a 1600 hour STAT certified AT teacher training course were considered eligible for inclusion. The study comprised five such musicians between the ages of 26 and 63 years, two male and three female, representing a range of professional profiles (see Table 1). The small sample size of five participants fits with an IPA approach, which holds to the idea that 'less is more' (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011) to allow an in-depth and richly detailed analysis of the experience of each participant. Participants are referred to using pseudonyms to preserve anonymity.

**Table 1.**

Participant	Current specialism	Age (years)	Years as professional musician	Years as trained AT teacher
David	Freelance chamber musician (viola)	26	Approx 1	1
Louise	Orchestral musician: opera and ballet (violin)	38	Approx 10	13
Christian	Freelance orchestral and chamber musician (oboe)	63	Approx 37	29
Gabriela	Soloist (mezzo-soprano)	52	Approx 20	5
Helen	Orchestral musician: symphony (cello)	56	Approx 28	7

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## 2.2 Procedure

Participants were recruited through personal contacts, recommendations, and via an email sent to all members and inclusion on the STAT website. A purposeful sample was chosen to represent a variety of instruments (strings, wind and voice), career types (freelance, orchestral and soloist), and stages of professional career (early, mid and late career). The number of years since completion of AT teacher training was not a sampling criteria, though it was hoped to capture a range of profiles from those recently graduated to those with significant time since completion of AT training. All participants were AT trained in accordance with STAT guidelines, and each trained under different heads of AT training in the UK or abroad. All participants worked within the western classical music tradition.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, conducted face-to-face or via online video call between December 2019 and February 2020. Interview questions were open ended and designed to elicit information regarding both participants' musician and AT history, in order to fully capture the influence of their engagement with the AT work over time. While freedom was allowed for participants to shape the direction of interviews, four core questions were addressed:

- *Can you tell me about your current life as a professional musician?*
- *How did you become a professional musician?*
- *How did you come to train as an Alexander teacher?*
- *How would you describe the impact of the AT on your life as a professional musician?*

(see Appendix I for full interview schedule)

Four interviews were conducted in English and one in Spanish. All interviews were audio recorded, and all interviews were conducted and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Initial transcription of those in English was done using Otter.ai, then listened back and corrected by the researcher. The interview in Spanish was transcribed in full by the researcher, with relevant quotations translated by the researcher and checked for accuracy by the participant.

### **2.2.1 Ethical approval**

The study was approved by the Conservatoires UK Ethics Committee and all participants provided informed consent (for participant information sheet and consent form see Appendix II).

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## **2.3 Analysis**

Interview transcripts were analysed through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), whose inductive approach was best suited to explore the meaning of participants' lived experience (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). IPA recognises that whilst one is trying to understand the world from the perspective of the participants, this is not possible without a process of interpretation on the part of the researcher (Smith & Osborne, 2004. p.230). Analysis was carried out in three stages moving from a micro to a macro perspective. Each participants' experience was approached firstly on its own terms (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009), before looking for points of convergence or divergence, and finally embedding findings directly in the words of the participants and organising themes under broad overarching themes representing areas of impact.

### *Stage 1.*

For a comprehensive understanding of participants' lived experience musicians with extensive AT training, analysis was guided not only by the main research question (RQ), but was augmented by four supporting analytical questions (AQs). These analytical questions were designed to tease out important historical and contextual information necessary to interpret the RQ data, information which would later be drawn on to fully explain the results.

*RQ. In what ways do professional musicians perceive the impact of extensive training in the Alexander technique (AT) on their day-to-day lives?*

*AQ1. What aspects of participants' experiences as musicians led them to engage with the AT?*

*AQ2. What were participants' motivations for undertaking an AT teacher training course?*

*AQ3. What were participants' experiences of their AT teacher training course?*

*AQ4. What form has participants' continued engagement with the AT taken post teacher training?*

Analysis involved in-depth reading and re-reading of the transcript for familiarisation, which was then manually coded to identify units of meaning. A document was created for each participant which was populated with codes grouped according to the RQ and the four AQs, and emerging themes identified (for an example see Appendix III).

#### *Stage 2.*

Stage 2 involved bringing together the emerging themes from all five participants and identifying common themes. Initially these continued to be organised according to the RQ and four AQs. However, as the analysis process advanced some information became more pertinent. AQs 3 and 4 were considered too far removed from the main RQ and were dropped from the analysis procedure, whilst AQs 1 and 2 were considered necessary contextual information to support interpretation of the RQ data. Separate documents were therefore created for the RQ, AQ1 and AQ2, with common themes listed as headings.

#### *Stage 3.*

Returning to the original data, the three documents from stage 2 were populated with a comprehensive selection of quotes relevant to each common theme (for an example see Appendix IV). This was the limit of the analysis procedure for AQs 1 and 2, and some of these quotes would later be used to clarify or contextualise the RQ findings.

For the RQ data, the selection of quotes were used to generate sub-themes. Finally, to give more coherence to the findings for the RQ it was necessary to go one step further in the analysis procedure and identify overarching themes to group the themes and sub-themes.

### 3. RESULTS

IPA for the 5 interviews revealed a wide ranging impact of extensive AT training on the day-to-day lives of participants. In order to fully understand the impact however, it is first necessary to address what led participants to engage with AT (AQ1), and their motivations for undertaking an AT teacher training course (AQ2).

The primary stimulus for participants to engage with AT was a build up of experiences with playing and performing that had generated specific problems such as playing related pain or performance anxiety. Alongside this, participants either felt that they were not coping with the demands of their professional career, or they felt a lack of satisfaction with the progress of their musical learning. The essential reason why participants continued their engagement with AT beyond initial consultation with an AT teacher was that they felt AT was offering solutions to their playing and performance related problems.

*“there is a chain that is frustration, pain, impossibility, and that is really bad for you, suddenly it was as if that chain had been unlocked” (Gabriela, p.12)*

All participants connected on some level with the principles of AT in relation to their own playing, eg. the importance of the head-spine relationship in playing a wind instrument or recognising their own faulty sensory appreciation. Most found the collaborative and investigative approach to learning and teaching advocated by AT especially beneficial, which for one participant was in contrast to the style of teaching to which he was accustomed:

*“I.Will.Work.With.You. Like this is what I felt the [AT] teacher was saying, we will work together and we will make it better.” (David, p.11)*

The primary motivation for undertaking an AT teacher training course was to enhance participants' understanding of AT and somatic skills. AT teacher training was seen as the best way to achieve this as it afforded a period of sustained input. Secondary was the idea that AT training was an investment, both in terms of future health and the potential for an alternative career.

Finally, several participants connected their motivation for training with a desire to help others since they personally had found AT so beneficial.

Having outlined the context for how participants became engaged in AT and their motivations for undertaking the training, the main analysis resulted in three overarching themes that together describe the impact of their extensive AT training on their day-to-day lives. These overarching themes, along with their constituent themes and sub-themes, are presented in Table 2 and discussed with reference to participant quotations in what follows.

**Table 2. Table of themes**

Overarching themes	Themes	Sub-themes
1. Impact on the act of making music	1.1 Making life as a professional musician possible	a. Success b. Not getting messed up c. Longevity
	1.2 Physicality of making music	a. Changing the physics of movement b. Changing understanding of technique c. Use of energy
	1.3 Sound and musicality	a. Sound quality b. Musical intention c. Sensory awareness and attention d. Intonation
	1.4 Musical practice	a. Knowing how: intelligence and strategies b. Knowing when to stop c. Enjoyment
	1.5 The performance experience	a. Performance anxiety b. Inclusive attention c. Feeling at home on stage
2. Impact on sense of self as musician	2.1 Self efficacy	a. Confidence b. Independence c. Somatic skills
	2.2 Identity and self worth	a. Changing habits b. Letting go of musical identity c. Changing mental approach to playing
	2.3 Motivation	a. Intrinsic motivation b. Conflict with intrinsic motivation
3. Impact on health and wellbeing	3.1 Relationships	a. Physical contact b. Improving personal relationships c. Changing professional relationships
	3.2 Coping	a. Perspective b. Internal locus of control c. Practical tools and strategies
	3.3 Physical and mental health	a. An investment in health b. Applying AT thinking c. Returning to a more optimal physical state d. Unpacking the psychological side
	3.4 Wellbeing	a. Physical wellbeing b. Making music is wellbeing c. Life feels easier

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### 3.1 Overarching theme 1. Impact on the act of making music

#### ***Theme 1.1. Making life as a professional musician possible***

For many participants the extensive training undertaken in the AT has made the life they now lead as a professional musician possible. For Christian, the *success* (sub-theme 1.1a) he has enjoyed in his career *“would not have come without the Alexander technique”* (p.17), while for both David and Louise it is expressed in terms of being physically able to play (sub-theme 1.1b: not getting messed up):

*“I think if I hadn't done the Alexander course... I would have been messed up by now, I would have not been able to do anything”* (Louise, p.24)

*“I'm really really sure I would not be playing if I hadn't had the Alexander technique. I'm positive... I think I would have been RSI'd, like to within an inch of my life by now”* (David, p.22)

For Gabriela, who came to the AT after an already successful career, the extensive AT training is credited with seeing her through the changes of the menopause and breathing new life into her career (sub-theme 1.1c: longevity):

*“for a woman of my age, after the menopause it's difficult. One doesn't always survive those changes, and at 20 years of my career to have the voice sounding fresh... (p.22). To have the physical mobility to interpret the role of someone young and have the voice fresh so that that can happen, it seems to me that the limits that I would like to conquer now are limits that have to do with my own ability to make my desires come true”* (Gabriela, p.24)

While this is not to say that Gabriela would not have continued to have a career without the AT training, there is a sense that it would have been more limited in scope and interest for her.

