



An Alexander Technique Approach to Double Bass Technique

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Table of Contents

What the Alexander Technique Offers Performers

Posture: Sitting and Standing

Head, Neck, and Double Bass

Left Arm

Right Arm

Torso, Shoulders, and Breathing

Inhibition and Playing (letting go of bad habits)

Accuracy (playing with faith)

Slow and Fast Playing, Fragments and Focal Dystonia

Whole Body Guided Release before Practicing or Performing

When You're Not Doing Something, Don't Continue to Do It

The Reasons Why Performers Resist Releasing Poor Physical Habits

As a Gift (for everyone listening)

Collected Short Essays in the Order Written

What the Alexander Technique Offers Musical Performers

The Alexander Technique makes it possible for musicians to perform without pain and wear and tear to their bodies. An Alexander Technique teacher shows the performer how to play his or her instrument with a sense of power, poise, and ease. What is it exactly that an Alexander Technique teacher does for the performing musician that makes it unique? We teach the performer to find the most effortless way to play her instrument. We teach the performer that her whole body plays the instrument. If the whole body is balanced, and the technique makes personal sense, the player will play without sacrificing her body. **In the Alexander Technique the performer's well-being is paramount, and if she takes care of herself, the performer will create an extraordinary performance.**

Alexander Technique teachers believe the means will take care of the ends. This means if the performer puts his awareness on his posture and technique and chooses to find the easiest way to play his instrument with the least amount of work and with high energy, he will not wear his body out. He will not create compression in his joints trying to maintain poor posture and simultaneously use too much muscle to play his instrument. This combination of using too much muscle to hold up a body off balance and using too much muscle to maintain the inefficient parts of his technique, makes it nearly impossible to trust his body to give him what he wants from his instrument daily. This muscling of his body and the instrument will eventually cause his body to hurt and potentially end his career.

A performer needs a set of tools to be able to play in the zone every day. What are these tools? They are *conscious control, inhibition, orders, direction, renewing the thought, opposition, balance vs. position, grounding, and troubleshooting.*

Conscious control is what F. M. Alexander called regaining control over the voluntary musculature of the body. If a client comes to me and says his neck and trapezius are hurting, and I tell him to just release these muscles, he'll look at me like I'm crazy. The truth is he has lost *conscious control* over these muscles, and it seems to him there is no way to get them to release. It is the ability to tell your body what you want, so that it happens, that F. M. Alexander helped his students regain in everyday and specialized activities.

Alexander called these instructions to the body **orders**. So, the student with the sore shoulder and neck says to himself, "My neck is free and my spine is lengthening, and my shoulders are widening, releasing, and floating on the ribcage". This is an order given to the

shoulder girdle and neck that invites the spine to lengthen and decompress. If you are patient and repeat these orders, your body will respond at a deeper and deeper level to these repeated thoughts of release, and you will have *conscious control* over your shoulder and neck.

Repeating thoughts to release the neck and shoulder are called **renewing the thought**. When you *renew a thought*, you are repeating an *order* to an area of the body asking for release and expansion. All repeated thoughts directed toward an area of the body have an effect, and the more you repeat the thought, the more profound the release. As the release begins to be experienced consciously, your faith in your control over your body grows, and your thoughts are felt as having direct powerful experienced effects on your body. This is *conscious control*.

Direction is the Alexander Technique principle that the head wants to lead the spine into lengthening in an activity, and this head leading the lengthening spine creates organized, elegant, graceful, powerful and athletic movement. So, core to this technique is that when you play an instrument, you do so with a released lengthening spine. This will organize and coordinate the whole body, so that you don't damage the discs and impair the nervous system.

Inhibition is the Alexander Technique tool that allows a performer to make changes to the way she plays her instrument, and not to replace one set of bad habits with another set of bad habits. Example: The moment a double bassist is about to play, he anticipates playing by locking his neck and then moves the bow. This is his lifetime habit, so he has always locked his neck before she plays. If she *inhibits* this habit which has been compressing the discs in her spine, then right before he plays he has chosen to consciously unlock his neck and then move the bow. To stop right before doing what you've always done, and choose to do something different is *inhibition*. It is an incredible tool for letting go of what doesn't work, when you play your instrument. You get to choose to do something different, to simply **stop** doing what isn't working and play without pain.

Opposition is changing your relationship to the instrument, changing the relationships between the parts of your body, or changing your body's relationship to the audience. If you allow yourself to be aware of the space between you and your instrument, or allow yourself to be in contact with the instrument without pulling toward it or pulling it toward you, then you really lower the tension level in the body. This means you flow upward with a lengthening spine, and you're not compressing downward or arching your body forward into the instrument.

Opposition between the parts of your body is allowing space between the joints. If we talk about the arms releasing out of the back, then we say, "Allow the hands to release away from the spine as you play". This is hands in *opposition* to the spine, which allows you to have

released arms as you play, and released/lengthening arms means you consciously create space in the wrists, elbows, and shoulder joints.

The performer in *opposition* to the audience is the performer sending the performance to the audience, as he allows his head to lead upward. This is *directing* tied to *opposition*, and this allows the whole body to be balanced upward as he performs, rather than leaning forward off balance to connect to the audience. **Choose to connect to the audience with your loving intention to give the music as a gift, not by sacrificing your body.**

A basic principle of the Alexander Technique is to choose **postural balance** over attempting to “hold” good posture. We recognize that the body is always in motion, and that when a performer tries to hold a position, whether posture or technique, she will cause pain and strain as she plays. Simply, you can’t *hold* a position as you play your instrument, without using too much muscle. This means you are simultaneously in motion and static at the same time, and this creates compression in the joints, which causes wear and tear to the body.

I’ve talked about how the Alexander Technique wants you to have an upward flow in your body, but since we also want there to be *opposition* in the body, then there needs to be a downward flow also. This downward flow is **grounding**. Allow the head to be in *opposition* to the feet and legs and/or sit bones, and this gives the torso the platform it needs to be supported fully on the feet and/or sit bones. This full support on the feet and/or sit bones with the leg musculature released downward, means that the torso follows the head up off of free hip joints. So, from the hip joints down there is *grounding*, and from the hip joints up there is *directing* or **up**, as we say in the Alexander Technique

Troubleshooting is one of my favorite things to do in this technique. If you can’t play a passage in a major piece of the literature for your instrument, then you are doing something wrong. Let’s assume you have the potential to play all of the great literature for your instrument, and if you can’t, you need to stop playing and figure out what you are doing technically and/or posturally wrong. This is troubleshooting. I love to do this with students. Every fine performer I have ever worked with who couldn’t play a particular passage was operating from lies about their ability and/or misconceptions about what was going on physically in the passage. Once we discovered the problem, then there was always a solution that worked, if the performer gave him or herself the gift of letting go of limiting beliefs that compromised his or her technique.

Posture: Sitting and Standing

Let’s take a look at your whole body as you play. We’ll look at sitting and standing. Choose a stool that is level or slightly tilted downward, has no lip on the front of the chair, and

has a perfectly flat seat and is padded. Sit to the front of the chair with the sit bones on the chair and most of the hamstrings, the back of the thighs, off of the chair. The chair needs to be high enough, so that the double bass player can be in the optimal position to the instrument.

In the Alexander Technique we approach the playing of an instrument from the perspective that the whole body plays the instrument, so what the whole body does from the top of the head to the tip of the toes is critical to what comes out of the instrument. The general relationship of the whole body to the instrument is one of compromise. In finding a posture that doesn't sacrifice any part of your body or technique, you will discover there are very few ways you can sit or stand with the instrument that are truly comfortable and allow effortless access to the double bass and *mechanically advantageous* posture.

The double bass is placed in front of the legs and torso and played. Here is what has to happen in terms of the double bass's relationship to your body, so that you don't have to sacrifice your body to play the bass. Whether sitting or standing, you want the instrument to be placed, so that your torso can be fully upright most of the time. You want to be able to bow all of the strings with a minimum of torso movement. You want to be able to bow near the bridge without having to compromise your posture. You want to be able to play in the 1st position and the highest positions with the left hand, so that you feel powerful at either extreme of the neck.

If you are to sit or stand fully upright, then the instrument will need to be high enough (length of the endpin), and it will need to lean toward you enough, so that the bass doesn't force you out over it to play most of the time. The front of the double bass needs to be turned to the right, so that you can get to the first string and also comfortably to the fourth string. This means the instrument may have to be on a diagonal to the body or the side of the bass fully facing the torso. The amount of turn to the right will also be determined by the style of bowing you use. The German bow hand position means it is easier to get to the first string without having to turn the bass as much to the right, but if you don't turn the instrument enough, it will make it difficult to play the fourth string. If you use the cello and violin style bow hand position, then just the reverse is true. The more you turn the bass to the right, the easier it is for the right arm, but this can make it more difficult to play on the fourth string. When the bass is facing forward totally, then you will need to spiral the torso also, again making sure you don't collapse the torso. The bass facing fully to the front may be a decision about what your left hand needs to play comfortably. (In the section *Torso, Shoulders, and Breathing* I talk about spiraling the torso to get to all of the strings without sacrificing the posture of the torso and the right arm.)

The double bass needs to be in a relationship to the left arm, so that the instrument isn't too tall and causes the left hand and arm to strain playing in the first position, but the bass also needs to be tall enough, so that when you play in the highest registers of the neck, you are able to get to these notes without having to come forward over the body of the bass any

more than you have to. It is nearly impossible to sustain a position of *mechanical advantage* of the torso when you play in the highest register, but you can do what needs to be done with a free neck and lengthening back and free shoulders and grounding and not harm your body.

There are essentially three postural positions for the bassist at the instrument: fully upright, pivoted over the bass, and curled over the bass to play the highest notes. In all three of these postures you want to have the head lead a lengthening spine and to be aware that your sit bones are the bottom of your torso, and to be aware that your legs are what grounds you on balance, even when you're sitting on a stool. On the stool, it is both your sit bones and legs that ground the head, neck, and torso.

I want to back up now and talk about the torso in relationship to the chair or standing and your legs and the instrument. I want to bring in the principles of the Alexander Technique, so you will not end up with an immobilized body at the instrument. Sit down on the perfect chair to play the double bass, but without the bass. Sit fully upright on your sit bones with a free neck and a lengthening spine and a wide stance with your legs, as if you are at the bass. Bring up your arms to play without the bow, and allow for a fully vertical lengthening spine and shoulders floating on the ribcage. Choose not to tense your legs in anticipation of playing the bass. This is a very direct way of looking at what you typically do in anticipation of playing the instrument, but without the instrument. I'm asking you to *inhibit* what you usually do in **preparation** for playing. **If you don't prepare to play with tension, then you won't have to play with tension**

One final point on your legs in sitting and playing: If you sit on a stool and place your left leg on the railing of the stool, then you are making a decision to play the double bass in what may be a more comfortable position, but you want to be aware that you are changing from a four point grounding stance to a three point stance. This means that you need to have an especially clear sense of your sit bones on the chair and your right foot and leg on the floor, supporting you in full, balanced, upright posture. This means you don't lean or collapse to your side as you play. If you were to mount a piece of wood that was the length and width of your foot to the railing and chair, then you would return to a four point grounding stance as you sit.

Now stand fully upright and let your skeleton support your musculature rather than the other way around, which means you don't lock a single muscle to be upright. (You also do this when sitting.) Bring up your arms to play and notice what happens to your posture. You will probably hunker down in your upper body and go into the posture you usually play in. *Inhibit* this and feel what it feels like to raise your arms (let them float up) to play with a fully balanced body not going to where you have always gone posturally to play. You want to do this whether

you're standing or sitting *without* telling yourself how much effort will be needed to play the double bass. Because of the size of this instrument and the amount of strength it takes to press the string, many double bass players approach the instrument as if they are lifting heavy weights. What if you didn't hunker down physically and emotionally when you approached your instrument? Then you won't set yourself up to sacrifice your body when you play.

If you don't have the instrument as you anticipate playing and you're *directing*, then when the instrument is placed in front of you in its optimal position, you can feel what it feels like to experience your body's new relationship to the instrument without *holding* onto it. You get to experience a new physical relationship to the instrument, where you're at dynamic ease in the chair or standing and not poised to play the way you've always played. **I'm asking you to be with the double bass for possibly the first time, where all of your attention is on you, and you are in control of the bass.** This is having the instrument accommodate you 100%, rather than you accommodating the instrument, which is a fancy way of saying not sacrificing your body for the instrument.

What does this playing the instrument look like where you aren't paying a physical price to play your instrument? As the left arm is on the neck and the right arm has the bow, you are playing the instrument as if you are playing the air bass. This means you aren't hanging onto the double bass. The left arm floats up to the neck and the right arm supports the bow with mobile shoulders. I will look at each arm at the bass individually, but right now I'd like you to just experience your arms and your body at the instrument, as if you were a dancer with arms floating to the bass and your body on balance and in *opposition* to the instrument.

In the introduction to this ebook I describe *opposition* as allowing the space between you and your instrument. So, what does this mean for you and the double bass, since the bass is in contact with your legs and torso? This means you sit fully upright with your head *directing* a lengthening spine upward from the sit bones, with the legs releasing out of the hip joints, as the instrument rests lightly against your torso. You then don't pull the instrument to you with your arms, and you don't slump into the instrument or arch your back or press the front of your torso into the bass. Since the bass is leaning toward you, let it come to you, and really feel how good it feels to **not hold onto** the instrument. Allow yourself to be in contact with the instrument, without pulling or pushing the double bass into you or away from you. *Let yourself wrap around the bass with balance, ease, and up.*

A very basic Alexander Technique principle is, when sitting, to allow the legs to release out of the pelvis. This means as you sit and balance on your sit bones, you let your upper leg musculature release, so that the legs fall forward out of the hip joints. Try this as you are sitting. Tighten your thighs, and you will experience and actually see your upper legs jammed into the pelvis. This is where so many sitting performing musicians get into trouble over the years. If you

sit for hours with static, locked, jammed hip joints, you will eventually end up with hip pain, potentially leading to arthritis and/or a hip replacement.

When playing standing, you want a sense of your head leading the torso up off of the legs, from the pelvis up. When you sit on a horse, the saddle clearly tells you where the bottom of your pelvis is, and this is the feeling you want in standing, the torso balanced up and over the legs. It is from the hip joints that you pivot over your legs and the double bass to play in that range of the instrument where you can get to the strings, where the neck meets the body of the bass. It is this mid-section of the bass neck where you can play the bass with the body in a *mechanically advantageous* posture. This means as you pivot forward, your knees are bent and the head, neck, and torso are able to be diagonally over your legs in the same alignment as if you were fully upright. So many bassists, it seem to me to be doing whatever they can do to play this large instrument without considering if balanced, aligned, powerful, and mechanically advantageous posture is possible most of the time. It is!

Head, Neck, and Double Bass

The central principle in the Alexander Technique is if you allow the neck to release and the head to LEAD a lengthening spine in any activity, then the freed-up decompressed central nervous system will allow you to move with elegance, ease, and coordination, and this is called directing. This is an extremely important concept and action that needs to be especially clarified for double bass players, because there are three major things that bassists do in their technique that usually compromises this inherent way of organizing the body. They are: the double bassist collapses down to see the neck of the bass and the bow, playing in the higher registers usually collapses the whole head neck and torso, and playing on the first string usually collapses the right side of the torso, resulting in the head and neck leaning and going down as the shoulder is pulled around to reach the first string.

Before I talk about these three things that double bass players do to compromise their technique, I'd like to talk about what almost all musicians do to compromise their technique. It is the opposite of the opening sentence of this section. **Almost all musicians shorten their neck and spine when they play or sing.** Psychologically speaking, this happens because the intention to play or sing well usually makes most performers afraid of making mistakes. I don't want to go into analyzing that here, but what I do want to do is what the purist Alexander Technique teacher would do. You teach the student to **order** their body to stop doing what isn't working and/or **order** the body to do what does work. *Orders* is the word that F. M. Alexander called the thoughts you direct toward your body, where you ask it what you want it to do or not to do. One of the most basic orders is, "My neck is free, and my head is leading a lengthening spine and a widening back". This *order* is a combination of telling the neck to release and then telling

the spine to lengthen. Even though the word *order* typically now has a negative connotation, in this Alexandrian sense, these “orders of allowance” are a kind control of your body.

Ideally you want to reestablish this inherent body organization that most three and four-year-olds have, and that is children play and run, etc. with a free neck and lengthening spine. So, even if you’re performing a concert and you’re afraid, you choose to order/allow your neck to be free and your spine to lengthen, so that you don’t hunker down and compromise the performance and escalate your fear. **In other words, if your body is in beautiful balanced postural alignment in a performance, it won’t compromise the performance from the get go. A hunkered-down posture is poor technique.**

For the double bassist to be fully upright, establish fully upright balanced posture, and then have the instrument fit you, rather than you trying to fit the instrument. Most beginners on an instrument let the instrument tell them what their bodies are supposed to do, rather than let their bodies tell the instrument what it is supposed to do. As you’re sitting or standing, have someone place the double bass in front of you and keep adjusting the instrument until you can be *on balance* and the instrument is *easily playable* for both arms. Discover how much the instrument needs to tilt, so you can sit or stand fully upright. Figure out how long the endpin needs to be. Figure out how much the bass needs to lean toward you, in other words how much of a diagonal backward tilt of the instrument is needed to fit your body. **Understand that in all of this you want to be sitting fully balanced upward on your sit bones with free hips or standing with free legs, and the instrument is coming to you, not you to it.**

From this fully upright posture, let your head pivot downward, without the head, neck, and shoulders rounding downward to the bass. This means you are still directing **up** with the crown of the head, even as the head is tilting to see the double bass. You can do this by allowing the space between the skull and first vertebrae (atlas) without the head and neck collapsing forward. Also, allow the eyes to move downward in their sockets, so that they can easily see the instrument, so that you don’t have to collapse the head and neck downward to see.

When you play in the highest register of the instrument, you have to press the strings with the musculature of the torso (*latissimus dorsi*), because the thumb is now in front of the strings. You want to be very clear that the fingers are pressed into the strings by the torso’s back and arm muscles and that the hand *can’t* press itself. The question is: how upright can you be playing in this register? This is another consideration, when deciding where the instrument needs to be to fit you, not you it.

