

Alexander Technique and Dance

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The Alexander technique is a therapeutic system that examines habitual patterns of posture, movement and related physical tension in the body. It is an educational training process that is geared toward eliminating poor posture and movement habits. This is accomplished by systematically retraining an individual to replace inefficient habits with efficient ones to make everyday activities easier and less stressful on the body.

The objective of the Alexander technique is to promote correct use of the body to support freedom of movement while exerting the least amount of effort. Studies suggest that this method is helpful for alleviating chronic conditions such as neck, back and shoulder pain. The Alexander technique is effective in treating a host of disorders related to strain, especially those brought on by repetitive physical movements. Ballroom dancing is an activity that places constant demand on the entire musculoskeletal system. Therefore, it is important to proceed in a manner that will not cause unnecessary strain that may otherwise result in bodily injury. It is not uncommon for dancers to experience joint pain, shoulder and neck stiffness and foot discomfort to name a few. This is frequently related to incorrect use of the body.

On the other side of the coin, an individual may not have an accurate interpretation of their sensory information. This leads to a phenomenon known as 'faulty sensory appreciation'. Keep in mind that the manner in which one moves is not only based on the information derived through the senses, but also on one's interpretation of this information. The dilemma is that most individuals have already learned to move in ways that do not reflect optimized movement. These learned patterns of posture and movement are largely based on one's individual interpretation of how the posture or movement should look and feel. In essence this becomes a learned pattern over time. The amazing thing here is that an individual may believe that their dance posture and movement pattern is spot on when in fact it may be quite flawed. One's actual posture and movement pattern on the dance floor may

be vastly different from their perception. This is sometimes referred to as a blind spot, i.e., seen by others but not by oneself.

Poor postural and movement habits are unconsciously learned and persistently reinforced especially through everyday activities. For example, individuals who sit at a desk for many hours each day have a tendency to develop a slumped posture. Unfortunately, without corrective intervention this habit can leave one's posture permanently skewed. The incredible thing is that the faulty posture feels right to the individual, even though it is visibly misaligned. This pattern becomes reinforced and perceived as normal. Working with a skilled Alexander techniques teacher can help correct faulty postural and movement habits by replacing existing ones with correct ones. This process will help dancers to become more consciously aware of both posture and movement. The goal is to reinforce good habits.

Working with Alexander technique can help dancers to develop a greater ease of movement, conservation of energy and spatial awareness. It helps one to learn how to move with greater efficiency, using the least amount of energy, resulting in less fatigue. It can help individuals to get the most out of their dancing as well as everyday activities.

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