#### ***Theme 1.2. Physicality of making music***

For all participants, the initial catalyst for engagement with the AT were physical problems associated with the act of making music or otherwise. However, extensive AT training has had a more fundamental impact on the physicality of making music than simply solving physical problems. David describes himself as *“just better because I was more coordinated, because I have the Alexander training, I just was better (p.19)... more rapid... [had] more agility, more*

*dexterity around the instrument... the physics of playing the instrument were just easier*" (David, p.21) (sub-theme 1.2a: changing the physics of movement). The AT training is also credited with changing the way participants understand instrumental or vocal technique (sub-theme 1.2b: *changing understanding of technique*). For Christian the woodwind player, AT helped him *"[look] into breathing in a much more constructive way"* (Christian, p.6), while for Gabriela her AT training resulted in a complete change in her technique of singing:

*"unconsciously the sensation I had of support was through compression. I had this thing of looking for it by bringing my head down, there was a thing of tensing the shoulders... When you start to look for connection through expansion, it's a different direction, contrary to the one that intuitively you turned to for many years. And this subtle change is an enormous change in the whole technique [of singing], from the jaw, the tongue, the eyes, the neck, everything"* (Gabriela, p.14)

Helen also had a history of physical tension associated with playing that changed through extensive AT training. But more than just being able to play without tension, she credits the skills learnt through AT training with impacting upon her *use of energy* (sub-theme 1.2c) during playing:

*"I can use the technique and use directions to... be able to... It's almost like a turning on the gas, be able to regulate the amount of energy required to play"* (Helen, p.5)

This is not to say that AT training always makes the physical act of making music easy. Some participants still describe physical limits, though they seem to *"shift [and] don't become fixed"* (Christian, p.16), while others such as Louise feel that playing remains physically challenging:

*"It always feels effort for me to play, always. Even after everything, even after all the Alexander, all the Feldenkrais, all the everything..."* (Louise, p.5)

Unlike Louise, David is able to articulate perceived improvements in the physicality of playing his instrument whilst at the same time recognising that he still experiences some physical pain and discomfort. This may represent a difference in expectations of what extensive AT training might provide.



### **Theme 1.3. Sound and musicality**

*“it has to do with my own way of singing of before and now, that I feel now is freer, that it’s more intelligent, it’s more enjoyable, it gives more, it can be heard perfectly in the theatre, I am in tune, I am saying something”* (Gabriela, p.17)

The impact on *sound quality* (sub-theme 1.3a), *intonation* (sub-theme 1.3d) and *musical intention* (sub-theme 1.3b) expressed here by Gabriela is similarly articulated by other participants. Sound is described as “*freer*” (Helen, p.9), “*more unified [with less] unevenness*” (Christian, p.18), “*richer [and] more balanced in harmonics*” (Gabriela, p.11). For some, struggles with intonation simply “*ceased to be a problem*” (Christian, p.19). David describes being able to “*feel the sound around me better because I’m looser, I’m simply less tense*” (p.20), and how that heightened *sensory awareness* (sub-theme 1.3c) combined with the AT skill of inhibition can be consciously employed to improve intonation:

*“just hear it, let it happen to you, make yourself hear the intonation, and then I am conscious of the fact that my body just goes okay a little bit sharper”* (David, p.33)

Several participants mention work on moving between focused and peripheral vision as part of AT training. Applying the same principle to other forms of *sensory attention* (sub-theme 1.3c) such as hearing is credited with a dramatic impact on playing:

*“changing the way I hear... hear the sound in the room as opposed to hear the sound in the viola... that has changed my playing like nobody’s business”* (David, p.20)

Having a more refined sensory awareness of the body and of sound helps “*define the [musical] intention and... maintain yourself in that intention*” (Gabriela, p.19). Christian comments on the vital interrelationship between the mind and body, and how AT training increases musical potential:

*“if you haven’t decided what you want to say, you know, the body... just says, I don’t know how to do that because you haven’t asked me to do anything. Just to make a noise. [Through AT] the whole thing opens into a much more, well imaginative space. You can reimagine yourself, which*

*includes music and your mind and your physicality and... that just goes on and on and on"* (Christian, p.15)

Here it is important to think of the physicality of making music. Musical intention is not a one way process of a musical thought expressed through physical action. Rather it is conditioned by what the musician perceives consciously or unconsciously to be their own physical limitations. Expanding those limits permits that more "*imaginative space*" Christian describes.

#### **Theme 1.4. Musical practice**

Learning how to practice effectively is essential for musicians. Christian made the decision to pursue music seriously at quite a late stage, and describes being thrown into advanced musical studies where the musical demands necessitated a sudden, dramatic increase in practice. This was around the time he first came into contact with the AT, and he credits it with helping him learn how to practice (sub-theme 1.4a: knowing how: intelligence and strategies):

*"[practice] in a much more intelligent way, I didn't really know, you know, I hadn't really done much. And, you know, to, to break it all down and to stop and think and do basically"* (Christian, p.6)

For David, a complete lack of self-efficacy when it came to practice had resulted in multiple negative performance experiences, and most probably contributed to his problems with performance anxiety. He describes a year working with one teacher who provided an extremely rigid practice structure as highly successful. However once that structure was removed he found himself unable to practice in the same way. The AT training has provided a framework within which he is able to practice more effectively:

*"now, thank you to my Alexander training course, I now know how to practice I think. And I have good practice strategies"* (David, p.4)

For Helen, being much more established in her professional career has reduced the necessity to practice. However, she must also deal with changes brought about by arthritis in her left hand, and the AT training has had an important impact on how she practices (sub-theme 1.4b: knowing when to stop):

*“I think with the Alexander Technique, I sort of know...my limits, I know when to give my, you know, have a break... I think it's impacted that way knowing, it's almost like knowing when to stop and have a rest and then start again”* (Helen, p.12)

Participants view AT as a resource for practice: as Gabriela says, *“it's always there, together in practice”* (p.21). It gives participants more awareness of what they are doing and an ability to stop, examine and work through problems when they arise. Perhaps for this reason David expresses a new sense of *enjoyment* (sub-theme 1.4c) in practicing after AT training:

*“my flatmate asked me... Do you enjoy practice? And I was like, No, and then I was like, I don't know whether that's true anymore. I really enjoy practicing”* (David, p.25)

We will see when we come to the theme of motivation, for several participants the AT training has helped them connect with a sense of personal exploration in relation to themselves as musicians, making their work more intrinsically rewarding and enjoyable.

### **Theme 1.5. The performance experience**

The confidence that comes from knowing you have practiced and prepared well can ultimately shape the performance experience. As mentioned, David suffered for many years with at times debilitating *performance anxiety* (sub-theme 1.5a), but this has changed since completing his AT teacher training:

*“The thing that I'm actually not struggling with at all is performance and performance anxiety”* (David, p.28)

For Helen, having described her prior experiences on stage as *“hanging on for dear life”* (p.2) and *“feeling just... terrified on stage”* (p.7), after extensive AT training nerves are no longer a problem and she feels much more comfortable on stage:

*“I think the technique's made a big impact... I can just enjoy it really, enjoy the performance”* (Helen, p.6)

Increased ability to enjoy performance could be the result of AT impacting upon the flow of attention. When working on physical movement in AT, the relationship of parts to one another is a fundamental element: for example the head in relation to the spine, or the arm in relation to the

back. Christian describes this as *inclusive attention* (sub-theme 1.5b), and he applies this idea directly to musical performance:

*“talking about the stresses of performing. When you, when you have inclusive sensory attention... it silences mental chatter, it diminishes the fear response immediately and... gives a sense of timelessness, ease and all the rest of it”* (Christian, p.28)

For Gabriela, this inclusive attention gives her more choice in performance, but she describes it as a choice that is *“passive, because it has to do with what is happening in that moment. It’s not something which I manipulate”* (p.18). Given that she had previously identified distractions from lighting or the actions of fellow performers as a problem during performance, this change is significant. In her last performance two weeks before the interview she describes the following experience (sub-theme 1.5c: feeling at home on stage):

*“The last performance the tenor who was really crazy threw some papers or something, and I just saw that a creased paper had landed on the floor... and I had time to see it, to pick it up, I incorporated it into the scene, I took it to him, I went to find a pencil, it was like being on stage the same as being at home, like that, making use of elements that are suddenly available but that weren’t rehearsed, to integrate them”* (Gabriela, p.17)

Whether the fear associated with performing can be reduced through developing the skill of inclusive attention as argued by Christian, or vice versa that the skill of inclusive attention is facilitated by feeling more comfortable on stage, is difficult to determine. Potential mechanisms will be discussed within the theme of self-efficacy (theme 2.1).