If you lengthen the endpin more, you may find that the instrument leaning even more toward you would be what is needed for you to play in the upper register. When the

shoulder/arm takes the fingers to the strings, then you don't collapse your torso forward to get to the strings. But in the highest registers, you will need to *curve* your torso over the bass. This is the third posture on the bass, the other two being fully upright and the second pivoted with an aligned back (not curved over). Double bassists do this to get leverage over their arm/hand as it presses the strings. Let the latissimus dorsi send the arm/hand into the strings, as you curve over the body of the bass and continue to release your neck, and have the head lead a lengthening powerful back. The musculature of a curving back assisting the left arm will not cause physical problems, even though it isn't a *mechanically advantageous* posture, as long as the neck and torso are powerfully engaged without compressing the discs.

Letting yourself be fully upright and trusting yourself to be on pitch, means you trust your head to be far away from your fingers, and that you are still able to play absolutely in tune. This is the other reason double bassists hunker down over their instrument; they are unconsciously getting their heads as close as they can to the bass, so they can play in tune. **It is an amazing feeling to realize you can be fully upright, the head "far" away from the notes, and be in total control of pitch.** Many performers pull their heads toward their instrument, because it is how so many of us learned to read and write. We got our heads as close as we could to the book or paper, so we could get the words or the letters right.

When you play on the first string, there is absolutely no reason your fully vertical posture has to be compromised at all, if you will allow your torso to spiral and support the right arm and shoulders as you play on this string. When the torso spirals without leaving the plane it is in, which means the spine doesn't lean out of the plane it's in as the torso spirals, then you have the whole powerful torso fully upright and supporting the arms and shoulders to back up bowing. In the section of this ebook titled *Torso, Shoulders, and Breathing*, I go into detail explaining how to spiral the torso to play on the first string and the other strings.

Left Arm

I'm a former concert guitarist, and I've worked with a lot of double bass players as an Alexander Technique teacher. I'm going to look at the left hand and arm of the bassist from the perspective of the Alexander Technique, and also from my perspective of having been a concert guitarist. I went to my first Alexander Technique teacher with carpal tunnel syndrome in my left wrist caused by practicing six hours a day, and within a few months I stopped hurting and never had a problem with my wrist again. It was this experience that led me to become an Alexander Technique teacher.

As a guitarist I discovered that if I created a vise on the guitar neck, between the thumb and fingers, and did not use arm weight, that I stopped creating carpal tunnel in my left wrist. Essentially, I played the guitar with the left hand, as if I was playing the air guitar. This meant

that if the guitar suddenly disappeared, my hand and arm wouldn't drop. My arm floated up to the neck of the instrument, and I pressed the string(s) with my thumb and finger(s), thumb vertical (always perpendicular to the neck), thumb almost always placed between the first and second finger.

As I've worked with double bass players, I've discovered all of them have been taught to use arm weight. As I see this, it means *hanging* off the neck of the bass with the idea that the weight of the arm and shoulder will press the fingers into the strings, so you don't have to work as hard to press the strings with your fingers. It doesn't work. Here's why it doesn't work. When you use the weight of the arm to press the string, you are not fully and gently supporting a light arm, and position shifts mean you have to keep re-supporting a heavy arm to move it. When you are using the weight of the arm to press the string, you have to find this tricky balance between using the arm weight to press the finger into the string and simultaneously not pulling the arm downward off the notes. So, usually what happens is the double bass player pulls the arm backward, and this means pressing the string with a lot of extra muscle, which is mainly the back muscle (latissimus dorsi). I think this is why bassists have created this slapping the strings technique to press the strings to the neck.

Here is my alternative to using arm weight. Let the thumb be on the back of the bass neck with a gentle forward bending of the tip of the thumb and the thumb perpendicular to the neck, placed approximately between the first and second finger. Let a light floating arm support the hand fully the whole time. In other words, never hang on the neck of the bass. This means that the fingers and thumb act as pincers on the neck to press the strings, and you press with the minimum amount of muscular effort to get a clean precise note. **It takes less muscle to press the string of the double bass, when the arm and shoulder are supporting the hand fully and with ease, than when you use a tense and simultaneously non-supportive shoulder, making you press fingers even more, trying not to slide down the neck.** (There is a whole section in this ebook where I will look at the shoulders and how to use them with very little effort to support the arms, so I won't address that here.) **It is incredible how precise the fingers can be, when there is a fully energized arm and shoulder supporting the hand and allowing the mind to place the finger accurately, with a minimum of muscular work.**

Because the bass is on a diagonal leaning back to you, you do not have to play the instrument holding your left elbow out, any more than pianists have to hold their elbows out to play their instrument. Let the left hand lead the arm up to the strings with the elbow being allowed to point down to the ground and see what this feels like. If you observe what many bassists do, when they shift position with the left arm, they will move the elbow first and then place the hand and fingers. Let your hand lead the arm to the note without winging out the elbow first. You will find that you'll have a comfortable relationship of the fingers and thumb to

the neck and strings without having to overwork the shoulder muscle (deltoid). Notice how I said to let the hand lead the arm and shoulder to get to the instrument. This a way of thinking and moving the hand with the shoulder, without making the shoulder muscle overwork, in other words a “trick” to use the least amount of shoulder muscle to get the job done. Also, you don’t want the instrument to be so tall, that you strain your wrist hand and arm playing in the 1st position.

In the last sentence of the fourth paragraph of this section I talked about bassists slapping the strings. I see a lot of double bass players use a left hand technique of what seems to me to slap the finger into the string. Does it have to be done this way? In all of my ebooks on using the Alexander Technique to inform the playing of musical instruments, I ask myself a simple question. How would I play this instrument after the basics had been demonstrated for me? What I came up with I apply to all of my students who come to me for the Alexander Technique. I show and/or explain to them what I would do to personalize my technique on their instrument, using everything I’ve learned about body mechanics to make the instrument easier to play. I present these as possibilities and leave it up to the student to decide, if he or she wants to use them or not.

What if you **gently curled** all of your fingers to the bass neck and kept them all within a quarter of an inch from the strings, and, when it was time to use a finger, you reflexively popped the gently curved finger into the string? Reflexively means twitching into the string as quickly as your reflexes can possibly move the finger. This would be the equivalent a slapping the strings but instead with a gentle curl to the fingers. You’d shoot into the string reflexively onto your fingertips. You would not need to add the extra movement of drawing the finger back to play the note cleanly. **You do not need to get a running start to play a note with precision and clarity.**

Speed on a double bass is a determined by the left hand and by what the instrument can handle. There are two things that have to be realized, if the bassist is going to be limited only by the instrument and not by the left hand fingers. ***You cannot move your fingers any faster than your reflexes will allow you.*** Simply, you can’t force your fingers to play faster than they can move, so you have two ways to be able to move to play notes at amazing tempos. First is what I mentioned earlier. Direct all of your fingers to be within a quarter of an inch from the strings at all times; released and poised to move instantaneously. **Second, since you can’t force the next finger to play faster than your reflexes, the next finger to play needs to be already on the way down to the next note, if it is to get there at a tempo your reflexes can’t handle.** You’ll experience this as the fingers moving as a wave through the left hand. And they are, because there is a constant flow of movement between the fingers at fast tempos, and this an incredible feeling to play super-fast effortlessly, and to be conscious of how you’re doing it.

Right Arm

Do you know which muscles move the right arm on the up-bow or down-bow? On the up-bow, the biceps and the chest (pectoral) muscle with the front of the shoulder (deltoid) muscle push the bow across the string. The triceps and the back (latissimus dorsi) muscle with the back of the shoulder (deltoid) muscle pull the bow on the down-bow. It is very important for you to understand that these large torso muscles do most of the work to move the bow. It also means that you need to accept that these muscles are very precise in what you ask of them, or you are conflicted. What the arm and torso do is similar, whether you are using an overhand bow or a German style bow. I want to generalize the principles we'll be looking at to both of these techniques.

You may now view your hands as precise and the larger upper body musculature as imprecise, which means you "live" in their hands. If so, then you may experience your hands as moving your arms, not your arms and torso as moving your hands. **The musculature of the torso and the shoulders moves the arms and hands, which means the torso places the hands where they need to be to be accurate.** There are two things we teach as Alexander Technique teachers, when it comes to activities like playing a musical instrument that require refined movement. We make it very clear to the double bass player which muscles are doing what, and we teach the performer how to get out of the way of these muscles, so that playing the bass is as effortless and dynamic as possible.

So, I want to make you aware that your chest, back, arm, and shoulder muscles move the bow, but experience it as the hand **leading** an *energized* arm in bowing. (An Alexander Technique "trick" is to experience bowing as if the hand moves the arm, even though you know in reality that the arm and torso muscles move the hand. When you experience the hand leading a very alive and available arm, you get this very dynamic arm that is doing the minimum muscularly to move the bow.)

When you, the double bassist, are making sounds, the bow is in motion. When the bow is in motion, the whole right arm and right shoulder are in motion. As obvious as this is, it is critical to bring it to consciousness. Why? **Because playing the double bass cannot be described in terms of static positions.** (One can describe playing the piano and guitar in static positions, because on both of these instruments the performer can play a note and not be in motion, and the sound continues.)

When I ask you to fully experience what happens in the right arm as you play, it may be the **first time** in your performing life that you are *experiencing/sensing* the arm, hand, and shoulder instead of telling them what to do. So, as you move the bow back and forth across the string, I ask you to feel what the whole arm is doing. **I ask you to realize for the first time that**

all of your joints are continuously changing shape when the bow is in motion making music and to feel this. The first time I did this with a bassist, it was a revelation for the player, because for the first time he got to watch his body rather than boss his body. What happened was wonderful. Instantly the tone became warmer, fuller, and louder. Then it became obvious to both of us that there was a major change in the quality of his whole arm's movements. All of the joints, from the wrist to the elbow to the shoulder to where the collar bone meets the sternum, became more fluid. They folded and unfolded with ease. (When I look at how a person walks, and I make her aware that her knee always precedes the foot in walking, instantly she releases her knees more when she walks, without even intending to.)

So the moment I make the double bass player aware that all of her right arm's joints are continuously folding and unfolding and changing shape when she plays, she lets this happen even more, and feels how good it feels in her body as it happens.

There are two places in the right arm where the double bassist typically gets herself in trouble: the shoulder and the hand. The deltoid muscle of the shoulder supports the arm forward and up, and it also assists in moving the bow. When you are playing your instrument the whole arm, shoulder, and musculature are all in motion, then there has to be a way to support the arm without immobilizing the deltoid.

If you can support the head upright with a free neck, then you can support a right arm forward and up with a free shoulder. Imagine there is a string tied to your wrist and elbow and someone is lifting your arm in front of your body for you, and that this has nothing to do with playing the bass (letting go of any intention in your body to play), and "let your arm be raised for you". For the first time you will probably feel how little muscle it takes to raise an arm. If I said to you that your life depended on you supporting your arm in the double bass position and not move it for five hours, then the only way you could do this without causing trauma in the musculature of the arm and shoulder would be to experience the arm as floating. If you are experiencing the arm as floating, then the arm is being supported with the minimum muscle necessary and is 100% available for movement (bowing). This is how you as a bassist can play for as long as you want and never have any problems with your right shoulder.

Double bass players do not like to drop the bow when they play, and especially when they perform for others. So, many bassists hold onto the bow - in fact I believe **most** double bass players hold onto the bow - with too much muscle. As an Alexander Technique teacher, I would instruct a bassist and other bow instrument players on how help to use less and less hand and forearm musculature to hold onto the bow, and this would establish a new habit over time. Then one lesson I asked a double bass player to imagine her fingers super-glued to the bow, and that she couldn't drop the bow even if she wanted to. The moment she started playing a look of surprise and joy that came into her eyes. She stopped after a moment, and

said it really felt like the bow was glued to her fingers, and she didn't have to grip the bow at all to not drop it.

In an instant we had solved what could have been along drawn out process of discovering how little work it took to hold the bow. Instantly she went to the minimum muscle necessary to get the job done, and because she fully experienced the bow as being glued to her thumb and fingers, she instantly let go of being afraid of dropping the bow. This is the most important part for me, because anything I can do as a teacher to help a musician let go of fear, means that what comes out of the instrument will be loving, if fear isn't blocking the loving performance. **"Love is letting go of fear"**, which is from *A Course in Miracles*.

Finally, for this new way of "holding" the bow to become an effortless habit, she had to *renew the thought*, "My fingers and thumb are super-glued to the bow", whenever she forgot, as she was playing and had started squeezing the bow. Every time she *renewed this thought*, it moved closer and closer to being an effortless habit/experience, and very quickly and permanently redefined her relationship to the bow, ultimately making the bow a gentle, loving extension of her arm.

Torso, Shoulders, and Breathing

The shoulder girdle floats on top of a ribcage, and the shoulder girdle and ribcage are in **constant flow and movement**, as a result of breathing and all that is needed to play the double bass. If you don't want to strain your shoulders and arms, you want to allow this freedom in the arms and torso and shoulders to be a constant in your playing.

When you play a non-wind instrument you never ever need to hold your breath. In other words, never holding your breath in practice and performance should be part of your technique. So, take a piece of music that you know backward and forward, or a scale, and as you play, place all of your awareness on observing your breathing. Let what comes out of the instrument be totally secondary, and place all of your attention on observing your breathing pattern, but not controlling it. The longer you only observe your breathing, the more natural your breathing will become. My intention is to make continuous breathing part of your technique, so that no matter how difficult a passage is, you never hold your breath. Another way to say this is that you play every piece with a fearless breathing pattern.

A fearless breathing pattern is when the diaphragm contracts downward and expands the whole torso backward, sideways, downward and slightly upward. The descending diaphragm pushes the ribcage out and up and the intestines downward and back and forward. So, the whole torso expands in all directions on the inhale. **The inhale is a muscular contraction of the diaphragm that moves the ribcage forward, up, sideways, and backward.** For this to

happen effortlessly, the external musculature surrounding the ribcage needs to release to allow expansion, rather than actively expanding itself. **On the exhale the diaphragm releases and rises upward into a dome, and the ribcage lowers and moves inward, and the abdominal musculature moves toward the back. On the inhale the spine gathers, and on the exhale the spine lengthens.** (This awareness of the lengthening is critical, so you don't collapse the torso when you exhale.) *Breathing effortlessly and fearlessly is about the whole torso being released, so that the diaphragm can contract and expand with ease.*

The shoulders sit on top of this constantly expanding and contracting and rising and lowering structure, and when you are fully upright, this does not interfere with the accuracy of the arms and fingers, if you trust your body and your mind. **Accuracy is a function of trust, not of immobilizing the body.** There is never any reason to immobilize the shoulders when playing the double bass. When the arms are brought up to play, allow the head to lead a lengthening neck and spine, and the shoulder girdle to float on this structure that consists of ribs attached to the spine and sternum.

The shoulder girdle, which is the collar bones and shoulder blades and their musculature, should be allowed to float on top of the torso like an inner tube in a pool. You never ever need to interfere with the freedom of the shoulder blades to stabilize the shoulder girdle. The shoulder blades follow the arms into movement, and the freer the shoulder blades, the more coordinated and elegant the arms' movements are. When the arms are raised to play the bass, you are not increasing the actual weight on the shoulder girdle, but you are activating shoulder and back muscles to support the arms in a different, more active place. This can be done without tensing and immobilizing the shoulders and hunkering down into the torso to play. In other words, you do not have to hunker down or lock the shoulder blades to support the arms. What we see as Alexander Technique teachers is that just about everyone braces their shoulders, when they raise their arms, and this is totally unnecessary. Raise an arm over your head and tense up completely, so that it is immobile. Now release all of the excess work you're doing to hold it up, and imagine it is being held up for you, and that the arm and shoulder are available to be moved for you. ***Simply, muscles can support parts of the body without any of the musculature being held rigid.***

When playing the double bass, the torso should be allowed to spiral to assist the right arm in playing, whether you're sitting on a stool or standing. Most of the bassists who've come to me drop their right shoulder and pull their right shoulder girdle around and off of the torso to play the first string. What do I mean when I say they pull the right shoulder girdle off of the torso? The shoulder girdle sits on top of the torso, and the collar bones rest on the front ribs, and the shoulder blades share the same curve as the back ribs. When a bassist drops her right side, which means curves the spine down and to the right and *stretches* her right arm to

reach the first string, she is stressing her back, right arm and shoulder. This means the shoulder girdle is not floating on and being supported by the ribcage and torso.

What if, as the double bass player played the instrument sitting or standing, he allowed his back to spiral as he moved from string to string? This would mean that the torso is spiraling under a head looking at the instrument, and that the torso is moving the bow from string to string assisting the right arm. What I just described is what the body does when we walk or run, if you don't immobilize the torso. The spine/torso spirals under the head from the pelvis up. The pelvis actually counter-spirals to the spine when we walk, but at the bass in sitting we're only concerned with the spiral of the upper torso. If you begin to play a scale very slowly, and if every time you moved to the adjacent string you allow the torso to spiral just enough to move the shoulder and arm to the next string without dropping the shoulder at all, you will experience playing the double bass in a whole new light. This makes the whole body available to play the instrument, and it means that playing on the first string can be experienced as comfortably as playing the other three strings.

Sit on the end of the chair that you use to play your bass, but without the instrument. Look straight ahead with your arms across your chest. Now release your neck, *directing* your head to lead a lengthening spine upward and then spiral the whole torso, with your head turning with the torso, as the shoulder girdle goes for the ride. Let the whole torso spiral, but only to the point that you're not taking the sit bones off the chair. Do this in both directions until you get a real feel for the shoulder girdle being moved by the torso. Now, release the neck, and have the torso spiral with the neck so free, that the head continues to face forward. This is torso spiraling under the head. Now pivot your head downward from the base of the skull, looking downward at the floor without pushing the head forward. Spiral your torso as the head/eyes look at the same place without turning. This is what you want to do at the double bass.