## **Summary**

Extensive AT training appears to impact almost every aspect of the act of making music, improving it as a physical, mental, emotional and artistic experience for the majority of the participants in this study. In particular it has a strong influence on the way participants approach the day-to-day work of practice and preparation, and appears to help foster a use of awareness which is conducive to peak performance experience.

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## 3.2 Overarching theme 2. Impact on sense of self as musician

### Theme 2.1. Self-efficacy

*“in some way when one frees their neck in the moment in which they are doing the activity, it’s like one has been able to recognise and accept what is, to have confidence in what is there... My voice is there, my notes are there, the possibility to express here today with how I am myself, with this director, with this partner who doesn’t look at me, with these two thousand three hundred people” (Gabriela, p.16)*

In AT, keeping the neck free is a core goal. Gabriela connects developing the ability to free her neck in response to the demands of performance with having *confidence* (sub-theme 2.1a). To respond in such a way she says has cost her a *“huge amount of work”* (p.16). Contrasting with how she previously felt during performance allows us to fully comprehend this change:

*“I worked a lot but always in the moment I felt like I didn’t know anything, that I hadn’t prepared well, with a lot of guilt and insecurity, ... it was something like, the place where I want to be is outside, it’s in another person, it’s far away, in the future, in another space and another person in a different country in a different theatre with a different conductor with a different cast” (Gabriela, p.16)*

For Gabriela the shift in her perceived self-efficacy has been profound as a result of extensive AT training. Similarly for David, AT lessons had a big impact on self-efficacy:

*“I was like... I can do this. I can remember having my Alexander lessons and just feeling problems, problems which were sort of aaaahhh, go clunk clunk clunk clunk clunk, and I’d leave the room and be like I need to do this and then that, and then this’ll happen, and that’ll be fine” (David, p.11)*

Completing the AT teacher training has given him more *independence* (sub-theme 2.1b), and he no longer needs to rely on input from a teacher:

*“now I’m like, No, come on. You got this. Let’s think about it...” (David, p.32)*

Additionally, extensive AT training makes participants more able to identify the root causes of problems or limitations:

*“[limits] sometimes open and close, but you can sort of see that happening for whatever reason”* (Christian, p.16)

Having the capacity to accurately identify the root causes of problems or limitations not only increases the chances of finding solutions, but has a crucial impact on the ability to assimilate new information. This is an improvement in *somatic skills* (sub-theme 2.1c), which are key to translating ideas into action.

*“with this knowledge... if someone proposes a [vocal] technique you can investigate it knowing that what you are doing is that, and not that you are wanting to do it but really doing something else”* (Gabriela, p.23)

David also recognises that he was only able to integrate many of the ideas given to him by his instrumental teachers after his AT training, *“once I had the [somatic] information and knew how to do it”* (p.13). The somatic skills gained through extensive AT training make learning a faster, more accurate, and most importantly independent process.

## **Theme 2.2. Identity and self worth**

All participants view AT training as a positive experience, though difficult and intense. For Helen, AT training went *“deep into personal habits”* (p.4), and for Christian it was being *“pulled back from your habits, really like a... train pulling in the opposite direction”* (p.13) (sub-theme 2.2a: changing habits). This impacted upon Christian’s sense of identity through what he describes as a process of *“unpeeling”* and becoming *“more essentially you”* (Christian, p.26). This further impacted upon his identity as a musician (sub-theme 2.2b: letting go of musical identity):

*“You do dis-identify with a lot of areas of your life, in a fruitful way... you sort of let go, because if you hold on, you know, you just get all those reactions, holding on”* (Christian, p.25)

David displays a shift in how being a musician influences his sense of self worth. He describes an experience of one of his very first AT lessons which he perceived as an attack on his very sense of self:

*“to have someone go ‘no, no, no’ was just like, I don’t know what I’m doing! You’re just saying no to me. Like you’re not saying no to, like, a habit or like all that, you’re just saying no to the very*

*being of who I am because I am trying to play my Haydn violin concerto to you and all you're doing is saying no"* (David, p.9)

But post AT teacher training his thinking and approach to playing changed (sub-theme 2.2c: changing approach to playing), resulting in greater self awareness:

*"What are my priorities when it comes to playing, and to an audition, a performance... Why am I doing it? Am I doing it for my self worth? ... Yes. A little, a little bit, obviously, but like, is that going to be beneficial for me to go in and go 'I didn't get it, I'm so terrible.' No... it's not going to be constructive... [that's] how I'm thinking about things now, genuinely how I'm working now with it"* (David, p.26)

Extensive AT training has provided participants with the self awareness and skills to construct healthier identities as musicians.

### **Theme 2.3. Motivation**

*"playing... in my own time and for me"* (David, p.28)

A change in mental approach also impacts on the motivation for playing or performing. For most participants AT has stimulated *intrinsic motivation* (sub-theme 2.3a) through encouraging curiosity and exploration, though for Louise the motivation for professional playing is primarily financial.

Christian and Gabriela felt that this change in motivation has taken their career in "a *different direction*" (Christian, p.18), the impact being both positive and negative (sub-theme 2.3b: conflict with intrinsic motivation). When Gabriela says *"the operas became less gratifying... because the kind of work I was wanting to dedicate myself to was maybe a different kind of work"* (Gabriela, p.14), she is highlighting the negative realities of opera productions, eg. the fast turnaround and limited rehearsal time, which in her experience can lead to artistic compromise. This was both a de-motivating factor on the one hand, but on the other hand a stimulating factor to take more control over the direction of her career.

### **Summary**

Extensive AT training changed participants sense of self as professional musicians, impacting upon their identity, self worth, motivation for playing and performing, but above all through improving self efficacy. With increased confidence in their own capabilities, more

independence in the learning process and better somatic skills, the potential for personal and musical growth is greatly enhanced.

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### 3.3 Overarching theme 3. Impact on health and wellbeing

#### **Theme 3.1. Relationships**

The impact of extensive AT training on health and wellbeing is reflected in subtle changes in participants' relationships with others. David was initially hesitant to engage with AT because of an aversion to being touched, but observes how touch from an AT teacher was never a problem (sub-theme 3.1a: physical contact):

*"I never actually struggled with the Alexander hand because I think there was that respect... I always felt like when someone was touching me, they were trying to like, read me or read my thoughts... touch with an agenda... And with the Alexander training, I never got that from an Alexander teacher."* (David, p.17)

During the early period of her career as a soloist Gabriela coped with the the pressures of performing by "*generating an armour, a barrier*" (Gabriela, p.25), at a cost to her personal relationships. She observes that in the course of her AT training something shifted, saying "*little by little I began to feel like I could be the same as how I am when I am alone, when I'm with others*" (Gabriela, p.13), and the AT training therefore has mediated the impact of her professional career on her personal relationships (sub-theme 3.1b: improving personal relationships):

*"[AT has helped me] achieve that the work of being a professional does not have to be so intense, and lived with so much demand and anguish that it dims the light of everything that surrounds me, of my relationships"* (Gabriela, p.2)

Christian notes that after extensive AT training "*you change the way you react to situations, you tend to change the way you react to other people*" (Christian, p.19), and though it is not explicitly stated, from both Helen and Christian there is a sense that this impacts upon their professional relationships (sub-theme 3.1c: changing professional relationships). Gabriela is more specific about the impact of AT training on her professional relationships, explaining how the AT has made her aware of a need for "*more respect*" (Gabriela, p14).