The amount that the torso spirals while moving from adjacent string to adjacent string is not a big movement. In fact it will be almost invisible to an observer. When you have the torso available to help move the arm from first string to fourth string, it is an incredible feeling to realize how much you've been straining and collapsing to play your instrument, and now it is totally unnecessary.

Inhibition and Playing

I defined *inhibition* in the introduction to this ebook, but I feel it is such a powerful tool for the Alexander Technique teacher to give to the student, that I want to look at *inhibition* or *inhibiting the habit* in detail.

A double bassist comes to me because he's hurting, struggling, because he can't do what he wants on his instrument. He plays for me. It doesn't go well, and he **instantly** starts over and starts over and starts over etc. He finally gets into the piece and gets in trouble, and he **instantly** repeats what he messed up and tries it again and again, etc. This is what so many performers do, and it is such a habitual dead end, because it never leads to solving the problem. **You cannot fix a mistake, if you constantly are trying to fix the same mistake, by doing the same thing over and over and over.**

What should the bassist have done after he messed up the beginning of the piece? **He should have stopped and done something different. This is inhibition. Inhibition or inhibiting a habit is a choice to stop trying to get it right and to let go of or inhibit what isn't working.** How is this done? You stop doing what you're doing, make a change, and continue on the release of that change. How does the hurting bassist who has come to me do this?

First, we find a way to play the instrument so he can sit or stand with a fully aligned back, whether he's fully upright or pivoting over the instrument. It will take more than one session to integrate what I'm describing, but let's go with making lots of changes all at once for the moment. I ask him to inhibit (stop) slumping and then play. I ask him to release his neck and then play. I ask him to allow himself to breathe and then play. I ask him to let his left wrist unlock and then play. I ask him to release the tension in his legs and then play. I ask him to feel his right hand fingers glued to the bow and then play. I ask him to release any holding in his feet and then play. I ask him to release any holding in his jaw and then play. I ask him to allow his shoulders to float on the ribcage and then play. I ask him to allow his head to release up and away from his sit bones and then play. I ask him to direct his head to lead his spine into lengthening and then spiral the whole body to play the first string, if he is standing.

This is what F. M. Alexander created to change habits. He helped his student change what was going on internally and externally in the body, rather than by overriding the old habit with a different one with the same amount of tension. Let me state this in a different way. **If you do something different with the same amount of tension and compression that got you into trouble in the first place, no matter how much better your double bass technique is, you will eventually get back into trouble.** You can do what visually passes for good technique on the bass, but if you aren't expansive and balanced, then you are missing the piece that Alexander Technique teachers offer to their students. **That missing piece is a technique created where you let go of what isn't working and replace it with what does work.**

If, as *A Course in Miracles* says, "Love is letting go of fear", then as an Alexander Technique teacher I say, "Love is letting go of what doesn't work on the double bass". There is a line in *A Course in Miracles* that says if you believe in two contradictory belief systems at the same time, the one that isn't true will run your life. Sit down with a pencil and paper and take a

look at everything that you have always believed is necessary for a great double bass technique and write it all down. Also write down everything that is a weakness in your playing. Be very honest and admit what you can't do consistently and easily, that you should be doing. **It is always time to let go of the parts of your bass technique that don't work.** Also, from the Alexander Technique teacher's perspective, you are going to be adding a whole lot of new parts that you never would have considered as part of the bass's technique. Example: Many double bass players wouldn't exactly consider what the legs are doing as part of the bassist's technique. Probably you just planted your feet, and that was it for the legs.

From this ebook you now know that the whole body plays the double bass. I'll never forget when I went to my first Alexander Technique teacher as a guitarist with carpal tunnel syndrome, and she began to change everything in my whole body from head to toe. I wasn't a happy camper, but in a very short time I realized it was fun to see how it all fit together. Every time I *inhibited* some habit, big or small, I kept feeling better and better in my body, and I sounded better and better. When your body doesn't feel good, there is always a profound negative effect on what comes out of the instrument.

I have always found it nearly impossible to connect to the music I was playing, when I was hurting physically unnecessarily. **I believe we inherently know when we play an instrument, if there is a better way to play it.** What I mean by this statement is that deep down we know that if the instrument is **hurting** us, and if it's a **struggle** to play what's worth playing, then we're doing something wrong, and there is always a **better way**. Just before you play the double bass, if you stop and choose to **let go of what isn't expansive** for the whole body, and then you play, you have made an incredibly self-loving decision that is called **inhibition** in the Alexander Technique.

Accuracy

Accuracy, hitting the right note effortlessly, is a function of knowing which note you want to play, and absolutely allowing it to happen, and trusting it to happen and expecting it to happen. When I found the book *New Pathways to Piano Technique* by Luigi Bonpensiere, I had found what I needed to play like a musical prodigy at age twenty-five. The book revealed to me that if I knew where I was going on the guitar, trusted my finger to hit the mark, and moved instantaneously I couldn't miss, and I didn't! It is an incredible feeling to leap across the neck of the guitar with total abandon, as quickly as my reflexes will take me and nail the note. I'm not talking about close, but truly landing with a precise landing, so that the sound is clean.

Now, the guitar does have frets, and we pluck the strings rather than use a bow, and this can make for some pretty imprecise playing on the guitar. What I mean is that once the guitarist plucks the note it begins to decay, and if he does a large position change trying to

make sure he *doesn't* miss the note, he will cause a break in sound between the two notes, because he isn't moving *reflexively*, but he won't play other notes in between as a double bass player would. *Reflexively* is my term for moving as quickly between shifts as my arm can move the hand. This speed is limited by the speed of our reflexes, so I call it a *reflexive* movement. It is simply moving as quickly as you can in a shift, and you can't move any faster than you can move. A whole lot of musicians don't understand this and keep trying to force the arm and /or the fingers to move faster and faster. All this does is cause tension that makes you move even slower and exhausts the arms and hands.

As a bassist you have to move your left arm/hand *reflexively* between notes in a position change, or you will be bowing either nothing or a glissando. *Reflexively* is how you should shift, but I have seen double bassists who fudge position shifts. When they shift positions with the left hand as the string is being played, there may be a break in sound or a slight glissando, so they can get the *guided* left hand into position for the next note. What is a *guided* hand? It is a hand you are moving slowed down slightly with tension, so you don't miss when you land.

If you are going to play the double bass with total faith and allow your hand and soul to hit the mark with absolute precision like a prodigy does, you are going to have to ACCEPT that if you know the pitch of the note you want to hear, YOU CAN'T MISS! I see absolutely no difference between what a singer does to sing at pitch, and what the bassist does to place a fingertip on the exact place on the string on the exact right note. There is absolutely no room for error for the singer or the bassist: either you perform the note, because you instantly "go to" and perform the note, or you miss the mark.

So, now it is time for you the double bass player to do what I did, so that you can do what I do (paraphrasing the founder of the Alexander Technique, F. M. Alexander). Go to the bass and make a decision which two notes you are going to leap between on the same string, making it at least a fifth. Now begin bowing the lower note, and then somewhere in the middle of the bowing instantaneously shift the left hand to the next note without thought or hesitation. Did you hit the right pitch? If you didn't, then you aren't trusting the note in your head to place the finger. Withdraw even more effort to get it right, and then move instantaneously again, trusting the hand and soul to hit the mark. There is another way to describe this instantaneous position shift, and that is to "teleport" to the next note. One moment you're bowing one note and the next a different note, as your hand magically appears on the second note. This is absolutely moving without *guiding* the hand/arm.

So, imagine how extraordinary your playing would be, if you never *guide* your hand/arm again. What if you never played a note again without faith? This means you always place the bow on the strings and your left hand on the neck without hesitation, without guiding either

hand or arm. You assume that you will always play what you hear in your head by totally trusting your body and soul, and never ever being careful means you play with amazing accuracy.

There is no way to guarantee you will hit the mark, unless you move with complete trust and abandon. **You can never guarantee accuracy by trying to avoid making mistakes.** Hitting the mark can't be worked out intellectually or mastered by endless repetition. It is an act of faith. You simply move instantaneously, *knowing, feeling, and experiencing* that you can't miss. When I experienced this on the guitar, there was such a flip flop in how I played the guitar, that I could never go back to being careful on the instrument, never again play trying not to make a mistake. My mantra became, "*I have no choice, I have to trust my hands*". So, at the guitar or away from it, I'd repeat this statement affirming what I had experienced on the instrument, and I began to feel like a prodigy 24/7.

Can you handle playing the double bass without any weaknesses? Because once you experience the feeling that you can't miss, you will have to accept that everything you believed you couldn't do on the instrument wasn't true. **If you are trusting your hands to hit the mark, and you are consistently missing the mark, you are doing something wrong. There isn't something wrong with you!** I call dealing with what isn't working *troubleshooting*. **In other words, if you can't play what is playable, there is something wrong with your technique.** Example: **If you can't play a very fast passage at tempo, then probably your left hand fingers are not super-close to the strings, you aren't trusting the fingers to hit the mark, you aren't allowing the fingers to be on the way to the notes they're going to play while the preceding note is being played, and/or you may be hanging off of the neck with the left shoulder wrist and elbow immobilized.** Make the necessary correction to your technique and *trust* it will work.

If you are going to continue to play after you realize you can play anything and everything on your instrument, then you may have to make peace with an ego that is based on you *not* having what it takes to be an incredible player. I didn't, and I had to stop playing the guitar after I discovered I could do anything effortlessly on the instrument. I had to quit when I had found the "Holy Grail", because my ego was based 100% on overcoming and struggle. This meant nothing could ever be easy and feel good, if it was going to be worth anything to me. So, once the guitar became easy, I didn't stop playing because I was bored with this easy instrument. I had to stop playing, because I was spending hours practicing without fear. I couldn't handle all of these hours without fear, because I wasn't ready to feel good all of my playing time. **Choose to allow your playing to become easy, because this is the loving thing to do for yourself.**

Slow and Fast Playing, Fragments and Focal Dystonia

Slow and Fast

This is an essay on the virtues of slow practice versus *a tempo* practice. It is also about the actual physical difference between playing slow or fast, which will lead to a look at whether playing slow is a true preparation for an *a tempo* performance or a form of making one “huge mistake”. From what I have seen of both sides of this argument, it isn't about whether slow playing is good or bad, since most performers and teachers use slow playing to work out what needs to be done in a piece. The disagreement is whether slow playing should be kept to an absolute minimum. You should get to tempo as soon as possible, so you are experiencing the piece as it is meant to be played physically mentally and emotionally, in other words treating slow playing as a “necessary evil”.

What is the physical difference between playing slowly and quickly? I ask a double bassist to play a two octave scale and to do so very slowly, and to pay close attention to what the hand is doing. I ask her to really experience her fingers and their relationship to each other, as she plays the scale at a very slow tempo, ascending and descending nonstop. As she continues to play the scale, I ask her to gradually pick up the tempo, continuing to pay close attention to her hand and fingers. I ask her to get faster and faster until she is going as fast as she can. I then stop her, and ask her if she was able to feel the place where “slow” playing became “fast” playing, and what the difference is. When she says no, then we do this a few more times, seeing if she can figure out the difference between the two. So far, no double bass player has come up with the answer on his or her own.

Here is the answer. At a certain tempo, for the player to continue to get faster and faster, the finger that plays next must already be on its way down to the string. We cannot move faster than our reflexes allow us to move. If you touch a hot plate accidentally, you will pull your hand away reflexively, but you cannot get off the hot plate any faster than your reflexes will allow you. Even if you touch it consciously and attempt to get off it more quickly, you still can't make the muscles *twitch* any faster than they can. If you are playing a scale, and keeping your fingers as close to the strings as possible (touching them) and articulating each finger 100% independently, in other words you do not move the next finger until the previous finger has pressed the string, you will not be able to play at your potential tempo. You simply cannot will your fingers to move faster than your reflexes can move them.

If you continue to make each finger wait its turn, you will end up constantly struggling with fast music on your instrument, and end up believing the lie that you don't have what the great players have. If you let the next performing finger begin its descent before it is needed, you will always get there in time to play the next note, and for the first time you will experience what feels like the potential for infinite speed on your instrument. This is such an incredible feeling. Of course infinite speed isn't possible, but what you will experience for the first time is

your instrument limiting the tempo by what it is capable of, not by what you are incapable of playing.

Now that I have the double bassist playing effortlessly very fast scales, I ask her to play slow again and really feel that place where fingers must already be on their way to get there in time, and tell me how this feels. She will probably tell me it feels like a wave movement flowing through her fingers, because now she is feeling the *continuous* movement of fingers, and not each finger waiting its turn to play. Each note will sound clearly articulated, even though she hasn't made each finger wait its turn. Effortless speed requires you to trust your ears, rather than incorrect technique beliefs, so that you can perform anything fast and playable with ease.

Let's discuss slow playing versus fast playing. Both I believe are necessary, so it becomes a decision for the player how quickly to pick up tempo, and do you work on sections of a piece or short fragments. I believe playing larger sections or fragments is a personal decision. Working out fragments will get you to tempo probably quicker, but I don't believe it is a problem to take a bit longer to get to tempo or beyond by working on larger sections. I do believe one should take a piece to faster than a tempo, so that *a tempo* will feel as effortless as possible. This is like a baseball player swinging a weighted bat before coming to the plate, so that the bat feels effortless to swing.

Is playing slowly a form of making mistakes? This is what many players believe, and most players believe mistakes should be avoided at all costs. I've found that almost all classical musicians believe that a mistake made is a mistake learned. This is the central belief of classical musicians that makes for fear based playing. "Thou shalt avoid mistakes at all costs!" I do not believe a mistake made, *and recognized as such as it is being played*, is a missed note learned, unless this is believed. **What we believe, true or not, is self-fulfilling.** In other words, if you believe every mistake made is learned, you will make that same mistake over and over again to prove you are right. Humans love to be right! *So, if you accept that a missed note recognized is not a mistake learned, then slow practice is not playing a whole piece wrong.*

Slow practice is where effortless technique can be preserved, as you work out where your hands are going and how they're going to get there. I am all for getting to tempo and beyond as soon as possible, as long as this means your technique is *never* compromised. As you begin to pick up the tempo, with the awareness of the point where you switch from individual articulation to continuous movement, then you are paying loving attention to not letting your intention to get to tempo cause your technique to break down. If your technique does break down, then what are you doing wrong? You may discover your technique has flaws in it that even flowing fingers can't solve, so you need to *troubleshoot* your technique by yourself, with a music teacher, with an Alexander Technique teacher or all three. So, perform with love and an

accurate sense of what it really takes to physically play your instrument, and who knows how good you'll become.

Fragments Slow and Fast

Recently I was working with a banjo player with focal dystonia, and I discovered that if I did two things, we were able to give her back control over her right hand fingers, that were seizing up and twitching involuntarily, making it impossible for her to play. The first thing I did was find the most mechanically *advantageous posture* I could find for her whole body. The second was to choose a fragment of a piece and have her play it at her most effortless *reflexive* top speed.

I don't want to go into detail here for overall posture. I do that in each ebook I've written for all of the instruments. But in general we found a way for her to sit and stand in full upright with the instrument in its most comfortable relationship to her body, so that the instrument *came* to her, and she didn't hunker down to it.

Then we took a look at playing the same 10 note fragment. I asked her to play it a few times only with her right hand, just to make sure that she didn't have to think about the pattern at all. (We left the left hand out of this exercise, because she was having no problems with the left hand.) I then asked her to let the fragment, her fingers, find their most effortless speed and just observe it. Sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't. Then I asked her to place all of her awareness on the whole hand staying released. Wherever she felt tension in her hand and fingers, to *inhibit* tensing up, and I asked her to keep gently repeating the pattern over and over.

It worked pretty well, and there were moments of playing the fragment beautifully and without tension or twitching, but she wasn't consistent. I discovered the reason for the inconsistency. As she played the fragments over and over, she kept reducing the time between each repetition, and I realized she was looking, feeling, and sounding rushed in her playing. So, she started seizing up and twitching involuntarily again.

I said, "I want you not to play until you're ready. I want you take five minutes between each playing of the fragment, if you need that much time to feel ready and not feel rushed. It was amazing! As long as she **took enough time** between each playing of the fragment, she played easier and easier and faster and faster, and she wasn't stressed and didn't sound stressed. The moment she started to *involuntarily* reduce the time between the fragments, you could really feel the pressure building up in her to get it right. I believe she was unconsciously trying to get back to continuous fast playing.

Involuntarily is the right word here, because you could feel the internal compulsive pressure in her to get back to doing what she used to be able to do as *quickly as possible* on the banjo. It had been over a year since she could play without the focal dystonia kicking in. When she came to me, it was obvious how incredibly sad she was that she may never be able to play again. This sadness really was pushing her to heal, so she wouldn't have to feel so hopeless anymore. Her not wanting to feel so incredibly sad anymore was making it nearly impossible for her to find a gentle loving way out of trouble.

Now, for the first time, she had *real hope* that this was not a permanently debilitating condition, and that maybe her focal dystonia was about the pressure she had put herself under to fix it right away, the moment she felt her fingers begin to twitch involuntarily. At the onset of the twitching, she should have stopped and found the most effortless way to play the banjo with her whole body in balance. Then she should have begun practicing in fragments *inhibiting* tension throughout her whole body and fingers, with the self-loving time she needed to play a fragment without pushing her hand. She would have saved herself a year of so much fear and sadness, if she been ready and willing to do what she had never done - do something different and gentle with help.

Guided Whole Body Release before Practicing or Performing

To prevent injury and strain in playing, lead yourself through this guided release of your body before you practice or perform. First, find a comfortable, firm surface to lie on, which might be a yoga pad or carpeted floor. If you have to do these releases on a hard surface, you may still be able to let go of enough tension to feel comfortable. Lie down on your back with your knees up. Your feet should be placed close enough to your hips, and far enough away from each other, to allow your legs to balance themselves, with knees pointing straight up. Place a book under your head so that the forehead and a free jaw are level with each other. Rest your hands on your lower ribs or abdomen – whichever feels more comfortable to you. Let your elbows be fully away from your sides and resting on the floor, your hands *not* resting on top of each other. This is the 'constructive rest position. It is the most neutral body position for the bones and muscles; it is essentially perfect sitting, lying on your back. In the Alexander Technique, this awareness exercise is usually done with the eyes open, but I also find it helpful to do it with the eyes closed, so that you can be *in* the world but not *of* it, as you release deep tensions that you do not want to take to the instrument.

Let your neck release and your head be fully supported by the book. Let your shoulder blades fall to the floor; do not immobilize them against the back. Let your hips be fully supported by the floor. Let your feet be supported by the floor, with your ankles totally released. Let your feet be totally released; be aware that they're not supporting any significant

weight. Think of your knees releasing to the ceiling, as if strings were gently supporting each leg. Let your calves release to your heels. Let your thigh muscles flow to your knees. Let your hamstrings release to the back of your knees. Let your whole back be supported by the floor but do not try to flatten your back – just let the curves soften as it releases deeper and deeper into the floor. Let the floor support your elbows; this allows the floor to support your arms. Let your hands be soft and rest on your torso and let your wrists be unlocked. Let the chest muscles release and the shoulders fall fully open into the floor. Let the muscles around your eyes and mouth release, allowing your face to soften. Let your jaw release, your teeth not touching, your lips touching gently. Let your upper arms flow to your elbows. Let your lower arms flow into your hands.

Let your neck release and your head move away from your sit bones. Let your shoulders flow away from each other. Now let your upper arms flow toward your shoulders. Let your forearms flow through open wrists into soft hands, with the fingers leading the arms into lengthening. Let your upper legs release out of the pelvis. Let your lower legs release away from the knees. Feel how far the head is from the shoulders. Feel how far the head is from the hips. Feel how far the head is from the knees. Feel how far the head is from the feet. Feel how effortless it is to sense your body, as you let your head be far away from all of these places.

Notice the rise and fall of the chest on the breath. Do not control your breathing; let the body breathe itself. Let the exhale be a letting go, not a pushing out of the breath. Let the body decide when it needs to inhale, and when it needs to exhale. Feel the rise and fall of the chest on the inhale and exhale. Feel the rise and fall of the abdomen on the breath. Feel the expansion and release of the sides of the chest on the breath. Feel the expansion and release of the lower ribs on the breath. Feel the expansion and release of the sides of the abdomen on the breath. Feel the upper back go backward into the floor on the breath. Feel the mid-back go backward into the floor on the breath. Feel the lower back go backward into the floor on the breath. Feel the rise and fall of the shoulders on the breath. Be aware that the pelvic floor goes downward on the breath. Feel the hands and forearms rise on the inhale and lower on the exhale as the upper arms rotate gently in the shoulder sockets. Feel the whole torso expanding in all directions on the inhale, like a balloon being blown up. As you observe your breath, notice that it settles into a peaceful, rhythmic breathing pattern.

Open your eyes if they are closed, and let yourself come into the room. Feel yourself fully present in the room without interfering with the ease in your body or the ease in your breathing. When you are ready, gently roll over onto your side and slowly push yourself up with an easy arm. You can now take all of this ease into warming up on your instrument. As you warm up, stay with what is happening in your body – what you are asking it to do or not to do – and as you play your instrument, remain totally in the present. Gradually allow your energy to

rise. Experience the joy of coming to your instrument without habits, tensions or fears that would turn doing what you love into a chore.

When I have led a guided release like this with a group of musicians, I always ask them what they discovered about themselves. I get answers like: I didn't know how tired I was. I didn't know how much tension I had in my arms/legs/torso. I've never felt so rested in my life. All of these responses go to show how disconnected musicians can be from their bodies, very much like athletes who usually use their bodies to get the job done, and who are not in the least concerned with how hard or easy they are on their bodies. I find it extraordinary how much excess tension, work and struggle a musician will bring to a performance just to get a subtle rendering of the music. Think about this: Isn't it insane to imagine that refined playing would require you to strain yourself?

I would like instead to connect refined and subtle playing to doing *less* work on the instrument. This is only possible if you can realize how much tension you are using to stay in control of your body. In the process of modifying an inefficient technique, you will generally become aware of how tense you are when you practice or perform, but to play with true ease and comfort, you will ultimately have to become aware of levels of tension that you live with all the time.

Athletes usually do too much to get the job done, but they generally look athletic and coordinated because they use their whole bodies in constant movement. In other words, they'll look good until they wear out a joint. Many musicians' bodies may look tight and uncoordinated with or without their instruments, but we may not notice this if they are great players. The hands and arms of a performer can be wonderfully coordinated to create a beautiful performance, despite the rest of the body being rigid and moving awkwardly. This blinds the performer to how much static tension she is holding in her body, so that she does not do anything about her technique until it has hurt her. As an Alexander Technique teacher, when I put hands on a musician who is playing very eloquently, I am often amazed to find a very immobile body!

Much of a performer's excess tension shows up in the face, and it is usually interpreted by the audience as 'feeling the music', even though more often than not it is simply an expression of the strain the body is going through. Once aware of the tension being held, it can be released from the performance at the deepest levels. Then the performer can play with flowing muscles in the whole shoulder and neck, even playing for hours. Then the performer can sit or stand elegantly upright with unlocked arms and legs, and the audience can witness a truly athletic performance – one that involves the whole body's effortless participation. Then the musician can finally be comfortable in his or her body, whether playing his or her instrument or not.

When You're Not Doing Something, Don't Continue to Do It

We have a saying in the Alexander Technique, "When you're through doing something, put it down. What does this mean? It means you allow your body to return to the level of ease appropriate to the moment after an intense activity. So, when you're through running, don't continue to run. When you're through playing a musical instrument, don't continue to play the instrument. There are three major things we do that contribute to the wear and tear to the body. First, all humans hold some fear in their bodies always. Second we do things with poor technique, which is by definition doing things off balance posturally, which is poor posture to begin with. Third we *try* rather than *do*.

Let's start with fear. Unless you're a totally enlightened being, your past and your future are running you, so you are not in the moment 24/7. This means your thoughts are racing backward or forward, which is essentially the same thing. When you look back to predict the future, you are potentially flooding your body with fear, and the body absolutely follows the mind 100%. But if you know what fearless posture and body use feels alike and looks like, then you can *order* the body to behave fearlessly, and you don't have to do posturally what doesn't work. This is what the Alexander Technique teaches.

Second, after a lifetime of doing everyday and specialized activities without any sense of the easiest way to move through this world, then whenever you do something you will do what you've always done. Also, the beliefs that you have internalized about what good posture and good use are that are not true will override the truth as long as you live by these misconceptions. As I stated from *A Course in Miracles*, if you believe in two belief systems, the one that isn't true will run you. So, if you still believed good posture is defined by standing up straight, then this lie will continue to create tension and injury in your body.

Third, many of us *try* rather than *do*. This means that our posture and our habitual way of doing things is based on *striving off balance*. So, in an activity, you try to do your best by doing too much work to do a good job, rather than find a way to create a great performance without straining yourself. One of the most basic of human values is that if you aren't trying as hard as you can, you aren't doing your best. This is the basis training for a sport or practicing a musical instrument without finding the smartest and easiest way to win, as you put in the long hours, so that you get the biggest bang for your buck. The most obvious example to me would be running for hours and hours with such bad and tense form, that you never win, when you could have won.

So, you have just gone out and run five miles, and you have done so with really good postural use, and at the same time pushed yourself to run the distance faster than you've ever done it (*doing* rather than *trying*), then what does it mean to stop running when you've

stopped running? It means that you slowly wind down the intensity of the run by walking it off with really good use. Let all of the internal changes and external changes calm down, and that you *direct* up in your body as all of the musculature calms down. You walk it off walk with a sense of high energy, rather than just simply collapsing posturally after the run. Also, after you've walked it off, what if you go sit on the edge a really ergonomically good chair. Sit with full upright on your sit bones, letting your legs release out of your hip joints, as your legs aren't supporting your weight anymore, as your head leads your spine fully upright and your breathing returns to the breathing of a person sitting quietly. You may also choose to do release moves (stretches), after you sit for a few minutes, as you calmly return your musculature and your mind to just quietly being in expansion. You can also lie down and do the Alexander Technique guided release described in this ebook after the run, even though you might have done this before the run.

You've just gotten through practicing a very difficult piece of music on your instrument, and you're through practicing, what do you do? Like the runner, you can go for a walk, but for you, you are *turning up the volume* in a body that had been sitting or standing fairly static for hours. Walk with *direction* and balance in this activity that requires considerably less concentration and intensity, than playing and instrument or singing does. You can also lie down and do the Alexander Technique guided release after you practice or perform.

What do you do when you just get through playing tennis or doing some other activity whose movements aren't predictable? You walk it off, and then you sit for a few minutes and you may also do release movements (stretches) in a very gentle expansive way. It is the constant starting and stopping and anticipating of your opponent's moves that you want to release out of your body. Again, as you wind down, you do not unwind into collapse, you want to unwind into a *directing* with total ease in the body, with a sense of balance and expansion in the body that is appropriate to taking it easy after an intense match. You can also lie down and do the Alexander Technique guided release.

I believe a lot of musicians and athletes are taught that they need to be thinking about what they're attempting to excel at all of the time. This is the worst possible thing you can do, because if you are always thinking about running, playing your instrument, or whatever 24/7, then you are running when you aren't running, you're singing when you aren't singing. I'm not talking about rehearsing an activity in your head, I'm talking about stressing your body all day. The body follows the mind 100%, and when your mind is training or practicing nonstop, so is your body, and you are wearing your body out. You are taking what you love, and potentially setting yourself up quitting eventually, because you never get to rest.

When you lose your passion for what you do because of endless concern, then the resistance to doing what you loved to do begins to build. If you combine resistance to doing

what you're about to actually do, and if you've been doing what you're about to do 24/7 in your mind, then you are never physically or emotionally at peace in the down time. If you run, play an instrument, play tennis, or do whatever with a stressed out body, compressed joints, and a posture that you have forced to meet what the activity requires, and you will get injured and/or quit eventually.

Unless a human is fully enlightened, he or she will nearly always bring his or her past to the present activity, unless he or she is able to be *in the zone*. But just because you can be *in the zone* as you do what you do, don't forget to put the double bass down when you aren't playing it. So, when you aren't running, playing your instrument, or playing tennis *in the zone*, what do you do with your past? When you chase off a squirrel, in a couple of minutes he comes back as calm and balanced in his body as he was before you yelled at him. This is the opposite in the human. We remember everything, and it is how we process those memories that may keep us playing tennis when we're not playing tennis, or afraid for our safety, when our surroundings are peaceful.

I propose you make a conscious choice as to how you do the activity you are practicing, training at, or competing in. When you apply Alexander Technique principles of good posture, good use, and great technique to an activity, you are not bringing your past to the activity, except to save the technique that works. **This is such an Alexandrian way to do things, because Alexander Technique teachers define and help you save what works, learn or reacquire certain basic principles of good body use, eliminate what doesn't work, creatively personalize your own technique, and then integrate it all into a way of moving that doesn't damage your body.**

This is moving in the fearless now with very specific physical principles of good body use. Tie this to putting down the tennis racket when you aren't playing, and you let your body do what is appropriate in the moment. The squirrel does what is appropriate in the moment most of the time, because he isn't digging up your plants in a steady state of fear, even after you've chased him off. As I stated earlier in this section, humans are almost always experiencing some fear, conscious or unconscious, because they not only remember how to do the activity they're doing, but they also bring their fears and beliefs around success to the instrument or the race. The Alexander Technique teaches them how they can consciously choose to use their bodies with *good use* and choose to perform or run fearlessly.

So, you run the race, play tennis, make music, swim the race, and you only do so with a body that you've emptied out all of the misconceptions of how it should be done. You get to move consciously connected to your body. When you're through, it is time to do the same, so that after doing something very intense, you return to balance, poise, and ease. You get to revel in how good it feels to go from an intense activity that you didn't sacrifice your body in, to at

rest in a body that is effortlessly balanced and expansive. This means your body isn't tensed or collapsed or compressed or already ready for the next performance, race, training, or competition.

The Reasons Why Performers Resist Releasing Poor Physical Habits

When a musician does what he or she has always done, and it hasn't gotten them to where they want to be, why is it so hard for some performers to just simply change course and find the most effortless way to play or sing? There are a whole kaleidoscope of reasons for this, and I want to look at, understand, and disempower each one. There will definitely be places of overlap between the psychological reasons for resisting change.

The reason poor posture, poor body use, and poor technique is the hardest thing in the world to do, is because by definition, continuing to play or sing with poor technique makes no logical sense if you're aware you're doing this. If you can't do what you want to do and don't do anything to change the circumstances, you are being disloyal to yourself, but you may not have a choice. I want you to recognize that this choice not to do things the easiest way is not on purpose, but it is based on compulsions that are for the moment beyond your control.

I want to make a blanket statement that covers all of the reasons for not making loving changes to your technique. **If you know the reason or reasons for why you're not making a change to the parts of your technique that aren't working, then you are not accepting the solution or solutions to the reason or reasons.** In *A Course in Miracles*, it says that when you know the truth, and it hasn't made a difference, the truth hasn't failed you. You're resisting accepting the truth, and it is this *resistance to accepting the truth* that can seem to take forever, which means you may never choose the easiest way to play or sing.

Here's the list of reasons you may not choose to make your musical technique effortless: 1) You Fight Change, 2) You Get Worse at What You Change, 3) It Is Too Hard to Change, 4) The Way You Play or Sing Is You, 5) You Are Addicted to Struggle, 6) You Have a "Not Good Enough" Button, 7) If You Become Too Good, You'll Lose Control of Your Life, 8) You Are Holding onto Technique that Doesn't Work 9) You Are Being Loyal to Those Who Set Your Limits, 10) If You Tell Yourself You're Limited, then You Get to be Easy on Yourself, 11) You Want to Get Your Parents Back, 12) Discovering Your Instrument Is Easy Can be a Huge Threat to What You Believe, 13) You'd Rather be Right than Happy, 14) You Never Want to Go Through What You Went Through Ever Again, 15) You Shouldn't Have to Still be Dealing with Technique Here and Now, 16) It Should be Easy, It Isn't, and You're Angry, 17) It Isn't What You Wanted to Do, 18) You Aren't Taking Responsibility for How Well You Play or Sing, 19) Being Complete is Too Scary, 20) Are You Willing to Not be the Hero in Your Dream, 21) If You Become Too Good, You Won't Know Who You Are, 22) If Your Performing Changes Too Much, You Won't know

How to Deal with It, 23) You Don't Want to Admit that What You've Been Teaching Isn't True, 24) You Tell Yourself It's Too Late and You're Too Old, 25) You Minimize the Truth, 26) The Music Teacher that Had the Most Power Over You Lied to You, 27) Too Many People Need You to Succeed, 28) You're Afraid to Commit, 29) You Are Not Experiencing Love When You Play or Sing Most of the Time, and 30) You're Stuck Getting Ready.

1) You Fight Change

This is the simple pure resistance of throwing a tantrum. You have simply gotten to a place in your life where you don't want to do anything other than what you're doing, so you don't care if you're hurting. You just don't want to deal with technique ever again. You've decided that you'll simply muddle through and do the minimum it takes to get the job done.

This is a tough place to be, because it is a giving up and still playing or singing not willing to do something different. This is ennui. You lack the will to do anything other than what you're doing. You want to be left alone. The question is, is it easier not to make a loving change to how you perform, or is it easier to be motivated to change what you're doing? As you go through this list, you will see so many of the reasons that make not changing easier than changing.

2) You Get Worse at What You Change

Simply, when you change the way you play your instrument or sing, you will lose control. You will sing or play worse when you change the way you've always done things. It is your ability to lovingly, for possibly the first time, go back in time on your instrument and start over and clean up your technique.

It seems to me the hardest part when it comes to revamping your posture and technique, is that a performer may not be willing to take a few weeks or few months of not having to perform, so that he or she can have one heck of a good time playing badly. It is an amazing gift to yourself to enjoy being a beginner and learn to play or sing lovingly for maybe the first time.

3) It Is Too Hard to Change

This in my opinion is the ultimate ego tactic to keep you from making any changes at this point in your life to how you perform. Inherent in this thought and feeling is that you can't make a change in how you play or sing without struggling through the whole process, and that it is not worth it. By the traditional definition of change, then you have to do something different to make a change. In a musician's technique, So, you feel it is too hard to make positional changes and technique changes that are probably very different from what you've been doing.

Certainly there are some of these larger visible changes necessary in revamping your posture and your technique, but what if you skip this part and sneak up on yourself. What I mean, is that you approach making loving changes to your technique by changing what isn't working and is invisible first. So, you release the tension in your neck, and you learn to do what you have always done with a free neck. You pay attention to the level of tension in your fingers and hands and do what you've always done with soft hands. You play or sing with dramatically less tension in your legs without changing anything externally. You play or sing with free shoulder blades with no concern for visible posture.

Does it sound too hard to make changes to the tension level first throughout your body? If it doesn't, then before you know it, you're not hurting and you're gaining true control over your body, and it just isn't that hard.

4) The Way You Play or Sing is You

One of my favorite Alexander Technique stories is about a client who goes to an Alexander Technique teacher. The client is very very tense, so the teacher places her on the table for table release work. At the end of the session, the client much less tense says, "I can't feel my body". She pays for the session and never comes back.

If you knew that you would not experience your body the way you've been experiencing your body after you made changes to the way you sang or played, could you handle it? It is truly worth trying out to see if you can. When you find ways to perform that are approaching effortless posture, body use, and technique, then you are taking the lid off of who you really are. I just don't believe anyone naturally is a grinder at what they love to do. When you push yourself to try harder and harder and eventually get yourself in trouble, is it your nature to do things the hard way? When you take a good look at this statement, you realize how crazy it is. It is a statement of how you treat yourself, not of who you are. **I believe it is inherent in all of us to do things the easy way, when the easy way is demonstrated and offered.**

5) You Are Addicted to the Struggle

This means that you believe that if you do not do what you've always done, you're afraid the wheels will fall off of the wagon. This is the psychological side of "you are what you experience and how you do what you do". So, it is similar to preceding section *The Way You Play or Sing is You*. You feel pride in fighting the good fight and getting it done the hard way.