### **Theme 3.2. Coping**

*“just by thinking about the technique, I could, what's the word, cope with all that stimulus”* (Helen, p.2)

All five participants find that extensive AT training has impacted upon how they cope with day-to-day life as a professional musician. The AT idea of ‘being in oneself’ encompasses a number of coping related sub-themes. It is expressed by Louise as a means of adopting a healthier perspective in the face of daily challenges (sub-theme 3.2a: perspective):

*“just taking a step back sometimes and being in yourself”* (Louise, p.24)

Achieving a more distanced perspective, ie. I am here, the problem is there, is about not allowing stress to narrow the focus of attention, thereby allowing one to maintain a broader awareness not only of the external situation but of your internal response to that situation. AT enhances this dual awareness, giving more control over that internal response (sub-theme 3.2b: internal locus of control):

*“with all the training and all the lessons I've had, you know, I can sort of, I can work with it. I'm sort of conscious of what's going on, I can work with it and decide”* (Helen, p.9)

*“one really can choose the way in which you respond”* (Gabriela, p.13)

Helen feels empowered by having this ability to choose. However, she recognises that it is often challenging not to be influenced by the physical or mental state of colleagues given how in the orchestral context musicians must work in such close physical proximity. Helen and David attribute their ability to maintain control over their response to outside stimulus to the fact that AT provides *practical tools and strategies* (sub-theme 3.2c):

*“how easy is it to notice how anxious you are, if you like, can free your neck kind of thing”* (David, p.14)

*“I can switch off or think about how I'm sitting or where my feet are or my breathing and not get pulled into all the sort of negative stuff that can come with sitting in an orchestra sometimes”* (Helen, p.8-9)

By attending to the physical, rather than ‘coping’ representing something abstract, it becomes concrete and attainable, and this has wider implications such as enhancing self efficacy (theme 2.1).

### **Theme 3.3. Physical and mental health**

*“there's a joke that it's a pension plan” (David, p.23)*

The idea that good use should lead to improved physical health is a fundamental principle of the AT. Whilst framing it as a bit of a joke, David, the youngest participant at 26 years and someone very much at the beginning of their professional career, is thinking about his long term health. That he does not see himself retiring is perhaps a reflection of the new reality for most professional musicians: the traditional concept of retirement becoming less and less attainable. Christian, the oldest of the participants at 63 years, similarly describes AT as *an investment in health* (sub-theme 3.3a) and how this was part of his motivation for undertaking extensive AT training in his mid-twenties:

*“in a funny sort of way that was always in the back of my mind. The Alexander Technique would be investment in my health” (Christian, p.31)*

He describes his physical health as good, without the need to engage in other forms of exercise. For others such as Louise, the physical health benefits of her AT training have been mediated through applying the AT way of thinking to other activities (sub-theme 3.3b: applying AT thinking). She perceives her AT training to have played an important part in enhancing her engagement with another discipline:

*“having the Alexander course and all that knowledge and all that input, meant that the way that I approached the next step... I was able to apply all the principles that I was learning in Alexander stuff to the Feldenkrais things. And I think that's why it helped so much” (Louise, p.17)*

Having undertaken extensive AT training does not automatically equate to a life without tension for professional musicians, but participants are better equipped to deal with tension and get themselves back to a more optimal physical state (sub-theme 3.3c):

*“I think in terms of being able to unravel after a concert, I can do, or after rehearsal, I can do that... any tension that I've got from playing” (Helen, p.10)*

Finally, the relationship between physical and mental health is a close one. It is expressed most clearly by David, who suffered greatly from performance anxiety and who perceives the AT training as helping him deal with his psychological issues (sub-theme 3.3d: unpacking the psychological side):

*“I felt like the, the anxiety and the fear... all of these things were, I, in my opinion, changed and unpacked by the Alexander technique” (David, p.14)*

Gabriela also talks about the AT training helping her overcome fear, which she describes as being present in *“every articulation [joint]”* (Gabriela, p13). Again this shows how the practical side of AT work of attending to the physical, ie. allowing muscles and joints to release, influences a person’s psychological state.

### **Theme 3.4. Wellbeing**

Participants express the increased feeling of wellbeing as an impact of their extensive AT training.

*“I think general happiness is more to the point quite honestly... wealth in that way” (Christian, p.32)*

This outcome is most likely a culmination of different areas of impact that have already been discussed, such as improved self efficacy, a better physical state of being, healthier relationships and increased capacity to cope adaptively, the physical element being paramount (sub-theme 3.4a: physical wellbeing).

*“being in myself is much more enjoyable” (Gabriela, p.11)*

David talks of feeling *“better to feel better”* (p.15), ie. feeling physically better to feel psychologically better, and how for him simply having physical wellbeing impacted upon everything else:

*“having wellbeing meant, it just spread throughout my entire life” (David, p.14)*

While for many participants it is possible to interpret a reduced negative impact of their professional work on daily life, for Gabriela the change is expressed as more than this. Making music now generates wellbeing in itself (sub-theme 3.4b: making music is wellbeing). This stems from the complete integration of AT principles with her conception of the act of singing, eg. breath support through expansion rather than compression as discussed earlier (sub-theme 1.2b).

*“singing and general wellbeing start to be the same thing” (Gabriela, p.11).*

Maintaining the active mental approach to activity proposed by AT can be challenging, and Louise in particular admits to finding it a struggle despite recognising that *“life feels easier”* (Louise, p.24) when she can do it (sub-theme 3.4c). Ultimately the extent to which participants perceive the impact of AT training on wellbeing depends on how the mental challenge of applying AT to daily life is met.

## ***Summary***

Extensive AT training has had an overall positive impact upon participants health and wellbeing. It has shaped how they relate to themselves and to others, and in doing so not only improved, but also given more clarity as to what they need from their relationships. The practical nature of AT and its emphasis upon working on one's self fosters an internal locus of control, which in turn allows participants to better cope with the demands of their profession. Participants perceive specific benefits to their physical and mental health. Moreover, the particular ability of AT training to bring about physical wellbeing positively influences all other areas of their lives.

## 4. DISCUSSION

This study set out to explore how a group of professional musicians perceive the impact of extensive AT training on their day-to-day lives. Completion of a 1600 hour AT teacher training course provided a baseline representation of extensive AT training, and all participants were active professional musicians in the western classical tradition. The perceived impact of AT was felt early on in participants' engagement, albeit dependent initially upon regular contact with an AT teacher. The perception of potential benefit was a driving factor leading to more extensive training, as participants determined that this was the most appropriate way to gain independent, internal control of the learning process and therefore maximise the potential benefit for themselves.

Results indicate that extensive AT training can penetrate many areas of a musicians' daily life. As it is not possible within the scope of this thesis to go into detail on every aspect, this discussion takes some of the particularly striking results and discusses them in relation to the literature. It will focus firstly on the impact of AT training on the physical body, and the implications this has for instrumental playing and sound quality on one hand, and wellbeing on the other. It will then pull out some of the psychological mechanisms contributing to the impact on practice and the performance experience: namely self-regulation, self-efficacy and flow.

As has been found in other AT studies (ie. Cacciatore et al., 2005), results show that extensive AT training brings beneficial physical changes. Participants reported becoming more able to play without tension, or finding their playing vastly improved through being better coordinated. This supports the findings of earlier AT studies with musicians (ie. Davies, 2019b; Fung-Ying, 2015). The ability to release excess tension in the neck, a skill specifically developed in AT training, is highlighted. In a non-AT study with instrumentalists using a bio-feedback protocol, the reduction of superficial neck muscle activity was found to have a conditioning role on the efficiency of global movement patterns (Loram et al., 2017). It is only recently with improvements in technology that the precise analysis of movement patterns during instrumental playing has begun to be explored. So far the aim has been to examine the movement strategies of elite instrumentalists so as to better inform novices of the strategies they should be employing

(Ancillao, Savastano, Galli & Albertini, 2017; Hopper et al., 2017; Verrel et al., 2013). However, this makes the tacit assumption that the movement strategies employed by elite players are the most bio-mechanically efficient, which given the high prevalence of PRP and PRMDs in this population could be debated. There is ample scope for investigating changes in movement patterns as a result of extensive AT training, which could make an important contribution from a pedagogical as well as an injury prevention perspective.

In the literature more generally, discussion of the physicality of music making is often limited to injury prevention and musicians' health and wellbeing. However, there is evidence showing that the quality of instrumental sound is directly influenced by the quality of the musicians' movement (Dora, Conforti & Güsewell, 2019), which the results of the present study support. Participants directly connect an improvement in sound quality, both vocal and instrumental, with AT training. Conceptualising the sound one wishes to produce as a result of quality of movement invites us to consider the conditions which facilitate or interfere with movement. Framing it in this way provides an antidote to the dogma of correct posture that continues to dominate the literature on performers' physical health and injury treatment or prevention.