I'd like you now at this point in your life to know you have choices you never knew you had. In acknowledging that you always had choices in how you approached your instrument, then you have to acknowledge all of those choices are still available, that it is not too late. All of these reasons for not choosing to find the most loving and effortless way to play or sing were

put in place unconsciously. I can't believe that anyone says to themselves as a child, "You know what I think would be a cool way to live my life is to do things the hard way". As children most of us model and copy what those around us do, and we usually model and copy the parent or whomever we identify with and/or want to please. So, you may become a struggler, because you're doing it the way a parent did things. You may also become a struggler to please your parent, because the parent you identify with admires strugglers and wishes he or she was more committed to completing things.

To be addicted to struggle means there is a need inside to do things the hard way, and when you get them done the hard way, you feel better. By definition, an addiction is a mixed bag of pain and pleasure. When playing or singing hurts and is a struggle, this is pain, but when you get good at what you do through the struggle, the getting good at and the positive attention is the pleasure part. I believe it is possible for the process to be pleasurable for everybody. It's just that a whole lot of people can't handle consistent pleasure as a way to learn and perform.

6) *You Have a "Not Good Enough" Button*

When you have a "not good enough" button, then you have to live by its values. What does this mean? It means that if 100 people tell you you played or sang a concert wonderfully, your "not good enough" button overrides all of them, and you believe the button. What is your greatest fear if you let go of having this button? It would be as if you went back in time, deleted the button, and your fear is you wouldn't be as good as you are now. So, if you perform with a "not good enough" button, you simultaneously never play or sing good enough for yourself, AND you perform good enough for someone, since you're performing for others.

This really does sound crazy, but as I write on these twenty-five plus reasons for resisting doing things the easiest way, hopefully they will all sound crazy to you. Because if they do, then the hold they have on you is diminished and hopefully they are all up for elimination.

If you were to choose to let go of your "not good enough" button at this point at time, would your standard of playing drop? I don't believe so, and neither do you believe this. Why should it? So, if you do decide to leave this button behind, what if you made changes to the way you played or sang that made you good enough. I'm suggesting you have the ability to walk away from a "not good enough" button and to replace it with an "I'm good enough" affirmation. This is an affirmation that returns you to a sense of self-love and gentleness.

7) *If you Become Too Good, You'll Lose Control Over Your Life*

If you've spent years as an average player or singer, then you are used to what others expect of you. In fact you "tell" others what to expect from you 24/7 as musician. What is your

greatest fear if you were to transform instantly into an amazing performer, when you've been a mediocre performer all of your life? I asked myself at one point if most people would accept being the same as Jesus, if God came to them and offered this to everyone. I decided there wouldn't be many takers, because of the responsibility that would come with being a Son of God.

I think unconsciously players and singers who have been striving for greatness all of their lives and haven't really come close, haven't really wanted to be extraordinary performers, especially if they have created a comfortable niche in the musical world. So, is it true that if you took the steps to realize your original goal of being an extraordinary performer, that you would lose control of your life?

This is one of those very sneaky hidden beliefs about becoming too good on your instrument. It means that unconsciously you believe that if you were to become too good a player or singer and too successful, you would be overwhelmed by the responsibilities that come with being a wonderful performer.

Why would you be overwhelmed, and what would those onerous responsibilities be? If you are feeling you would be overwhelmed by responsibility, then you are saying that you have control of your life now, even though you can't play or sing the way you want. Kind of sounds crazy doesn't it. If you can get to the place that you can sing or play the way you want to, then there is **no** inherent responsibility that comes with this. The only responsibility that comes with being a wonderful performer is why you play or sing for others. By definition to turn a performance of your playing or singing into a responsibility is not loving. Only play or sing as your choice to give it as a gift, so only give it when you want to as a gift to yourself and others. Performing or teaching as a responsibility makes making music only about being an obligation and not about your being loving to yourself.

8) You Are Holding onto Technique that Doesn't Work

This is about not being open to the possibility that a very important teacher to you taught you things that aren't working anymore on your instrument. I've had performers I was working with as an Alexander Technique teacher, and I asked them to try a different way of doing something on their instrument. If the client felt what I was asking was too much of a challenge or contradiction to how she was taught to play or sing, then she may ignore what I'm suggesting and/or not come back.

When I see this look in a client's face, I quickly say she should try what I'm suggesting, but that she always makes the choice, as to whether to use what I have to offer or not. If what I'm asking her to do really produces a much better result, and she isn't willing to make a

change, then this is a place where I may ask her to consider creating her own personal technique and not holding onto everything she was taught by that teacher.

It really is a wonderful gift to give yourself as a performer to reexamine your total technique and posture, and be willing to make changes, without exception, that make your instrument easier and easier.

9) *You Are Being Loyal to Those Who Set Your Limits*

When you “decided” to believe someone who told you what the limits were on your potential as a performer, you defined yourself through them and you betrayed yourself. I don't believe there are any limits on a person's ability to be a wonderful constantly evolving performer. Once you “decide” what your potential is as a performer, then you have to live by these other-imposed and self-imposed limitations, as long as you believe they're true. The limits on your potential as a performer were probably “decided” by you when you were a child. The reason I'm putting decide in parenthesis, is because I'm not using decide in the traditional sense. Decide in the traditional sense means you have a choice. But when a child “decides” whether he's going to be an average player or singer or an exceptional player or singer, he usually is presented with only one choice coming from the signals being sent by the typically unconscious adults around him.

So, here you are having lived a life as an average performer, is it too late? It is if you want to remain loyal to those around you who unconsciously shaped your life, or you can stop being loyal to them and be loyal to yourself. I believe that the at the core of every one of us is unlimited potential in everything, but that by the time we have finished *self-authoring* ourselves, as *A Course in Miracles* says we all do, then that potential is really buried under beliefs that define, limit, and shape who we believe we are. **Our unlimited potential is always available and can never be destroyed.**

10) *If You Tell Yourself You're Limited, then You Get to be Easy on Yourself*

This is having the choice made for you, rather than you making the choice for your goals on your instrument. This is a decision made where you may not feel you have the freedom to choose how much work you want to put into your instrument. If you can't find a way to decide for yourself how much work you want to put into your instrument, then this is a possible way out. By believing you have limited talent on your instrument then you can say no matter how much I practice, I can only get so good, so why bother.

It is possible to set a limit on your practice and to practice so smart and lovingly, that you get better and better and revamp your technique while still being easy on yourself. If a performer is willing to let everything about how they play or sing be up for grabs, then he or

she gets evolve a personal technique that never fails them permanently. This means whenever something about your technique isn't serving you, then you get to make changes without being traumatized. You do not have to do what you've always done to be the best you can be on your instrument. When you recognize a change you are about to make to a part of your 30 year old technique is a huge improvement, then the change disappears the old way very fast, and you will not feel insecure about the new way.

11) You Want to Get Your Parents Back

When your parent(s) has been very involved in your music and there are unresolved psychological issues between you and them, then sabotaging your playing or your singing is how this can be acted out. This means say this clearer. If you were/are incredibly angry at your parent(s) and you are/were very afraid of your parent(s), then the way to get back "music parents" is to unconsciously create problems in what you love doing. This is the equivalent of throwing an adult tantrum. When a child throws a tantrum by kicking or screaming or holding her breath, then she is turning her anger against her parents on herself.

Whether it is dangerous or not for a child to direct her anger against her parents for whatever reason, the child usually believes it is dangerous, and the child will act out on herself. If the parents have gratuitously lived through a child's musical talent, and the child hasn't forgiven the parent(s) for whatever, then at some point the performer will get into physical trouble on her instrument and will resist making changes to a technique that are limiting or hurting her, especially if the changes mean the performer will get recognition for her talent. In other words, the angry inner child of the performer simply cannot let the parents take pride in the talented child they produced, so the performer fails or gets injured.

The only way out is for the adult performer to heal is to accept what happened, forgive her parents, forgive her own anger toward her parents, return to wanting to make her parents happy, come into the present, and give herself the gift of an effortless technique out of self-love.

12) Discovering Your Instrument Is Easy Can be a Huge Threat to What You Believe

What do you do when you have worked for years to get good on your instrument but are still struggling, and you're presented with an end to your struggle on your instrument? If you've always had to struggle with the difficult literature, and then you see the potential that after revamping your technique and posture with the principles of the Alexander Technique, that your instrument can be easy and all of the great literature accessible (if not easy), can you handle this? When this happens you may have to work through a lot of anger and grief. The anger is about having spent endless hours doing it the hard way and not the easiest smart way.

The grief is about mourning all of the time lost struggling to become good, when you could have been making music the way you wanted to make it a long time ago.

So many musicians get caught up in an endless pursuit of being good enough to do what they want on their instrument. This means that the *journey* to be good enough to do what you want to do on your instrument becomes what you do on your instrument, instead of you just playing the music you love as lovingly as you want.

There is a very simple question that you need to answer for yourself, if you are shown how to complete your journey to playing your instrument with ease *in the zone*. *Are you ready to be complete on your instrument?* If you are, then completion is a given.

13) You'd Rather Be Right than Happy

As I write this section of this ebook, I am enumerating all of reasons that people have for not healing their bodies and their instrumental techniques. All of these reasons are valid and not valid. Any reason for why you can't or won't make a change to your posture or technique is experienced as a permanent limit on you. But none of these reasons will hold up as a real limit on your playing or singing, once you expose them to the light of logic, love, truth, and grace. So, **none** of them are valid.

As long as you believe that for whatever reason you can't do what you want to do on your instrument, given you have all of your fingers and your toes and they all work reasonably well, then you are choosing to be *right* rather than *happy*. "I'd rather be right than happy", is usually an unconscious belief that you are permanently damaged goods, because of what you did and/or was done to you, so you're off the hook with self-righteousness, and you lose. Let me say this again, "If you'd rather be right than happy, you lose".

No matter how right you want to be about the limits on your ability to be a wonderful performer now, you are wrong in most of the cases. All psychological limits on your ability on your instrument are temporary, and so are most physical limits. If you choose to be happy rather than right about your musical abilities, then you have chosen to be powerful and tell yourself the truth, rather than be right.

14) You Never Want to Go Through What You Went Through Ever Again

If you were incredibly hard on yourself (a perfectionist) to turn yourself into a fine player or singer, then you probably are incapable of doing what you did a second time. When a performer is offered a chance to change his technique to finish his journey to become a wonderful player, he may run away. He may run away, because he can't conceive of returning playing or singing differently without beating himself up to make the changes. This is what I had

to work through, after I went to an Alexander Technique teacher. The Alexander Technique teacher didn't do psychological work with me, since that is not part of the Alexander Technique teacher's formal training. I sought out a psychologist eventually.

When you work with an Alexander Technique teacher you are being shown how to perform with the least amount of physical work, the most amount of balance, and the greatest trust in your body, as you revamp your technique and posture on your instrument. The greatest danger in this situation is that a perfectionist's mind will appropriate the process and beat you up for not using the Alexander Technique principles well enough. If this happens, then you are in real double bind, because you are simultaneously attempting to learn lovingly, as your ego is saying you aren't learning lovingly enough to get the job done.

This is when it is time for you to stand up to a horrible way of treating yourself and choose to learn lovingly. As I explore these potential reasons for not letting your instrument become potentially easy, I'm not suggesting you just "snap out of it". I'm not being reductive here. What I am doing is bringing to light most of the reasons for not letting yourself win lovingly on your instrument, so that there may be some aha experiences for you, and you can let yourself make transformational changes quickly. This is what I call *grace*. But there is also the possibility that when you accept that you're not permanently damaged goods, you should also recognize when you need help healing, and you should find someone to help you heal.

15) You Shouldn't Have to Still be Dealing with Technique Here and Now

I have worked with a whole lot of musicians as an Alexander Technique teacher, and there is one very consistent thing I have seen when a performer in trouble comes to me and is twenty-years-old or older. Almost all of them didn't think they'd have to ever make changes to their technique again, even if their technique never really served them a 100%. They had unconsciously resigned themselves to being as good as they were or progressing as well as they were progressing, and they never wanted to hear about technique again.

I had a psychotherapist one time, who, when I said to her with great chagrin that I didn't think I'd still be dealing with the same problem still at 50-years-old said, "You aren't through until you're through".

When you are shown by an Alexander Technique teacher how to perform with ease, it is not an accident that you found your way to someone who can help you *finish* your journey on your instrument. So, is it better that you never find the Holy Grail or is it better that you wander around not knowing you're looking for the Holy Grail?

16) It Should be Easy, It Isn't, and You're Angry

Some performers realize they have great potential, and that they are being realistic, even though everyone else says they don't have what it takes. If you're in this place, you have leaped ahead of your ego and your ego's capacity to accept that everything is possible. This can also be triggered when a performer experiences playing *in the zone* and realizes how effortless the instrument can be. I had the equivalent spiritual experience a few times drinking alcohol. I realized how joyous and effortless my life could be, when I shut down my super-ego with the whiskey. So, I was using alcohol to be in the spiritual zone. Luckily I couldn't tolerate drinking regularly, so I had to actually pursue my healing without medicating myself.

A better way to state the title of this section is ***It Should Have Been Easy***. This means you intuitively know it should have been easy, but it wasn't. Are you going to let it be easy now or are you going to stay stuck in "it should have been easy"? Because if you stay stuck in "it should have been easy", you will be stuck in anger and you will not heal. You will remain a victim for the rest of your life for no real reason.

17) It Isn't What You Wanted to Do

When a performer realizes that he pursued a music career because it was what his parent(s) wanted, what does he do? First, he needs to ask himself if he wanted it also. If he did, and he sabotaging his career to get them back, then I've looked at that issue in 10). What do you do if you realize this wasn't your dream at all? **You have to decide if you are going to keep hurting yourself for what is irretrievable but is always healable.** You did what you didn't want to do for your parents, and this is a double whammy. It not only means you don't want to please them by healing your body and performing better than ever, you don't want to forgive yourself for not standing up for yourself and doing what you wanted to do?

The hardest part may be forgiving yourself for not standing up to your parents and doing what you wanted to do. *This is going to require you to forgive the child you were, be the parent to the child you were, and now show compassion for the child you were and who you are now.* I don't know if you will continue to make music. If you are truly to heal, then to forgive *everyone* involved in you becoming an unwilling performer, so that you can treat yourself with compassion, is the loving way out to not live in regret and anger. It isn't what you did with a huge chunk of your life and why you did it, it is who you are now. So, what if you end up a healed performer and/or a healed person simultaneously? Then does it really matter what you did professionally all of those years, if you are at peace on the inside now?

18) You Aren't Taking Responsibility for How Well You Play or Sing

This is my way of saying you aren't here and now willing to do what it lovingly takes to be as good as you want to be and can be. "Not taking responsibility" to me means you aren't

willing to accept that here and now you have control of where you want to go with your music and how good you want to be. Control is a very interesting word. Nowadays it has almost all negative connotations. We call someone a “control freak”, when they want to control everyone and everything in every situation. Is a musician being a “control freak” when she attempts to be in control of her instrument? She is if she doesn’t believe she can be in effortless control of her instrument.

If being in extraordinary control of your instrument isn’t a possibility, then how do explain the performers in the world who perform so effortlessly? In most of these cases of performers who play flawlessly and fearlessly, I’m willing to bet they grew up in surroundings that rewarded consistent practice tied to having faith in themselves. If you are going to have loving control over your instrument, which means you take total loving responsibility for what comes out of it, then you will need to have faith in your ability to play or sing wonderfully, and you will need to attract those to you who can help you make this possible. Implicit in what I just said, is I’m giving children the power to have as much control over their lives as adults theoretically should have.

I’m willing to bet that if you were to interview adults who are in loving control of their lives, you will find that they also felt they were in loving control of their lives as children. It is NEVER ever too late to be an adult in loving control of your instrument, even if you weren’t in control of your instrument as a child.

19) Being Complete Is Too Scary

If I said to you that I could make you instantly the best double bass player in the world, even though you’ve been a struggler on the bass all of your life, would you accept the gift, and could you handle the gift? If you’ve been a struggler on the bass all of your life, you may be able to accept the gift of being the best double bass player in the world, but I doubt if you could handle it. If you could offer everybody in the world what they wanted and nobody ever had to work a day in their lives, what do think the result would be? I’m guessing chaos, greater drug addiction, and a whole lot of suicides in a short period of time.

So, why should you be different, if I offered you extraordinary and effortless bass skills with the wave of a wand? Because you can handle it, and you were designed to handle the effortless joy of effortless practice and performing. I believe we were all designed for Heaven, but that many of us reside in a communal hell. This means we have made ourselves temporarily incapable of allowing ourselves to follow our bliss 24/7 and be comfortable in bliss 24/7.

If I ask you to take a slice of your life, your music making, and allow it to be a place where you are always in Heaven emotionally, how did you react to this request? The human

condition makes inconsistency effortless, but if you were to take a moment when you're feeling particularly good and ask yourself why it can't be this way all of the time, I believe you can't come up with a logical answer. The answer is we frighten ourselves out of our happiness and that is considered the way it is, but is it?

It is possible to perform nearly every day and nearly every moment with a flawless technique tied to faith in your ability to hit the mark with your desired interpretation, and to be at peace with how easy it is to play or sing 24/7, if you're willing to stop following the crowd.

20) Are You Willing to Not be the Hero in Your Dream

Are you willing to let go of being the hero in your dream? There is a section in chapter 27 of *A Course in Miracles* called "The 'Hero' of the Dream". This section says that all of us are the heroes in our lives. This means whether we're famous concert artists or homeless, we somehow find a way to feel like heroes in our lives. The concert artist may be the hero in his dream, because everyone told him he didn't have what it takes, but he showed them. The homeless person may be the hero in his dream, because he is suffering heroically in silence in a world that has tried to break him. If you look closely at this statement that everyone is the hero in his or her life, you will find it is 100% true in everybody's life.