The results of this study reveal a clear link between the positive impact of extensive AT training on the condition of the physical body, and the mental health and wellbeing of the participants. In fact, in the minds of some participants physical wellbeing and psychological wellbeing were part of the same thing. Psychology literature however does not consider a physical element in wellbeing constructs. They are often restricted to psychological components, such as in the PERMA profiler which has been used to study musicians' wellbeing (Ascenso et al., 2017). These components are theorised to have an effect on physical activity (Ryan et al., 2019), and therefore physical activity can be seen as a potential outcome of wellbeing, and inversely, participating in structured physical activity or exercise has been shown to positively influence wellbeing (Mandolesi et al., 2018). However, apart from one participant who described the need to engage in movement or stretching, the participants in this study did not talk in terms of taking exercise or being physically active in that sense. For them physical wellbeing was independent of physical activity per se, evidenced through comments such as finding being physically in oneself more enjoyable, feeling lighter, or feeling more comfortable in oneself. Common measures of

physical health or physical wellbeing are designed to detect the presence or absence of pathology or disability (Cummins, 2018), but this is not the same as a subjective sense of physical wellbeing, just as subjective mental wellbeing is not accurately represented by the absence of psychopathology. It would seem pertinent therefore to investigate further the subjective sense of physical wellbeing achieved through extensive AT training, rather than relying solely on quantitative measures of fitness or physical activity as an indicator of optimal physical functioning.

The perceived impact of extensive AT training on activities such as musical practice can be explained by recognising that the core AT strategy of inhibition and direction is, in essence, a self-regulatory mental process. The application of this strategy fosters a moment-to-moment awareness of the use of the self in activity, and AT teacher training stimulates more consistency by virtue of the intensity of the training schedule. Based on the findings of this study, this process is transferable. Participants describe their AT training as having taught them how to practice effectively by implementing a 'stop, think, and do' strategy, with opportunities for self-reflection provided by internal, ie. the ease of playing, as well as external sensory information, ie. sound. This strategy bears remarkable similarity to Zimmerman's model of self regulated learning (SRL): forethought, performance, and self-reflection (Zimmerman & Moylen, 2009). Zimmerman's model is but one of a multitude of SRL models. However, there is a crucial difference; no models of SRL take into consideration the concept of inhibition, despite recognising that automaticity is not always positive for learning (Panadero, 2017). Baumeister's self-regulation theory assumes that willpower is enough to effect behaviour change (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007), but AT posits that willpower alone is *not* enough, and that it is necessary to learn how to inhibit an undesired behavioural response in order to create the optimal conditions within which change may occur (Alexander, 1932). Self-regulation during musical practice and learning is an active area of current research, and as a predictor of musical achievement is considered of much more importance than the quantity of time spent practicing (Bonneville-Roussy & Bouffard, 2015). Attempts to understand self-regulation strategies used during musical practice have indicated that more advanced musicians rely predominantly on personal resources as opposed to external resources (Araújo, 2016), though the use of self-report questionnaires to elicit this information has quite significant limitations. McPherson, Osborne, Evans & Miksza (2019) have demonstrated that a microanalysis protocol is more suited to capturing the moment-to-moment behaviours, thoughts

and feelings musicians experience during practice. This analysis method could be applied to the study of AT trained musicians' practice to better understand the impact of AT training in this domain.

Self-regulated learning influences self-efficacy beliefs (Ritchie & Williamon, 2013), and the improvement in self-efficacy as a consequence of extensive AT training was an important finding of this study, as indeed it has been in another qualitative AT studies (ie. Yardley et al., 2010). Self-efficacy has been found to be the most important predictor of musical performance outcomes, including achievement and performance quality in assessed performance (McPherson & McCormick, 2006; Ritchie & Williamon, 2012), self-rated performance quality, and boost (also known as peak performance experience or flow) (González, Blanco-Piñeiro & Díaz-Pereira, 2018). Furthermore, Bandura (1997) proposes that awareness of our physiological and affective states is one of the four contributing sources of self-efficacy. While research connecting Bandura's theory to music education has proposed building strength and stamina for musical performance in order to improve the musicians' physiological state and therefore enhance self-efficacy (Hendricks, 2015), the findings presented in this study would imply that there is an alternative route. Taking the experience of Gabriela as a powerful example, achieving an improved sense of self-efficacy is not about physical strength, but is rather achieved through possessing the somatic skill to create the conditions in which the body, and therefore the musician, can function optimally. The result is a more enjoyable, confident, peak performance experience. In fact, much of what the participants in this study describe as the impact of extensive AT training on the performance experience resembles the elements that contribute to peak performance, or *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). These elements include being fully absorbed in the task, feeling a sense of control, an absence of self-consciousness, and transformation in the sense of time. One contrast however is the perception of how attention facilitates this state. Some literature advising musicians on how flow might be achieved suggest focus techniques which limit external and potentially distracting sensory input (Kirchner, 2011), but the participants in this study talk of nurturing 'inclusive attention,' which they perceive as silencing mental chatter (negative self-talk) and enabling a sense of timelessness and ease. While it has been suggested that musicians use techniques such as self-talk to maintain task oriented focus during performance (Clark, Lisboa & Williamon, 2014),



Gabriela describes this type of attention as non-analytical and not something that she is required to consciously manipulate, more an innate responsiveness to the performance moment.

While the findings of this study indicate further areas of impact such as coping, motivation and identity, these can potentially be understood as a further consequence of the physical changes and psychological mechanisms discussed above. Considerably more research is required however to fully understand the interactions at play, which from this discussion it is clear are numerous and interrelated.

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## **4.1 Limitations**

Where previous quantitative studies into the AT were unable to provide conclusive results due in part to their short duration and the necessary narrowing of questions posed, the qualitative methodology employed in this study has permitted an investigation of considerably more depth. While the small sample size means that findings may not be generalised, it would not have been possible to do justice to the breadth of participants' experiences with a larger sample. While clear themes emerged from the data representing three principle areas of impact for extensive AT training, there was considerable diversity in participants' individual experiences. This may have been partly a result of the range of professional profiles included. The performance context and professional demands for an opera soloist are quite different to those of an orchestral musician, and this was clearly reflected in the way participants talked about their professional life. Comparing participants' experiences was therefore challenging, and this could be considered a limitation the study. However, it was also interesting to see similar themes emerge from such divergent profiles, and as the overriding purpose of this study was exploratory in nature, it was essential to capture a wide range of individual experiences. A second limitation could be the fact that all participants worked within the western classical tradition. It is by no means the case that only classically trained musicians engage with AT, and it would have been interesting to include the perspective of musicians from other musical traditions. Unfortunately no such candidates came forward for participation.

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## 4.2 Implications and future research

This study allows musicians a glimpse of the diversity and depth of experience which extensive engagement with AT can bring. Musicians who do not suffer from any particular physical issues may never consider engaging with AT, but it is clear from the findings presented here that AT work represents much more than just posture, which continues to be the automatic association made in relation to AT, and can therefore be of benefit to all musicians. Though physical changes are a valuable outcome, the power of AT for musicians lies more with the psychological processes involved, which can positively impact upon many areas of a musician's daily life. How far this impact extends, however, is dependent on the extent to which one is prepared to engage with the mental challenge of it. Extensive AT training could therefore be considered a starting point rather than a solution.

Future research interested in exploring AT for performing artists and musicians should keep in mind the gradual nature by which the participants in this study perceived its impact. A first step could be to address the gap in the literature pertaining to the experiences of performing artists from other disciplines who pursue extensive engagement with AT, using methodology similar to this study. This could indicate whether the impact on self-efficacy, the performance experience and wellbeing are more general trends resulting from AT training. Complementary to this would be a thorough investigation of the teaching methods used by AT teachers when working with performing artists. There is some literature from AT teachers reporting individual approaches to AT work with actors (Bjerken, Mello & Mello, 2012) and dancers (Nettl-Fiol, 2006), but there has never been a comparative study undertaken. Such a study could prove valuable for AT teachers who may have limited contact with the ways of working in different disciplines, and indeed for anyone working with performing artists. Finally, though rigorous quantitative investigation of engagement with AT is difficult, the intensive nature of AT teacher training courses could provide an ideal setting within which to conduct longitudinal quantitative or mixed-methods research focussing on some of the outcomes highlighted by this study.

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### 4.3 Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that professional musicians perceive a predominantly positive impact of extensive AT training in three core areas of their day-to-day lives: (1) the act of making music, (2) their sense of self as musician, and (3) their general health and wellbeing. The impact on each of these areas is constructed through multiple avenues, the most striking examples being the result of physical changes, ie. on the physicality of making music and sound, or psychological processes, ie. improved musical practice and increased self-efficacy. The physical and psychological aspects of making music are equally important, and the participants in this study perceive AT as allowing them to work on both simultaneously. In doing so they find that the increased ease of playing achieved through effective self-regulation of their physical use enhances their sense of self-efficacy, which in turn facilitates more positive performance experiences with less stress and anxiety, and therefore increases their general sense of wellbeing.

By using a purely constructionist methodological approach, this study has been able to approach the diversity of participants' experiences with fewer prior assumptions. It has therefore contributed significantly more depth and nuance to the academic discussion of AT and musicians, and highlighted important considerations for future research.