What would it mean to not be the hero in your dream? It wouldn't mean that you become the one person in the world who doesn't feel like a hero in your life, it means you get to be one of the people who realizes that being a hero is a very very poor substitute for effortlessly expressing your unlimited potential. I believe as *A Course in Miracles* says, that we are all part of God forever. If you accept this, then would God have designed us as inherently flawed and lacking? What if each of us is unlimited in our abilities and each one of us is eternal, then setting up situations in our lives that we have to constantly overcome does make us a hero in the traditional sense. If all of the limits and dangers we live believing in aren't real, then being a hero is meaningless concept. You can't be a hero if you're not really in danger and are not incomplete in some way. Maybe it's time for you to get on with making music with an inherently effortless loving technique and get out of the way of your inherent ability to interpret or compose music with effortless depth.

21) If You Become Too Good, You Won't Know Who You Are

The ego, who we believe we are, is not primarily concerned with what is in our best interest. Its primary concern is that we continue on as who we are. So, if you've been an average performer all of your life and music is the most important thing in your life, then your ego is not going to go along easily with you going from being mediocre to amazing. If you find your way to

an Alexander Technique teacher who can give you the tools to be an amazing technician on your instrument, you may not come back for a second session.

Earlier in this section of this ebook I talked about the woman who went to an Alexander Technique teacher and couldn't handle being at ease in her body, because she was her tension. Are you a mediocre player or singer, or do you perform at a mediocre level? This is a very important distinction to make, if you are going to be willing and able to take the lid off of your talent. If you've been a mediocre musician all of your life, then you are potentially by identification a mediocre musician/person unconsciously in your beliefs about yourself.

I'd like you to look at this, step back and see yourself as an extraordinary being, who didn't realize that you were unconsciously accepting a limit on your talent, and that that limit became who you were. This is not a loving thing to do. This is not who you are. It is time you tell your instrument who you are, rather than letting the instrument tell you who you are.

22) If Your Performing Changes Too Much, You Won't Know How to Deal with It

This is the basis of a personality that always assumes change is not good. It is a fear that if you become a wonderful player or singer, you'll quit. It doesn't matter why you'll quit, but if you've performed all of these years at a mediocre level, then there is something about that level of playing or singing that you should preserve. So, if you change what you do, then you may quit. Actually you may quit anyway, if you continue to choose to play or sing poorly. It is more likely that after years of unnecessary struggle, that you may choose to quit.

This is actually a result, not a cause. The better question is, will you have to look at why you held yourself back, if you stop holding yourself back as a performer. I didn't do this, and within a few months of me taking the lid off of my talent, I quit playing the guitar. Whatever is most important to you contributes to your consciousness level. So, if your ego isn't open to change, then this is what your performing will reflect, because of the alliance between your ego and your instrument.

If you leap over the ego with the Alexander Technique and transform your physical playing of your instrument into one of ease, you will probably have to make peace with an ego that doesn't want your instrument to wake you up.

23) You Don't Want to Admit that What You've Been Teaching Isn't True

If a performer who also teaches comes to me in physical trouble, and I begin to show her how many misconceptions she had about how your instrument works and what the easiest way to get the job done with high energy on the instrument is, she may not continue. She may

not continue, because she is being confronted with having to change the way she teaches the instrument, if she accepts what I'm teaching her as valid.

If she is able to change how she plays or sings to a way that is easier and easier, then there is no reason to assume she can't offer these same new ways of performing to her students, and that they won't embrace these changes. I've always noticed that there is usually a direct correlation between a teacher's level of consciousness and openness and her students' level of awareness. I believe that *like attracts like*, so if the teacher is ready to make loving changes, probably so are her students.

24) You Tell Yourself It's Too Late and You're Too Old

This is one of the ego's best weapons for stopping change. If you make a change to your playing that transforms it, and you're 90-years-old, aren't you worth it? If you embrace these changes, you have a choice with how to deal with it. You can turn it into a negative by saying I wished I had had done this 40 years ago and go into anger or depression, or you can say that every time you do something loving for yourself, there is no down side to making these technique and postural changes that feel so incredibly good. If it is all about the *means*, how you do what you do as an act of self-love, then it doesn't matter how old you are when transform your technique. If it is about the *ends*, what comes out of the instrument and not how it affects you, then you may still be sacrificing yourself on the instrument at 90-years-old. **It is never too late to make yourself infinitely more important than how you sing or play.**

Let's back up the age a bit. Let's say at 50-years-old you are considering making some pretty big changes to your playing or singing, and you are in the middle of your career performing very well but getting into physical trouble. Should you make the changes that will make your performing considerably easier, because it will take too long to integrate the changes into your performing? First, let me return to the idea that if you lower the tension levels in your body, you may still heal and prevent more injury. So, if you feel this is the best course, then take this middle road as I described in 3).

Here is the argument for doing the whole thing. If you make one postural or technique change at a time and fully integrate these changes one at a time very slowly, then you should be able to perform and have your technique and posture serve you and not cause problems.

Also, if you want to get out of the way of making changes quickly to how you perform, then realize that you cannot make a poor habit any deeper over time. **In other words, 30 years of doing something the same way is not going to make it any harder to change than 5 years of doing it, unless you believe the longer you do something the deeper it is ingrained.** I believe this is a pretty universal belief that the longer you do something the harder it is to change, and

that you'll never be as good as you would have been, if you hadn't done the first inefficient way for years. When I discovered I could play with amazing accuracy if I trusted my hands on the guitar, I instantly was demonstrating this faith. Of course the more I played this way, the more effortless and accurate my playing became, but the shift to the truth was instantaneous, and I dropped off 20 years of trying not to make a mistake completely and instantly.

The reason habits of 30 years can seem harder to release than habits of 5 years, is because of the emotional layers on top of the physical technique. It isn't true that you've deepened the rut. What is true is that the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs between you and your technique accumulated over the years have set up emotional blocks to change being easy, not physical blocks to adopting a more loving posture and technique.

25) You Minimize the Truth

Our minds have the capacity to disempower the truth, and to prove to us that the truth will not make us free. This has been my ego's most powerful weapon for keeping me from making truly transformational changes to my adopted personality. I was able to do an end run around my ego on the guitar, but my ego eventually won. My ego just couldn't let me have the truth that I learned on the guitar - since the guitar could be easy, my life could be easy. I'm just about there, but it has taken years of dismantling an ego that wasn't loyal to me.

If you say to yourself it DOES NOT MATTER if I know why I can't do what I want to do on my instrument, this thought will disempower the truth. So, when you are shown a way to transform your technique, posture, beliefs, and approach to your instrument that works, you will find a way to sabotage the truth. When I was told I could play the guitar with extreme accuracy after years of grinding repetition and negative reinforcement, at least I was ready for the truth that I couldn't miss if I trusted my hands. But, like I said, I wasn't ready for this to transform my life.

The truth always matters and it is always transformational, unless you minimize the power of the truth. Like I wrote at the beginning of this section quoting from *A Course in Miracles*, it is the acceptance of the truth that can seem to take forever. When you minimize the power of how much pain you're in or the power of a revelation, then you are cutting yourself off from healing, cutting yourself off from the power of thoughts that are true. You then reduce yourself to only doing things and not creating things. So, you're ok as long as you can take the steps to transforming your technique in a loving way, but what happens when you can't take the steps anymore? **The quickest way to heal is to make your loving thoughts infinitely powerful, able to transform your performing, and recognize your fearful thoughts are powerless.**

26) The Music Teacher that Had the Most Power Over You Lied to You

This is the most unconscious block and possibly the most painful thing to be admitted of all, because the source of this artificial limit on your ability came from the person who was supposed to help you reach your potential. You go to a conservatory to study with a world renowned teacher, and before you know it you're burned out, you doubt your ability, and/or you're injured. Is this an accident, or has a very ambitious music teacher who did not realize his or her dream as a world famous performer, and sees this potential in you, 100% unconsciously sets you up for failure and/or injury?

If a wonderful instrumental or voice teacher pushes a talented student, and the teacher wants the student to succeed, then the student will probably succeed. But if a bitter great teacher works with talented students, I'm willing to bet most of that teacher's students will not be in music after five years of leaving the conservatory.

I would suggest that if you are going to study with a world famous teacher, that you look at the success rate for that teacher's students. If it is extremely low, look elsewhere. I would also suggest that if you are studying with a great teacher, that you trust your own judgment. If you are being set up to fail, find a different teacher as quickly as possible.

27) Too Many people Need You to Succeed

I once knew a very very talented guitarist and composer who could easily have been one of the best concert guitarists in the world. It didn't happen. Why? There were too many people who needed desperately to share in his potential glory. There was the guitar professor, there were his parents, there was the conservatory, there was a former guitar professor at the conservatory that had his hand in the process, and if I'm being perfectly honest, I wanted a piece of the glory vicariously that I hadn't achieved as a concert guitarist.

This talented guitarist couldn't handle it and dissipated his talents by joining a religious cult and messing around in pop music. This section is a variation on wanting to get your parents back section, but it is still worth looking at. All of us took what this guitarist had to offer away from him. Looking back on watching him perform, it seemed as if everyone felt they owned a piece of this "horse". In many ways it was very similar to an owner of a great race horse, and the owner acts and feels as if he just ran and won the race. Of course the horse doesn't care (I think), but this talented young guitarist did care and he didn't know it. Because he didn't know what was going on around him and inside of him, he didn't have the consciousness to take back his power and make his own decisions, so he rebelled.

This actually happened to me, also. I didn't display the same talent this other guitarist had, but I could have been a concert artist. In retrospect I had a whole family, a music teacher

and a whole culture needing me to win, so I rebelled to save myself. When you rebel to save yourself, you aren't choosing the loving path for yourself, you're actually throwing a tantrum and screwing yourself in an attempt to have some control over your life. ***Walking away and doing what you want is always option, even if you aren't yet aware that you can walk away.***

28) You're Afraid to Commit

If you don't have faith in your future, then how can you adopt an effortless technique to succeed? Hard work is the sneaky substitute for smart work. Working hard and not making the changes that make your technique effortless is a sneaky way to calm the fears inside that you don't have faith in your future as a successful musician.

You cannot commit to taking all of the steps that would make your performing an effortless joy, if deep down there is a little voice saying it isn't going to matter. If you can shift to having faith in your future as a happy successful musician, then you can take the steps to make it. ***If you accept that your future as a successful musician is based on your faith that your future as a successful musician is guaranteed, and you do the smart practice with faith to make it so, then your smart practice will combine with your faith, and you will succeed!***

If you don't believe you will have a successful career in music, and if you choose to never take the smart steps to be good enough on your instrument, then how can you take the steps to succeed? If you have practiced without faith in your future as a successful musician, then you have to admit to yourself that you were never committed to your instrument no matter how much you practiced. Once you admit the truth, then you are free to commit to and to having fun on your instrument.

29) You Are not Experiencing Love When You Play or Sing Most of the Time

What is the emotion you experience the most when you play or sing or think about practicing or performing? If the thought of your instrument doesn't consistently evoke love in you, then what is it evoking, and why are you practicing and performing? I was just thinking that many musicians do what they do and maybe even do so pretty darn well. But it seems to me they sometimes just stumble into being good musicians, make a living at it and never know emotionally what it does for them.

If that is where you are, then when you get into physical trouble, then you're much more likely to look for an allopathic quick medical fix to you're hurting, rather than find a way to play or sing with greater facility and pain free. In *A Course in Miracles* it says there are two basic emotions, love and fear, and that when you're afraid you can't experience love. So, if your instrument doesn't evoke love in you, does it evoke fear and you simply suppress the fear? If

you are making a living in music and you don't love your instrument, then this is a very scary situation that you probably can't admit to yourself.

What if you did admit this to yourself, also admitting deep down you may love your instrument? Then isn't it time to always make music as a gift, find the easiest way to play or sing, and let yourself fall in love with your instrument?

30) You're Stuck Getting Ready

Getting ready to do what you need to do, to become the performer you want to be has become a way of life. You're making a living doing what you do, but if you were to make a list of what needs to be done for you to perform the way you could perform, you just aren't doing it.

There are two aspects to doing what you need to do, so that you do what you want to do on your instrument. Externally, you take the physical steps to revamp your technique into the most loving, efficient, and effort less technique you can create. This is the second phase.

The first phase is that you have already done it in your mind. This means you see it done, so that you bring faith to the doing, and the steps are effortless. If it is done before you do it, and then when you physically do it, so there is no resistance to doing it. I think of this as the "Harry Potter principle". In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* he was able to create a patronus to save his life because he experienced doing so before he did it by going forward in time. When you have "seen" yourself take the steps to transform your playing or singing, then you will take the steps to transform your performing.

As a Gift

Why do you make music? Is it because you love it? Is it just a living, a job? Is there a way for you to have almost every moment of practicing and performing be a joy? Could you handle this? When music is given as a gift, it fulfills its purpose, its only purpose.

Over the last hundred years, with the advent of recording, classical music has become an ever-increasing exercise in playing to be perfect. The pressure for note-perfect performances has grown so powerful that many musicians, who do not want to buy into this, may feel as if something is wrong with them. They may feel as if they are lacking something, because they do not feel they can win against this pressure for perfection. Is there a way to play the double bass with beauty and ease without pushing yourself?

There are three books published by psychiatrist Dr. John Diamond called *The Life Energy in Music, Volumes I, II and III*. After I read these books, I combined what they were saying with the Bonpensiere book on faith in performance. I began playing with love and faith. Diamond's

three books talk of making music as a gift to yourself, to the audience, to someone you love, and to God. He says that if we want our playing always to be high energy, then we should always play giving the music as a gift.

When I went to an Alexander Technique teacher to stop the pain in my wrist, I learned to problem-solve on the guitar and to speak to myself in kind ways that eased and transformed the poor posture and tension in my body into ease and balance. When I read the Bonpensiere book, I learned to play with faith in my hands. When I read the Diamond books, I began making music as a gift. After I went through the Alexander Technique training, I learned to stop sacrificing myself physically. My evolution has been one of integrating the physical and mental aspects of playing and eventually adding in the ultimate emotional feeling - love. All of this became part of my playing.

Many times in our culture, we confuse understanding for feeling, for experience. However, the feeling is what gives meaning to whatever you are doing. It does not matter whether you are writing an ebook, making music, or running around a track; what gives the activities meaning is how you feel about them, not your competence.

Music given as a gift is a reaching out with love to yourself or someone else. This offering of love gives true meaning to the music. If you play a piece that is about sadness, then you are offering sadness as a gift. It is not about making the listener sad; it is about transmuting the listener's own unresolved sadness into love. We do not play to make ourselves sad, afraid depressed, or angry; we play to heal our unresolved fear. We usually do not realize this, and therefore, many performances, literally, do not lift the spirits of the audience.

When a practice session or a performance is given as a gift, it is *cantillatory*. Dr. Diamond describes as cantillatory a performance or a work of art that raises our life energy. When a listener connects to the performer who is giving her playing as a gift, then the listener's life energy rises.

When you practice, what are you saying to yourself? Are you criticizing yourself for what is not working? Many of us learned that the best way to improve our playing is with criticism, that the way to do our best is to attack ourselves for what we play wrong. Our *life energy*, our well-being, our capacity to feel love diminishes when we criticize ourselves. Perfectionists criticize themselves, and probably most classical musicians are perfectionists or suppressed perfectionists. The more a person ties his self-worth to his ability to play well, the greater his resistance to practicing and performing. If you withdraw your love of yourself when you play badly, then you are bullying yourself to play. However, if your main reason for making music is as a gift, then your self-worth will not depend on how well you play.

Playing as a gift is its own reward. How could you refuse a gift of love? If your three-year-old child gave you a gift, would you tell her it isn't good enough? If you accept the gift given with love by your child, then you, at least for the moment, are two consciously connected spirits. When you play for a beloved or an audience or God as a gift, you connect with love to the listeners; you all feel this love.

A gift given and received surrounds you with love and a feeling of wellbeing, but what effect does it have on your playing? I remember playing a concert and beginning not to play well. I kept trying harder and harder to feel good about how I was playing, and then I realized how desperately I wanted the audience to admire my playing. At that moment, I had two choices. I could keep pushing and trying to entertain the audience, or I could realize that the only real reason I wanted to be there was to honor the listeners with a gift. I chose the gift. What happened was beautiful. I instantly felt the tension level drop in my body. I stopped trying to drive the strings through the guitar. My sound became fuller and warmer. My tempo slowed, and I stopped missing notes. Even more profound was that I stopped wanting the piece to be over. I began enjoying the sounds, the beauty of the music, the audience and I did not want it to end.

If a musician always judges his playing, at what point does he get to enjoy his playing, reaping the rewards of all his work? If you are never pleased with how well you play, then at ninety years old, you will still be telling yourself, "It will be good enough tomorrow." When will you get to hear what you are doing? How can you truly hear the music if there is a constant critical voice going on inside? Turn this voice off for a moment and listen to the beauty of your instrument, the notes, the melody, and let this beauty be enough. When was the last time you played a piece for the sheer beauty of it? When was the last time you played and a voice inside did not say this could be better or that could be better? Imagine always returning to give the music as a gift, after you are through troubleshooting and deciding on interpretation. J.S. Bach said that his music was always a gift to God; that is why his music is so cantillatory.

Classical music has complexity and depth rare in other forms of music. To convey this depth and beauty, many players sacrifice themselves physically and emotionally for the performance, playing less and less for themselves and others. By limiting your options for playing, you may burn out. This does not have to be. There is not a no-win situation if you want to make music. Practicing with excellence can actually raise your energy level, so that by the end of a practice session or performance, you have even more energy.

If one-by-one you remove the obstacles to an inspired performance, at some point all that is left is ease, joy, love, and passion. Then if you let your playing be a gift to yourself and to everyone else, when you play, you are only offering love to all of the listeners.

Collected Short Essays in the Order Written

Pizzicato on the Jazz Double Bass

Recently I heard from a jazz bassist who said he was having aches and pains in his right wrist and fingers as he played pizzicato on the bass.

As an Alexander Technique teacher and classical guitarist, my first thought went to what is he doing in his right shoulder as he plays. Is he using too much tension in his shoulder and upper arm to create stability in his forearm and hand and fingers as he plays?