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## APPENDIX I

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE - INDICATIVE QUESTIONS

MAIN QUESTIONS	PROMPTS
How did you become a professional musician?	<p>Can you describe the training you have received?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- at the beginning</li> <li>- later on</li> </ul> <p>What kind of relationship did you have with learning your instrument?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- at the beginning</li> <li>- later on</li> </ul> <p>What influenced your decision to pursue music more seriously?</p> <p>How would you describe your learning process?</p> <p>What kind of challenges have you faced?</p>
How did you come to train as an Alexander teacher?	<p>When did you first come into contact with the AT?</p> <p>What led to your decision to train as a teacher?</p> <p>Can you tell me about your experience on the training course?</p> <p>How did the AT work relate to your playing?</p>
Can you tell me about your current life as a professional musician?	<p>What kind of playing do you do?</p> <p>What do you find most challenging about life as a professional musician?</p> <p>What do you find most rewarding...?</p>
How would you describe the impact of the AT on your life as a professional musician?	<p>In what ways does the AT influence your day-to-day life as a professional musician?</p> <p>Are there any ways in which the AT presents new challenges to your life as a professional musician?</p> <p>How would you describe your personal practice of the AT?</p>
How do you see your future as a professional musician?	
What kind of influence do you think the AT will have on your future as a professional musician?	

## **APPENDIX II**

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

3 PAGES

## **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

### **PROJECT TITLE**

**Exploring the perceived impact of extensive training in the Alexander technique on the day-to-day lives of professional musicians.**

### **DATE:**

### **INVITATION**

You are being invited to take part in my research project. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. You will be given this information sheet to keep. Thank you for reading this.

### **PROJECT**

The aim of this research project is to generate a clearer understanding of the impact the Alexander Technique (AT) can have on the lives of musicians through exploring the lived experiences of those musicians who have taken their engagement with the AT work so far as to have completed a 1600 hour AT teacher training course. To this end I am embarking upon a qualitative study and conducting interviews with AT teacher trained musicians. Interviews will be audio recorded with permission, and the audio destroyed once transcripts have been prepared.

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS**

You have been asked to participate in this project as you are an active professional musician who has also completed a 1600 hour AT teacher training course certified by STAT or equivalent professional body. I will be carrying out interviews with between 6 and 8 participants with a similar profile.

### **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

It is up to you to decide if you want to take part in my project or not. If you do not want to take part, or you change your mind about taking part, having agreed to do so, you won't be penalised in any way. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. You can withdraw either by physically leaving and/or by withdrawing consent for me to use whatever contribution you have already made to the research. Again, you won't be penalised in any way.

### **NATURE OF PARTICIPATION**

Interviews will be conducted between January and February 2020. You will be required to attend one interview lasting between 1 and 2 hours, at a time and location most convenient to you. Should a face-to-face meeting not be possible, you may choose to conduct the interview via Skype or FaceTime. In the interview I will ask questions about your history as a musician and your experience with the Alexander Technique.

### **LIFESTYLE RESTRICTIONS**

You are not likely to experience any restrictions to your lifestyle as a result of taking part in this project.

### **POTENTIAL RISKS TO PARTICIPANTS**

There are no foreseeable risks of you being offended, shocked or harmed by my research. In the event that any distress should occur, you will be signposted to appropriate support.

## POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS

While people taking part in my project are unlikely to experience any personal benefits as a result, I hope my research will aid the general understanding of the Alexander Technique work and indicate directions for future research.

## POSSIBLE TERMINATION OF RESEARCH

If for any reason my project has to be terminated and you or the contribution you have made is no longer required, you will be told and the reason explained. Any data already collected will be destroyed.

## CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

Information that is collected about you, for the purposes of the research, will be kept strictly confidential unless you disclose risk of harm to yourself or others. Information you provide will only be attributed to you by name with your explicit permission.

## STORING PERSONAL DATA AND INFORMATION

Your personal data and any information that you provide for the purposes of the research will be stored securely on my personal computer for 10 years. If I wish to re-use it within this time period I will seek your permission to do so. At the end of the period it will be destroyed.

## OUTPUTS

Your contribution to this research will be used to produce my master's thesis for completion of the MSc in Performance Science at the Royal College of Music. It will be shared with my supervisor during the process of data collection and analysis. It may subsequently be used for presentation at conferences and/or published in a professional journal.

## ETHICAL APPROVAL

The CUK Research Ethics Committee (REC) has reviewed my project and granted ethical approval for it to be carried out.

## CONTACT DETAILS

Researcher

Ellen Casey, Royal College of Music  
[ellen.casey@rcm.ac.uk](mailto:ellen.casey@rcm.ac.uk)  
+44 7397 792 803

Supervisor

Rosie Perkins, Royal College of Music  
[rosie.perkins@rcm.ac.uk](mailto:rosie.perkins@rcm.ac.uk)

## SUPPORT SERVICES

Help Musicians UK  
Music Minds Matter  
[MMM@helpmusicians.org.uk](mailto:MMM@helpmusicians.org.uk)  
0808 802 8008

Samaritans  
[jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)  
116 123

NHS Moodzone  
[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

GP services  
[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

***Thank you for reading the Participant Information Sheet. Please ask if you have any further questions you would like answered.***

## CONSENT FORM

### PROJECT TITLE:

Exploring the perceived impact of extensive training in the Alexander technique on the day-to-day lives of professional musicians.

**NAME OF RESEARCHER:** ELLEN CASEY

### PARTICIPANT IDENTIFICATION CODE FOR THIS PROJECT:

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet dated [insert date] for research project in which I have been asked to take part and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.
3. I give the researcher permission to collect information about me and from me for the purposes of the research project provided all information about me will be kept confidential, stored securely and destroyed after 10 years.
4. I DO/ DO NOT [delete as appropriate] give permission for information from me to be attributed to me by name.
5. I DO/DO NOT [delete as appropriate] give permission for the interview to be audio recorded.
6. I agree to take part in the above-named project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Name of participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Name of person taking consent**  
*(if different from lead researcher)*

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Researcher**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

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## **APPENDIX III**

EXTRACTS FROM PARTICIPANT TRANSCRIPT AND ANALYSIS DOCUMENT

6 PAGES



Ellen Casey 3:05

Physical, anything. How did you cope with the with the demands that that placed upon you?

ATM04 3:14

Okay

Good question um

ISQ1

Not coping  
Hard work

Unravel

Ability to  
recognise what  
she was  
doing while  
playing

Well I suppose until I started having Alexander technique lessons I wasn't really coping that well with the demands on me as a musician, just physically and mentally really, such hard work. So it was the Alexander technique. It was slow going though because I, you know, lots of habits, particularly the classic neck tension, which was, you know as soon as I picked up the bow, and the left hand, off I went eeerrrrr (neck tension)

PLAYING

So it took a long time of having Alexander lessons to unravel that, to recognise that that's what I was doing.

NECK TENSION  
= IMMEDIATE RESPONSE TO PLAYING

UNRAVEL = long process

"Recognise what I was doing"

Ellen Casey 4:07

And how often when you, when you started having lessons to try and work through these issues, how often were you having your lessons?

ATM04 4:23

Um, initially, the teacher, her name was Isabel Anderson, she advised to go for, say, three weeks of having two or three lessons a week. And then the lessons were weekly. I can't, you see I can't remember how, I mean it was a long time, and then and then as I began to sort of, I was able to kind of unravel myself, then the lessons got, you know, more sporadic and further apart. So a lot of that for me was doing the semi-supine, lying down. That's where it really did a lot of the unraveling and that's why I use that part of the technique a lot. Yeah.

Early AT lessons more frequent

Getting better at "unraveling" lessons = more sporadic

Semi-supine = unraveling

Able to  
unravel

Ellen Casey 5:04

And how did you find applying it to the instrument and to playing?

ISQ4

ATM04 5:14

I think the biggest thing was it just gave me more awareness of what I was doing when I was playing. And also this, this, because it's such an incredible amount of stimuli when you're playing in an orchestra, you've got you know, you've got your own playing and technique and the music's right in front of you, you're sharing music stands, you've got the stimuli of someone sitting next to you, you've got all the people around you, you've got the conductor plus then trying to try and you know, play the music!

More awareness

Orchestra = "incredible amount of stimuli"

Awareness  
of what she  
was doing  
while playing

Cope with  
stimulus

Awareness

- noticing  
what she  
was doing  
in (within  
orchestral)  
situation

So I began to recognise a lot going on and the technique sort of, just by thinking about the technique, I could, what's the word, cope with all that stimulus, I think. Whereas when I wasn't aware of it, or you know, it was just, I was hanging on you know, hanging on for dear life sort of thing trying to play the music and kind of cope with it all. But, so I think awareness was the biggest thing the technique gave me, noticing what I was doing when I was in, within that situation. And if I was tightening up I could actually, you know, I don't know whether you know about, are you having Alexander technique? So you probably know it

"by thinking about the [AT] I could ... cope with all that stimulus"

AWARENESS

Before "hanging on for dear life," trying... to cope

ISQ1

Ellen Casey 6:29

I'm a teacher as well, I'm also trained as a teacher

going to talk about  
Directional thoughts  
next page =>



ATM04 6:38

Did you tell me that? I can't remember.