This is almost one of those guaranteed right first assumptions. Almost all performing musicians use too much muscle to stabilize an arm to get control over their instrument. It is in a bassist's best interest to experiment with how little shoulder muscle it takes to move and/or stabilize the arm, so that when he plucks the string, it doesn't move the hand instead of the string.

My second thought was, is he playing the strings by pushing too much toward the neck of the bass, rather than plucking the strings more parallel to the neck. If he is pushing the strings too much toward the neck, then he is creating tremendous resistance (back pressure) of the strings into the fingers, hand, and arm. The strings on the bass are pretty powerful.

When he plays a string, how much less tension can he have in his wrist and finger joints? If he anticipates playing pizzicato by tensing his fingers, then he is forcing the bones of the wrist and fingers together, and as he plays, he will be bending finger joints with compression (the bones forced too close together). We have a saying in the Alexander Technique, "Do less".

When you play pizzicato on the bass, you are turning a string instrument into a percussion instrument, which only requires a quick strike of a string to play. THERE IS NEVER ANY REASON TO PRESS THE STRING OR HOLD TENSION IN THE ARMS, HANDS, OR FINGERS BEFORE YOU PLAY OR EXCESSIVE TENSION AS YOU PLAY. Playing pizzicato on the bass should be like using a hammer. Ideally, the carpenter uses the quickness and momentum of his triceps and forearms to drive the nail, and he never pushes the nail before or after he hits and drives it into the wood.

As a bassist, use the reflexive quickness of a finger twitching through the string to create an effortless pizzicato technique.

I would also suggest you move the fingers from the main finger joint, the large knuckle, rather than bending the fingers at the first two joints to play. When you move a finger from the main knuckle, there are two advantages to playing this way.

The first is you are moving the whole gently curved and stable finger from the flexors of the under side of the forearm. This way you don't stress the joints of the fingers playing an instrument with such powerful strings.

The second advantage is you create a much nicer tone. As a classical guitarist, I learned that if you pluck strings with gently curled fingers from the flexors, you can play the guitar as loudly as the instrument will allow you to, without sacrificing the quality of the sound.

So, the main idea I want to get across here: How effortless can you make pizzicato on the double bass?

Playing the Double Bass - The Ideal Way to Begin or Retrain

If you have never played the double bass, what would be the ideal way to begin? If you're a beginner, you want to start from the beginning learning a wonderful technique and great posture from a kind teacher who doesn't let you slide. What do I mean by a teacher who doesn't let you slide?

As you're learning from the double bass teacher how to create a balanced fully upright posture and how to use your whole body to create a technique that is mechanically advantageous, your teacher lovingly does not ever let you get away with compromising your posture and technique.

Does this sound harsh? It isn't. It is extraordinarily loving, because if the teacher is absolutely clear about teaching you how to sit or stand and play the double bass with the greatest balance and the most effortless technique, then whether you practice a half hour a day or six hours a day, you will become a wonderful player and want to practice and/or perform for others, and it will be easy.

Is it possible to get this from one teacher? It is possible if your double bass teacher is an excellent Alexander Technique teacher also, or has done enough work with an Alexander Technique teacher to convey great overall posture and good use to the student.

What if you can't find such a bass teacher, then I believe the ideal situation would be to find the best bass teacher you can and the best Alexander Technique teacher you can and alternate between them. A word of caution, make sure the double bass teacher is ok with an Alexander Technique teacher tweaking the bass teacher's technique, or this won't work.

Ex: I'm now teaching the Kind Piano Technique with the assistance of a very fine pianist who has spent the last two years learning this technique from me. For the first time in her performing and accompanying career, she is not hurting and is realizing there is no piano work worth learning, that she can't find an effortless or near effortless way to perform the whole piece without pain, strain and struggle.

This pianist and I are teaching the Kind Piano Technique to students, beginners to advanced, alternating lessons between us each week. What would truly be ideal, is if the students took lessons from both of us each week, but this is generally not practical for most students.

I have created, mastered, and can teach this technique, and I can demonstrate it at the most refined Alexandrian level in exercises at the piano, but I have not pursued becoming a pianist. As an Alexander Technique teacher, I am very very good at seeing the things that musical performers (double bass players) do on all instruments that compromise their technique. With my Alexander Technique skills and the principles of great double bass technique, I trouble shoot and solve any technique problem a bass player or other performing musician has.

What this means, is that I can instantly see what the double bass player is doing that compromises his or her technique, and I help the bassist find the most effortless way to play. I can also see and change old technique problems that sneak back into the bassist's playing. Ex: Many double bass players have never learned to release fingers that aren't playing, and this can creep back into a bass player's new technique, as the difficulty of the pieces increases.

So, find a wonderful double bass teacher and a wonderful Alexander Technique teacher and go for it, beginner or advanced.

Double Bass - Believed Lies that Limit Your Potential

All performing and beginning double bass players gather evidence to prove what they believe about how good they are and how good they can become.

What do I mean? If you believe you don't have the talent to be an extraordinary double bass player, to perform the greatest literature written for your instrument, then you will demonstrate it in your double bass playing. Every time you play a difficult piece, you will struggle to make it through the hard passages.

You will prove you are right about your limited abilities by struggling through your wonderful literature. Which comes first, the beliefs in your limited performing talent or the demonstration of your limited talent?

I believe the beliefs come first, and then you go about proving what you can't do on the double bass, whether you're 5-years-old or 60-years-old. The bass is simply the perfect vehicle to prove what your potential is or isn't in the things you want to learn.

When you choose a double bass teacher who uses negative reinforcement to teach you the instrument and teaches you a bass technique that does not allow you to play this instrument with ease, then if you believe you have limited talent on the bass, it will be effortless to prove it to yourself and the teacher.

When you believe you have limited talent, you have two choices, if you continue to play. The first choice is you don't put in much practice time or effort, because you've given up on yourself before you start. The second choice is you prove to yourself and the world that you are going to do whatever it takes to become a fine double bass player DESPITE your lack of exceptional talent.

The world definitely loves number two. I'm not sure which the world admires most, the Mozarts or the overcomers. I think the world admires the overcomers, because there are a whole lot more strugglers out there than Mozarts. But is this true? Are most double bass players overcomers, lacking the potential to be extraordinarily facile players?

If you choose a double bass teacher who uses a love of music and positive reinforcement to teach you bass, tied to a double bass technique that uses Alexander Technique principles of good body use, then you are confronted with two choices. Either you accept and watch yourself become a wonderful double bass player making great music easily, effortlessly, and joyously, or you prove to yourself and the teacher you lack talent.

Why would a new double bass student, or a struggling bass player who had found a double bass teacher and/or Alexander Technique teacher who could make the bass easy, choose to prove there is no way they could play with great ease? Because, if you are the hero in your life by being an overcomer, then it is infinitely more important that you live always struggling, so that you can admire yourself for hanging in there, even though you believe you were dealt a poor hand of cards.

So, when you come to the double bass teacher and/or Alexander Technique teacher who can assist you in revamping your bass technique to teach you how easy the instrument can be or will be, and you've been an overcomer, then you will continue to take lessons, if you're ready to give up having to struggle and overcome to feel good about yourself.

Double Bass - Breathing and Breath Holding

It is almost universal that performing double bass players hold their breath, especially in the difficult sections of a piece. Is this inevitable? What effect does it have on a performance? What does it say about the double bass player? Can it be changed, if the bassist wants to do so?

Breath holding in double bass performance and while practicing is not inevitable, but like I said it is nearly universal. Since there is no obvious direct link between breathing and playing the double bass, you can play holding your breath and breathe when absolutely necessary. I have heard wonderful recordings of wonderful double bass players, and you can hear the players gasping for breath at times.

When a performing double bass player holds his or her breath, it usually means the performer is afraid he or she will not make it through a passage. If you stop breathing in the difficult passages, then I believe this always has an effect on what is coming out of the double bass. You

may still play beautifully, but it has always been my experience, that when a bassist plays for me and doesn't hold his or her breath in a passage, the passage dramatically changes.

It may not be a dramatic technical change, but the passage almost always has a better tone quality, and I notice there is a lowering in me of feeling stressed when I listen. The double bass player usually feels less stressed for two reasons. The first is he or she isn't immobilizing the body. The second reason is that for possibly the first time, the bassist is watching him or herself breathe and choosing to breathe through the passage, rather than focusing on their fear of the music.

So, yes, a double bass player can make gentle non-held breathing part of their technique. A performing bassist's technique is everything he or she does in their body when they perform. As an Alexander Technique teacher, when I help double bass players connect to their whole body as they play, then I truly make their technique conscious and whole body.

How does a double bass player internalize a new truly fearless breathing pattern as they play?
Ex: I ask a bassist to play a three octave scale with no particular focus. Then I ask him to play it again, but this time **ONLY** observe his breathing as he plays. I ask him what he notices. He may say he's noticing himself hold his breath, or he may notice he's trying to "force" himself to continue to breathe.

I ask him to play again, but this time gently watch himself breathe as he plays the scale at a very easy tempo, and to let his body breathe when it wants to, and to continue to repeat the scale non-stop for five minutes. If he can truly trust this process, he will begin to realize he doesn't have to make himself breathe, and he won't hold his breath.

For possibly the first time in his life, he has expanded her double bass technique beyond his hands and arms, and he is beginning to play the bass with his whole mobile body.

Double Bass - Does Poor Technique Work?

Poor technique on the double bass **DOES** itself. What do I mean? Every day you practice and/or perform, if you are using a poor technique, that is the technique you use to play consistently.

What is a poor technique? It is a technique that makes you struggle in the difficult literature on the double bass, makes you incapable of getting the best tone out of your instrument, makes it difficult to realize the interpretation you want, and is doing damage to your body.

Does it work? It must if you're a fine double bass player. If you're not very good, then you're using poor technique and/or you're not practicing. If it does work, why change poor technique? Does really poor double bass technique really work, even if you sound good? No! Why?

Because, if you're technique makes you struggle to play what you want, and if it is doing damage to your body, then poor technique lowers your ability to enjoy the music you are

creating in the moment. In other words, poor technique can take the joy out of playing the double bass, and make you solely dependent on the positive feedback of listeners to feel good about your playing.

This is probably not a unique occurrence among double bass players, since many are probably perfectionists. What do I mean? I define a perfectionist double bass player as someone who will never ever be satisfied with their playing, even though the promise they will be satisfied is held out front of each practice session and performance, like a carrot at the end of a stick.

What I just wrote is very black and white, but is it possible for someone who has moderately poor double bass technique to enjoy some of his or her performance in the moment. Yes. But what about the bass player who has to work like a dog to create a pleasing performance? These are the double bass players who really need constant external validation. They will probably get into physical trouble and at some point and have to stop playing, because of injury and/or the fact that playing the double bass is just too hard.

When you tie poor double bass technique to perfectionism, there is no way you're going to be able to truly enjoy your playing as you play. You will only be able to enjoy making music AFTER THE FACT, if you are able to find things you liked about your playing and/or you got praise from listeners.

Does poor double bass technique ever work? Is it working if you sound good? It only truly can be said to work, if at the end of a practice session or a performance you like your interpretation, you aren't damaging your body, and you feel more ENERGIZED than when you began playing.

Does this mean there is such a thing as a poor technique that isn't debilitating in the long run? Let me rephrase this. By definition, a poor double bass technique is an inefficient bass technique. So, is there an inefficient double bass technique that is harmless to the body and mind and lets you make beautiful music?

Yes. But you probably will have to practice and perform for short periods, if you don't want to expose the destructive flaws in your double bass technique.

Double Bass - Going for It Without Damaging Your Body

When I observe double bass players going all out 100% in a performance, they are almost always paying a physical price – harming their bodies. The more performances a double bass player does, where he or she goes all out, the more cumulative the wear and tear.

Does it have to be this way? Is it possible for an extraordinary double bass player to go all out all of the time every time he or she performs and not cause damage to the body? Yes, but a couple of things have to happen. First, the double bass player needs to use a technique where

the body is almost always on balance, so that the bass player doesn't have to use excess muscle to perform the most difficult literature written for the double bass.

The other major factor is that the double bass player may use too much muscle constantly throughout the performance. This usually manifests as two negative things happening at the same time. The bass player tenses before he or she presses the strings or uses the bow, and he or she uses too much muscle to get the job done.

What do I mean they use too much muscle to get the job done? In anticipation of pressing the strings and bowing, the double bass player creates too much musculature tension in the arms, back, shoulders, etc., to make sure he or she can play and interpret the music exactly as they want. This has two negative effects on what he or she doing.

The first is that excess muscular tension interferes with the speed of the fingers and bow arm. It slows the double bass player's fingers and arms down, so they aren't moving reflexively.

Second, if the bass player plays with held musculature in anticipation of what they're about to do, then they have forced joints together throughout the whole body unnecessarily, and hours of practice or performance with joints in compression wears out the joints. In other words, it isn't about the hours of practice and performance with a lot of repetitive movements, it is about the excessive tension throughout the whole body being confused for playing expressively.

You can play the double bass without damaging your body, when you perform with a technique that creates balance throughout the whole body, and by not tensing up, and then pressing the strings and bowing with total all out ease.

It is a powerful realization for me to see how double bass players who go all out in performances, assume they have to pay a physical price to experience the joy of an all out commitment to playing their best for the audience. This is the norm. It is a norm based on the assumption that you can't do your best in a concert unless you are willing to do damage to your body over time.

If this is true, then performing without holding back is not a win win situation, it is a win lose situation, where the bass player believes the momentary glory is worth a lifetime of pain, or at worst a crippled body.

Playing a concert without holding back can be a win win situation, if the double bass player learns to move reflexively on balance using released muscles. Going all out is the way it should be, because it is doing what you love without holding back, which is an act of self-love, commitment, and self-loyalty.

Double Bass - Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

When I was practicing six hours a day, seven days a week, to become a concert guitarist at the Royal College of Music in London in the early seventies, I developed carpal tunnel syndrome in my left wrist. I went to an Alexander Technique teacher, and within few months I was able to practice as much as I wanted without pain, and I've never suffered from carpal tunnel syndrome since.

What was it that the Alexander Technique teacher taught me that got me out of physical trouble permanently? I was taught how to press the strings with the minimum strength necessary, to find the most mechanically advantageous hand position in relationship to the string and guitar neck, and to press the strings without immobilizing my wrist, elbow, and shoulder.

I've applied the above principles in my ebook on the double bass. If the hands are in a mechanically advantageous relationship to the double bass, when you press the strings and move the bow with released, not relaxed (collapsed) wrists, then you will be on your way to healing your carpal tunnel syndrome.

As a double bass player, you want to support your hands with released forearms, upper arms, and shoulders, but not immobilizing the wrists, elbows, or shoulders. Then you can play the double bass with arms, hands, and shoulders that are not held unnecessarily still. When the strings are pressed and bow moved with released supported wrists, then you won't cause carpal tunnel syndrome.

Let me explain. If you were to learn how to play the double bass with a static held body and arm positions, then as you continuously change the relationship of the hands to the forearms with held immobilized tension, you'd be forcing the bones of the wrists to grind against each other.

Simply, tense muscles force bones together and cause 100% unnecessary wear and tear throughout the whole body.

Why do musicians use too much muscle to play the double bass? It is to prevent mistakes. It is using physical negative reinforcement to press the right note and bow the right string. So, when you practice a lot, you may become fairly accurate by using tension to minimize the number of mistakes you make, but you are damaging your body.

Then you seek out an Alexander Technique teacher who shows you that you can be extraordinarily accurate, if you release all of your excess tension, use balanced posture, and trust your bow and fingers to hit the mark.

I want to say something here about injuries being inevitable in repetitive activities that require precision. They are not, but by the time someone comes to an Alexander Technique teacher with carpal tunnel syndrome from playing the double bass, the double bass player has lived with a powerful belief system that says injuries are inevitable on the double bass.

I show double bass players how to get out of physical trouble, and I also ask them to simultaneously question all of the beliefs they have about doing activities that require precision. I then ask them to consider giving up all of the beliefs that guarantee they will eventually get injured over and over in any activity that requires precise movements.

Double Bass - Doing the Minimum with High Dynamic

How does a performing double bass player do the minimum with high dynamic? DOING THE MINIMUM WITH HIGH DYNAMIC is a concept that I coined in my ebooks and other writings. It means that you create a very powerful musical performance and simultaneously do the least amount of work muscularly. What do I mean?

When you practice or perform on the double bass, and you expressively with inspiration play without any more muscular effort than is necessary, this is doing the minimum with high dynamic. What are the elements that need to come together for this to happen?

Let's start with the expressively inspired piece first. When you practice or perform on the double bass as a GIFT to yourself, to others listening, to someone you love and/or God, then even if you have poor technique you will touch the hearts of those listening, For me, this is the primary reason to play the bass – to give performed music as a gift. All else, technique and interpretation, is in support of playing the double bass, making music, as a gift.

There are only two things that can get in the way of giving the gift of your double bass playing effortlessly. They are, you withhold performing the bass with an open heart, because you are afraid your gift won't be accepted unconditionally. The second is a poor double bass technique doesn't let come out of your fingers and whole body what's in your heart.

When you perform on the double bass as an unconditional gift to yourself, then there is no problem. What I mean, is that as long as you accept your own gift, then you can feel safe to offer it to an audience, someone you love, and God. I assume performing for someone you love is also someone who loves you, and they will accept your gift. I put God in this category.

Now, technique. Double bass technique is whole body. Everything every part of your body is doing as you play the bass is either contributing to the performance or interfering with you creating what you want from the double bass. This means, the closer your double bass playing is to the ideal performance in your mind, consistently, the closer your whole body technique is to a beautiful balanced posture and your specific bass technique is to playing consistently effortlessly, even as you play incredibly expressively.

A double bass technique that makes absolute control of the instrument as near as you can get to effortlessly realizing what you want, is by definition DOING THE MINIMUM WITH HIGH DYNAMIC.

What does this feel like and look like? As you sit on the chair or stand, you feel and appear and are effortlessly upright, mobile from the top of a head lengthening away from your sit bones with free hip joints.