Ellen Casey 6:40

I put it in the sheet. I think I did say in the initial thing.

ATM04 6:51

I see.

So when I talk about directions you know exactly what I'm talking about.

Oh, yeah, sorry.

Yeah, that, that was a biggie to actually give myself a moment to think about the head-neck-back relationship and give myself some directional thoughts.

Could be something as simple as, you know, what am I doing with my feet, you know, are my feet, you know, my feet planted on the floor, you know, because that, because I noticed when I was playing, I don't do it so much now, I would scrunch up my feet, and I had no idea what I was doing that. So that was a big one that I don't have, I don't have to do that. You know, and then by releasing my feet, it sort of worked its way up and through my body, I suppose. For me, the biggest thing was neck tension, but gradually, gradually that subsided, and I could play without tightening up in my neck.

Ellen Casey 7:53

And did all this, did this happen in that period of lessons while you were still playing?

ATM04 8:03

Um, yeah, I think so, Yes. But I know that the training gave me so much more as well. So much, so many more tools to use.

Ellen Casey 8:18

Can you tell me a little bit more about what took you to train and what that experience was like for you?

ATM04 8:35

I think because the technique had been so good and helped me so much in my playing, and in this situation of playing in an orchestra that I was just asking for it actually. I just thought it was such an amazing technique and so valuable for musicians. So I think that was the, and also I'd reached a point in the orchestra where I thought it would be good to have some training, so that perhaps if my playing you know, if I couldn't play anymore for whatever reason, I would have the Alexander Technique teacher training as a, as a backup as much as anything. Ironically, I'm not teaching it now. But I think if I wanted to teach again, like, just do some, some refresher courses, you know. So that's what led me to it, just a complete belief in it as a technique and wanting a change from playing full time as a musician, I think. Yeah. Does that answer the question?

Ellen Casey 9:49

Yeah. So how was your training course? Can you tell me about your training course?

Capacity to  
Time to think

PLAYING  
Neck tension  
gradually  
subsided,  
+ could play  
without  
tightening up  
in neck.

Training  
gave more  
tools to  
use

SCQ?  
Helped my  
playing

Alternative to  
playing

AT as Backup

Belief in it  
Wanted a  
change

Time to think =  
"a biggie"

Directions

Habits  
Lack of awareness

Connecting up the body

Neck tension "gradually  
subsided"

Training gave more  
tools

AT so good + helpful,  
training seemed  
necessary.

AT teacher training  
as "backup"

Complete belief in AT  
change from full time  
playing.



the technique for that. So I'm not expending huge amounts of energy when I don't have to, but then I can turn up the gas when I do need it you know.

Ellen Casey 17:20

And is that something you felt was an ability that came from doing the training course, or had you already felt that possibility coming in the lessons before?

ATM04 17:35

It was actually in my lessons before that. Because I remember taking my cello to a lesson and she would say things like, okay, now, you know, really turn up the gas really, you know, play something loud and fast and all that. So, I think it had come a little bit before the training course, but then the training course sort of, because it went so much deeper that became, I became more able to use, use those techniques.

AT lessons pre-training  
"turn up the gas"

Training made her  
more able to use  
those techniques.

Yeah. Was there a little bit before to be honest. Yeah.

Yeah, I don't know

I can't remember all the years just meld into one, you know.

Ellen Casey 18:19

And what about the performing element? You mentioned that, like speaking in front of people is a challenging performing context. How did you find performing through the instrument?

ATM04 18:42

I think that the training course definitely had a huge impact on that because, so in the training, there's so much more time to think about what you're doing. So I mean, but having said that I wonder, the stimulus is so great. I wonder if you know, if you said all right get your cello now and play to me, that would be quite testing, because I'd have all that awareness of you know the adrenaline, you know, what to do with it?

Huge impact on  
performing w. cello

but still testing  
Awareness of adrenaline  
"what to do with it?"

I forgotten the question What's your question?

Ellen Casey 19:24

I was asking about the impact that the training had on how you perform and how you feel when you're performing.

ATM04 19:40

I mean, certainly in the orchestra, unless it's something really exposed and I have to look at it, it's, I don't, I find I don't have problems with nerves anymore. I mean, having said that, we played a program last week that, it got me going. It was Barber's Adagio for Strings, then Mahler songs and Shostakovich Fifth Symphony, the stimulus was just so huge. So I did get a bit nervous for that one. But generally, generally, I feel much more comfortable performing.

Don't have problems with  
nerves anymore

generally feel  
more comfortable  
performing

And that, but then I wonder whether that could be experience and my age? No, I think the technique's made a big impact there. So I can just enjoy it really, enjoy the performance.

Is it just age + experience?  
No, AT = big impact.

Enjoy performance.

Ellen Casey 20:37

What about, so I'm going to make you think back if you can, before you started working with the Alexander Technique, how was

Training =  
more able  
to use  
techniques  
- more able  
to regulate  
effort

SQ3  
More time to  
think

Nerves not  
so much  
of a problem

More  
comfortable  
performing

Enjoy  
performance



## ATM04 ANALYSIS

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### Analytical questions

**AQ1: *What aspects of participants' experiences as musicians led them to engage with the AT?***

- PHYSICAL PROBLEMS
- NOT COPING
- PERFORMANCE ANXIETY
- PRIOR EXPOSURE TO AT

Physical problems - particularly neck tension  
Tension  
Not coping with demands on me as a musician  
Not coping physically  
Not coping mentally  
Pressure  
Workload  
Hard work  
Stage fright  
Hanging on for dear life  
AT helpful at music college  
Came back to AT once a professional

**AQ2: *What were participants' motivations for undertaking an AT teacher training course?***

- DERIVING PERSONAL BENEFIT CREATES BELIEF IN THE AT
- DESIRE TO PASS IT ON
- AT AS ALTERNATIVE
- GETTING CONTROL OVER CHOICE

Wonderful technique  
Complete belief  
Worked for me  
Helped playing  
Desire to pass it on  
Getting control over choice  
Alternative to playing  
AT as backup  
Wanting a change

**AQ3: *What were participants' experiences of their AT teacher training course?***

- POSITIVE EXPERIENCES
- EMOTIONAL
- PRACTICAL LEARNING
- GOOD GUIDANCE

Amazing  
Rewarding experiences  
Y.1 inspiring  
Quite difficult  
Holding up a mirror  
Goes deep  
Profound  
Y.2 deep into personal habits  
Emotional  
Practical learning  
Using performance to observe use  
Performance anxiety - observing physical responses  
Revealing

Time to think  
Being guided to become aware

**AQ4: *What form has participants' continued engagement with the AT taken post teacher training?***

- NOT CURRENTLY TEACHING AT
- PERSONAL USE OF AT

Semi-supine  
Using AT  
Not teaching AT  
Gone off teaching  
Ironically not teaching now  
Potential to go back to teaching it  
Gone off teaching  
Allergic to teaching

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**Main Research Question**

RQ: *In what ways do professional musicians perceive the impact of extensive training in the Alexander technique (AT) on their day-to-day lives?*

**PHYSICAL EFFICACY**

- UNDOING TENSION
- FINDING STABILITY
- KNOWING WHEN TO STOP
- FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT
- RECOVERY PROCESS
- REGULATING EFFORT

Unravel neck tension  
Neck tension subsided - can play without tightening up in my neck.  
Unravel myself  
Can use AT to ground myself  
Neck tension has gone  
Freer movement  
Recovery process post concert - unraveling tension  
Knowing my limits  
Knowing when to stop  
Regulate energy required to play  
AT training made me more able to regulate energy and effort in playing

**SELF AWARENESS**

- AWARENESS OF TENSION
- AWARENESS OF REACTIONS
- RECOGNITION OF PLAYING HABITS

Ability to recognise what I am doing while playing  
Awareness of what I am doing while playing  
Awareness of reactions - what I am doing in playing situation  
Awareness of what I am doing while playing and performing  
Awareness - I can feel tension coming and work with it  
Awareness - can release it  
Conscious of what is happening - can make decisions

## **CHANGING BEHAVIOURS**

- MAKING TIME TO THINK
- ADAPTING TO NEW PHYSICAL REALITIES
- PLAYING LESS
- PRACTICING LESS

Capacity to give myself time to think  
Changing and adapting to arthritis - hard to quantify the impact of the AT  
Less practice - many factors involved  
Periods with no playing work - challenging motivation to practice  
Job share to do AT training - now only 50% playing

## **COPING**

- COPING WITH STIMULUS OF PLAYING CONTEXT
- LEARNING NOT TO REACT
- NOT WORRYING ABOUT NERVES

Coping with stimulus of orchestral context  
Ability to "switch off"  
Not get pulled into negative stuff  
Not "lose the plot"  
Not worrying about nerves

## **AGENCY**

- REALISING ABILITY TO CHANGE
- EMPOWERMENT THROUGH CHOICE
- DECIDING WHAT IS IMPORTANT

Realising ability to change things  
Choice is Empowering  
Ability to decide what is important

## **PERFORMANCE**

- FEELING COMFORTABLE
- ENJOYMENT
- IMPROVED SOUND
- NERVES NO LONGER A PROBLEM

Feel more comfortable playing  
Feel more comfortable on stage  
No problems with nerves anymore  
Enjoy performance  
Freer sound  
Better sound  
Enjoyment

## **TIME**

- GRADUAL CUMULATIVE IMPACT OF AT EXPERIENCES
- AT TEACHER TRAINING GIVES INCREASED ABILITY TO USE CERTAIN TECHNIQUES
- AT TEACHER TRAINING GIVES MORE TOOLS TO USE

Gradual impact  
Gradual changes  
Big impact over many years  
Becoming more able to use techniques through training  
AT training gave more tools to use

## **APPENDIX IV**

CREATION OF THEMES AND SUB-THEMES: EXAMPLE FOR ONE COMMON THEME.

3 PAGES

## APPENDIX IV: Stage 4: creating sub themes from participant quotations

### COMMON THEME: PHYSICALITY OF MAKING MUSIC

From quotes	Themes	Sub-themes	Points for discussion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More coordinated</li> <li>- Movement becomes easier</li> <li>- Agility</li> <li>- Dexterity</li> <li>- Elasticity</li> <li>- Physical mobility</li> <li>- Less physical limitations</li> <li>- Physical limitations not fixed</li> <li>- More space for the physicality of playing</li> <li>- physically freer</li> <li>- Unravelling tension</li> </ul>	Movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better coordination</li> <li>• Mobility, freedom and ease</li> <li>• Agility, dexterity and elasticity</li> <li>• Less physical limitations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It is perhaps to be expected that a discipline intent on improving 'use' would therefore impact upon the movement involved in making music.</li> <li>- To a certain extent this appears to be like an improved baseline of coordination (ATMP, ATM02)</li> <li>- BUT it is a mental challenge (ATM02)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Re-learning technique</li> <li>- Subtle change of thinking dramatically changes technique</li> <li>- Dialogue between AT and musical technique</li> <li>- Faster integration of new technique</li> <li>- AT directions include (englobar)/contain/framework for (???) musical technique</li> <li>- Constructive understanding of technique</li> </ul>	Technique	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Re-learning technique</li> <li>• Understanding technique</li> <li>• Making technique more effective</li> <li>• Faster integration of new techniques</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Different framework within which a musician can understand technique, in function of their own functioning NOT directly in function of sound (ATM01).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Less cost</li> <li>- Less effort than before</li> <li>- regulate energy</li> </ul>	Use of energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced cost</li> <li>• Reduced effort</li> <li>• Ability to regulate energy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It is not the case that making music ceases to make demands upon energy, but perhaps the use of energy has a more positive/reciprocal health benefit (ATM01)</li> </ul>

#### ATMP

- "towards the end of training I got back into it, and I now genuinely feel like I'm playing better than I have ever played" p.18
- "I was just better because I was more coordinated, because I have the Alexander training, I just was better." p.19
- "you're in contact, and you've never been more in contact in your life because you're not feeling like you're going to drop it and therefore holding it" p.20
- "shifting was more accurate, scales are just generally more accurate. I was just... more rapid... more agility, more dexterity around the instrument" p. 21
- "like just literally, the physics of playing the instrument were just easier" p.21
- "Tense my thumb, and then rock my hand over my tense thumb, which I can't do now, because it's just awful. That was how I did vibrato. So it's challenging because I'm going, right, we don't need this, like putting it out on the front lawn... {Ellen Casey 1:08:12 re-learning?} ...That's it. Yes, that's the word. I've renovating my house of playing. And that's tough. That's a challenge" p.27-28

## ATM01

- “yo creo que en alguna forma la, inconscientemente la sensación de apoyo que yo tenía era como en compresión. Yo tenía algo de buscar con mi cabeza por abajo, había algo de tensar los hombros, había algo de comprimir para generar conexión. Cuando empezás a buscar una conexión por la expansión, es una a dirección distinta, contraria a la que intuitivamente uno recorrió durante muchos años. Y ese cambio sutil es un cambio enorme en toda la técnica, desde la mandíbula, la lengua, los ojos, el cuello, todo” p.14
- “I think that in some way, unconsciously the sensation I had of support was through compression. I had this thing of looking for it by bringing my head down, there was a thing of tensing the shoulders, there was a thing of compressing to generate connection. When you start to look for connection through expansion, it's a different direction, contrary to the one that intuitively one turned to for many years. And this subtle change is an enormous change in the whole technique [of singing], from the jaw, the tongue, the eyes, the neck, everything” p.14
- “recién ahora estoy empezando a tener un poco más de conciencia de la técnica de canto en dialogo con la técnica alexander. O sea, nada de lo que yo planteo como técnica de canto entre en contradicción con los principios de la técnica.” p.15
- “just now am I beginning to have a bit more awareness of the technique of singing in dialogue with the Alexander technique. I mean, nothing that I propose as singing technique is in contradiction with the principles of the Alexander technique” p.15
- “Es como si de alguna forma esas direcciones englobaran todo lo demás, de alguna forma” p.17
- “It's as if in some way those directions [AT directions] include everything else, in some way” p.17
- “hay más disponibilidad en todas las notas que tengo posibles de ser cantadas” p.11
- “there is more elasticity and availability in all the notes that I have the ability to sing” p.11
- “una sensación de menor costo para mí, o sea que el cantar empieza a ser una actividad en la que, en la que no hay un costo, o sea no hay un costo, no es a costo del dolor de mi cuello que canto” p.11
- “a sensation of less cost for me, I mean that singing begins to be an activity in which there isn't a cost, it's not at the cost of pain in my neck that I sing” p.11
- “Es como si ahora yo sintiera que canto así, como eso que yo antes sentía que era en otros, de a poco empecé a encontrar en mí” p.17
- “It's as if now I feel like I sing like that, like that which before I felt was in others, little by little I began to find in myself” p.17
- “Tener la movilidad física de poder interpretar el rol de alguien joven y tener la voz fresca como para que eso pase” p.24
- “To have the physical mobility to interpret the role of someone young and have the voice fresh so that that can happen” p.24
- “poder aplicar un elemento técnico nuevo en poco tiempo. O sea, con ese conocimiento, con esa salud en la conexión, de repente, si alguien te propone una herramienta la podés investigar sabiendo que lo que estás haciendo es eso, que no estás queriendo hacer eso y haciendo cualquier otra cosa... lo logré en el proceso preparación de la obra, en muy poco tiempo. Entonces la maestra estaba alucinada, no lo podía creer.” p.23
- “to be able to apply a new technique in a short period of time. I mean, with this knowledge, with this kind of health in connection, suddenly, if someone proposes a technique you can investigate it knowing that what you are doing is that, and not that you are wanting to do it but really doing something else... I

achieved it in the preparation process of the piece, in a really short time. So the maestra was amazed, she couldn't believe it" p.23

#### ATM02

- "It always feels effort for me to play, always. Even after everything, even after all the Alexander, all the Fekderkraiss, all the everything... I still feel quite heavy." p.5
- "Like I'm saying, I still feel heavy when I play, I guess it's not, It's not like it as bad as it used to be. It's like, get on with it. I suppose. It's just, it mustn't be as bad otherwise, I wouldn't be able to do it" p.6

#### ATM03

- "open up that process of, of looking into breathing in a much more constructive way" p.6
- "the Alexander technique, for example, just the physicality of playing, it can give you much more space for that" p.15
- "you're not bound by... physical limits. I mean, there's still, one struggles with limits because, but you just change where those limits are... the limits shift... The limits don't become fixed, that's the point." p.15/16

#### ATM04

- "it took a long time of having Alexander lessons to unravel that, to recognise that that's what I was doing." p.2
- "For me, the biggest thing was neck tension, but gradually, gradually that subsided, and I could play without tightening up in my neck" p.3
- "I can use the technique and use directions to sort of ground myself when I'm, when I'm performing. And also that, not only to be grounded, but to be able to... It's almost like a turning on the gas, be able to regulate the amount of energy required to play." p.5
- "I think the sound that I make is probably a lot freer than it used to be, you know, because I'm physically freer, free to use the bow." p.9
- "the training gave me so much more as well. So much, so many more tools to use" p.3