This means that there is rarely, if ever, a place in a double bass work that you can't create your ideal, so you ideally never need to tense and hope your body will give you what you want. The ideal absolutely effortless practice or performance may be rare, but close counts as long as it is created with you being gentle to yourself.

When Is Your Double Bass Technique Good Enough?

Your double bass technique is good enough when you can play whatever you want effortlessly with trust. Which comes first – a good enough technique or trust? Ideally they should occur at the same time, but usually they don't in the typical two circumstances of a musician. These two circumstances are – you have played for years without trust or you are an outright beginner learning to play very carefully. By definition playing the double bass carefully is trying not to make a mistake.

If your technique is not good enough for you, then what is necessary for you to get to this point? From the Alexander Technique perspective, you decide what works on the double bass, and you let go of or avoid doing what doesn't work. The most obvious and not so obvious thing that bass players do that doesn't work, is they play with too much tension.

This is nearly universal in performers, because you could possibly do a really fine job of performing with too much tension if your technique is good enough. The problem is, that over the years of practicing and performing hours and hours with too much tension, you will probably cause wear and tear to joints and muscles and get into physical trouble. This is usually accepted as the norm. It is the norm, but that doesn't make it unavoidable.

As an Alexander Technique teacher, it is my job to teach double bass players to let go the aspects of their technique that don't work and to trust what does work. If I don't teach a student of mine to trust their technique, then there is truly no way I can get them to perform with anything approaching effortless technique consistently.

What does this mean? It means the double bass player will not be able to perform in the zone whenever they choose. You can tweak posture and your instrument's technique constantly, but if you never wed a wonderful technique with trust, then every time you play the bass you will be subtly, and maybe not so subtly, trying to improve your technique nonstop.

If every time you practice or perform there is a conscious or unconscious stream of thought goading you on to improve, then you can never perform in the moment with the joy of loving what your instrument is producing. This is the norm among classical double bass players. It is what so many bass players have always done, so they really really don't know they are doing this, so they never question if it is the best way to maintain their skills.

It isn't the best way. In my Alexander Technique publications for the different instruments, I make it clear, extremely clear, what great technique is on each individual instrument, how to acquire it, and then how to trust and have faith in it. Getting out of your own way so you can make music, and accepting that nonstop striving every time you play the double bass is not the best way to learn to perform effortlessly, and makes it possible for you to perform in the zone effortlessly.

Knowing when to accept that your double bass technique is good enough and having faith in it, is the most loving thing a bass player can do for him or herself.

Double Bass - Using Negative Reinforcement: The Ultimate Doing and Self-Attack

When you use negative reinforcement to improve your double bass playing, you are doing the ultimate DOING. Doing in the Alexander Technique is how we describe doing too much work to get the job done. Ex: If a double bass player tenses his fingers before he plays and uses too much pressure after he presses the strings, then he is doing. NON-DOING is doing the minimum necessary with high energy.

It is nearly impossible to non-do if you are attacking yourself with negative reinforcement. It can almost be done, but it requires a split between what you are saying to your body and what you are saying to yourself. Let me explain. You can be very harsh on your double bass playing with your self-talk, expecting perfection and punishing yourself in your thoughts. At the same time you can use the principles of the Alexander Technique to order your body to release and be on balance. But this is an extraordinary balancing act of compartmentalizing.

Compartmentalizing is by definition an extraordinary act of will – walling off two contradictory activities being performed at the same time. So, if you are using negative reinforcement to play the double bass extraordinarily well, you are motivating yourself with punishment, or at the threat of punishment. If you want to keep the fear of punishing yourself from compromising the most effortless and balanced posture and technique possible, then it is a pure act of will to tell your body what you want of it, so that you don't hunker down physically in fear of yourself as you play the bass.

The tool that we have in the Alexander Technique for getting the body to do what is mechanically advantageous are orders. ORDERS OF ALLOWANCE, as I call them, are telling your body what you want it to do with kindness. So, you say to yourself, "My neck is free and my head is moving up, as I press the string". Think about this. This means if there is an undercurrent of thought telling you that your double bass playing is never good enough, while you are inviting your neck to release and lead a lengthening spine upward, then you are playing suppressing the effects of attack on your body.

Does this work? Yes, for many wonderful double bass players. It is not the intention of this article to get you to stop using negative reinforcement. It is my intention to bring to light what you are doing, so that you can make a conscious choice as to whether to keep doing it or not. Look, if negative reinforcement has made you a wonderful bass player, then you may not want to change what you have done to become a wonderful performer. If that is your decision, then this article is about asking you to take your negative perfectionism and find a way to create positive results by not sacrificing your body.

In other words, ally negative reinforcement with the Alexander Technique principles of good body use and great double bass technique. Then, at some point you may decide it is worth it to be loving to yourself in how you motivate yourself to play the bass.

Double Bass - Accepting Poor Technique So You Can Move On

The kindest way to replace a double bass technique that doesn't work for you anymore, is to accept that you did the best you could. You chose the best double bass teacher and technique that you could handle at the time you began. You may have even moved through more than one major technique change and bass teacher. But now you're ready, if you're able to replace or enhance the technique you have with one that takes the artificial limits off of your potential as a fine double bass player.

I did this so many times as a classical guitarist. Finally, I found an extraordinary guitar teacher and an extraordinary Alexander Technique teacher at the same time. Between the two of them I gained the ability to trouble shoot on the guitar. This meant I could objectively see what worked and didn't work for me on the guitar and choose what did work. But I hadn't forgiven myself my past choices and ultimately stopped playing.

What has to happen for you to replace a double bass technique that doesn't serve you anymore with one that does? The better question is, how do you let go of completely what doesn't work anymore, so that it doesn't compromise what you want to do now?

It has to do with how you talk to yourself about the years doing a double bass technique that doesn't serve you anymore. If you get caught up in anger and regret and aren't able to move on without anger and regret, then you are punishing yourself for what you did and can't change.

It doesn't matter that you can't change what you did, but what does matter is that you can heal a flawed double bass technique. If you are willing to forgive yourself your choices, and accept that what doesn't work can only override what does work, then you can let go of believing you've spent too much unforgivable time doing what doesn't work.

What do I mean? I believe there is a difference between years spent doing what doesn't work and what does work. I believe, at least unconsciously, you knew that you're technique wasn't the best way to play the double bass, because you were struggling and straining much of the

time to realize the interpretation you want. Because you knew what you did wasn't the best solution to bass technique, it never became a part of you. ONLY WHAT IS BEST IS PERMANENT.

You can only handle an effortless double bass technique when you're ready. This means, when you're ready, even if you don't know you're ready, you'll find the right teacher and technique, because you can handle a bass technique that is effortless. You are ready, if you are able to forgive yourself for having chosen a technique and interpretation path of resistance.

This is what I mean by the title of this article on accepting what you did on the double bass, so that you can move on. I know many, if not most bass players, believe who they began the double bass with was by chance, but I don't believe in chance. I believe you find the teacher you could accept and handle at the moment you started the bass.

So, right here right now, if you can accept and embrace a double bass technique that makes all of the worthwhile literature easily playable, then you have accepted your musical choices of the past and forgiven yourself, your past bass teacher(s), your past technique, and your past interpretation choices.

Double Bass - Visualizing the Extraordinary Performance

I've worked with a whole lot of performing double bass players, and I've asked them all to perform a piece in their heads, to see themselves performing on their instrument a piece they knew. I'd ask them how they did afterward, and they usually said pretty good.

But I discovered there was one consistently unusual thing that most of them said they did in their visualizing. WHENEVER THEY CAME TO A PASSAGE THAT GAVE THEM TROUBLE, THEY SLOWED IT DOWN IN THEIR VISUALIZATION, ACTUALLY STRUGGLED IN THEIR VISUALIZING.

This was really a revelation for me, because it meant that instead of what the double bass player wanted out of a performance setting the possibilities, it was actually what they HAD BEEN DOING in a real performance that was setting the limits. Think about it, why shouldn't a bass player play the ultimate perfect effortless performance in their thoughts? But they didn't. Why?

There were two reasons. The first is it would be intolerable for the double bass player to do in their head what they couldn't do on the bass, which means you shouldn't think about what you can't do, because it is just too painful. The second powerful belief is you don't visualize what you don't believe is true. In other words, how can you possibly conceive of the possibility of the impossible, so don't even try!

So, the double bass player will not and psychologically cannot conceive of what they're not capable of doing. This is a feedback loop of insanity. What do I mean? You do not let yourself conceive of what you've already proved is the impossible. But is your ability to play the bass at

the highest level impossible, or are you trapping yourself with lies based on gathered evidence, so you shouldn't even find out if you're really a mediocre double bass player or not.

The problem with reality determining what you visualize is totally ass backward, as they say in Chattanooga, where I was born and raised. YOUR HEAD SHOULD TELL YOUR HANDS WHAT THEY CAN DO, NOT YOUR HANDS TELL YOUR HEAD WHAT IT IS ALLOWED TO THINK IS POSSIBLE.

By the time a double bass player comes to me for an Alexander Technique session, they are usually in physical trouble, and have played the way they play for years, never questioning their bass technique. So, if a mediocre double bass player does not get into physical trouble, they may never face the possibility that their beliefs about their ability on the bass has been determined by a limiting bass technique. (Getting into physical trouble on the double bass could be a blessing.)

So, sit down and close your eyes and visualize yourself playing a double bass piece you know better than Karr or Hauta-Aho. Were you able to? As an Alexander Technique teacher, I have to ask the question, did you see yourself playing the bass amazingly beautifully upright or hunkered down? Does it matter?

Yes it does. BECAUSE IF YOU ARE GOING TO LET THE POSSIBILITY THAT THERE IS AN INCREDIBLE PERFORMER HIDDEN IN YOU EMERGE, THEN WHEN YOU VISUALIZE, YOU WILL WANT TO BRING ALL OF THE ELEMENTS TOGETHER THAT WILL MAKE THIS A REALITY.

This means you will have to be absolutely clear about what you want to hear, and absolutely clear about what is a double bass technique good enough that will let your body be capable of doing what your mind can conceive of.

Double Bass - Does the Ends Ever Justify the Means?

Is it ever worth it to play the double bass doing WHATEVER IT TAKES to get a piece to where you want it technically, musically, and interpretively? This is what many wonderful bass players do, so is it a valid thing to do? It may not be a loving thing, but is it a valid or good thing? The better question may be, is doing the unloving thing ever a loving thing?

There are three reasons that I believe that it isn't worth it for the ends to override the means. The means is simply how conscious you are in the present as you play the double bass. From the Alexander Technique perspective, it is simply how good your posture is and how good your technique is, determined by an expansive balanced posture on the bass and a technique of minimal movement and decompressed joints. And all of this comes together in a way you can play all of the great double bass literature without pain, strain, and injury, and with great ease.

Here are the three reasons that ends playing isn't worth it. First: If you are physically doing damage with your technique and posture, then you will potentially end your ability to play the

double bass your whole life. If your posture and technique on the bass are extraordinarily Alexandrian, and you carry this over into the rest of your life's activities, you will play your whole life without physical damage and limitation and still play the double bass wonderfully.

Second: If you focus 100% on what you want to come out of the double bass, then you will leave no room for a sound or interpretation that surprises you. This means that if you totally focus on controlling what you play, rather than finding a way to make your technique easier and easier by doing less and less work, then you are potentially getting in the way of your technique evolving into a more and more effortless technique, that lets your interpretation evolve in an extraordinary way you may not have thought possible.

All truly extraordinary performers are continuously evolving their concepts of how to interpret their pieces. In fact, if you were to listen to different recordings of the same performer of the same piece 20 years apart, and there were minimal differences in the performances, you would say the double bass player has gotten stuck.

Third: I experienced the third effect today in my writing these posts on my blog. I was determined to get a certain amount of new posts done today, and I did not allow myself to take a rest between getting them all done (except this one). The effect on me was very unloving. I was so focused on getting the posts done, that I totally ignored the ache in my back, needing to go to the bathroom, and my mood was getting more and more irritable (angry!).

This is how I use to practice the classical guitar. I played a certain amount of hours no matter how sad or angry I got. I believe this third reason is the most important of the three reasons that the ends never justifies the means. It is the one that pollutes the other two reasons, and makes being an ends playing double bass player not worth it.

Let me explain. You can use the principles of the Alexander Technique to create a double bass technique that doesn't sacrifice your body. You can create an interpretation a piece that opens your heart. But if you don't pay attention to a mind that is screaming for a break or wanting to go outside and play, then you are sacrificing yourself for mastery (and your heart won't be able to stay open). Mastery is a very poor substitute for self-loving behavior, since mastery and listening to your heart and head aren't mutually exclusive.

Why Double Bass Players Continue to Use a Technique that Doesn't Work

As an Alexander Technique teacher, there have been times when a double bass player comes to me, and I show them how to play better than ever and they don't continue. I've never actually contacted a bass player who didn't come back after only one session and asked him or her why they didn't come back, after they've had a taste of effortless performing.

But I have taken a look at myself and my beliefs and habits in general that don't work, and I asked myself why I'm still doing them. It seems to me for every habit and belief we live by there is more than one reason we hold onto them, even if they aren't serving us anymore. I believe there is one main reason why we continue to do what doesn't work.

We continue to do what doesn't work, because when we did what we did, we believed in what we did and lived by with such unconscious unquestioning conviction and commitment.

What does this mean? If a double bass player learns to play with a specific technique, no matter how poorly it has served him or her, he or she has probably never ever questioned this technique. By time this inefficient technique fails him or her, it becomes a matter of loyalty.

What do I mean a matter of loyalty? There was a particular family belief I had lived by, and one day I realized it did not serve me. In fact, this belief was a total betrayal of everything I now believed, so shouldn't it have been easy or obvious that I should let this belief go? You would think so, but what I felt is that I SHOULD still continue to live by it, because I have lived by it. In some weird way this belief, that was a total betrayal of all I knew was true now, still felt bizarrely right or true.

This is what I think happens to double bass players who are confronted by a technique they have lived by that is hurting their bodies. They know the technique isn't working, but it still feels right, because WHEN THEY LEARNED THE TECHNIQUE THEY BELIEVED IT WAS RIGHT, or why else would they have committed to this specific way of performance.

So, when a double bass player comes to me for an Alexander Technique session, is there a way for me to make it possible for him or her to make radical technique changes that won't scare him or her off? In the Alexander Technique we usually spend most of a session helping a student let go of what doesn't work technically rather than taking on the role of being a music teacher. I now realize that I have to make it safe for this to happen.

This means I have to gently and kindly and slowly enough guide a double bass player into letting go of what doesn't work, at a pace that it doesn't freak out his or her ego. I was so driven as a concert guitarist, that I would do whatever it took to get better. But in retrospect, this was not done lovingly. I wasn't concerned for the effect major radical technique changes had on me on the thing that was most important to me, so ultimately I stopped playing.

I should never forget that the double bass player in front of me in an Alexander Technique session is more important than his or her instrument.

Double Bass - Artificial Limitations on Your Talent Is Not Humility

When you play the double bass for yourself and/or others as a gift, this is humility. When you tell yourself what you can't do on the bass, you are setting up artificial limitations on your potential, and this isn't loving or being humble.

By the time a double bass player has decided what he or she can or can't do on their instrument, it is a cumulative decision made over the years. It's reinforced by years of struggle on the bass – not being able to do what you want or doing what you want with a huge effort.

These artificial limits on your talent can also be reinforced by double bass teachers who can only see what you do, and may not see what you are capable of.

I'M GOING TO GIVE YOU ALL OF YOUR POWER BACK BY TELLING YOU THAT YOU CREATED THIS. What do I mean? Unconsciously you told yourself what you couldn't do on the double bass, and unconsciously you told your bass teachers what you couldn't do. This is your own power turned against yourself, but it is perceived by you as you being a victim of limited talent or being humble.

What if you flipped it over? What if you made a list of what you can't do on the double bass, and you went about eliminating all of your weaknesses, by focusing on what you can't do, one problem at a time. This is a loving way of letting go of your beliefs that have limited your potential on the bass.

This is a fancy way of saying stay with the means over the ends. What do I mean? Instead of placing your awareness on what is or is not coming out of the double bass, you begin placing all of your attention on letting go of what is in your way technically on the bass.

This is what the Alexander Technique teacher does. But I have carried this a step further in all of my ebooks. I look at the basic overall postural components in playing an instrument, and then I carry this into troubleshooting. This means I help the client look at very specific things they're doing in their technique that are not working, and make the changes that get the artificial limits of a flawed technique out of the way.

Ex: When you use excessive pressure to press the double bass strings down, then you are doing something that creates unnecessary strain. You should only do the minimum necessary to hold the bass strings down, depending on how loudly you are playing. When you play the double bass always doing the minimum to create a great sound, then you will realize you may be letting go of a half or more of the work you've been doing to play the bass.

Make a list of all of your limitations on the double bass, and if you truly look at the technique you acquired accidentally or were taught that hasn't worked, you will find that there is a physical solution to your artificial limitations.

Then you can be truly humble by giving the gift of a loving performance with a loving double bass technique that lets you do everything you want in a beautiful composition.

Playing the Double Bass When You're Truly Ready - The Ultimate Act of Love

I have rarely had double bass players come to me for an Alexander Technique session who performed for me, who waited until they were truly ready. They began to play instantly, or they took a moment to brace themselves and went for it. It is fascinating how unconsciously so many double bass players jump into performing.

This comes from years and years and hours and hours of practicing. So, when an injured double bass player comes to me they do what they've always done. As an Alexander Technique teacher it is my job to show the bass player how to do what they may have never done, which is to only play when they're ready with a loving technique.

What does being ready mean? It means that the double bass player only plays after they have waited long enough to let go of everything they don't want to do, so that they are able to do what they want to do. Physically, it means they do a whole body inventory of releasing the postural and technical habits they don't want to bring to the performance.

Simply you don't play the double bass until you are ready, even if it takes five minutes of waiting before the first note is played. Psychologically, it means that you play when you're not afraid. This can be a very very subtle thing, because so many bass players perform without being aware of their state of mind.

When you have the loving luxury of not playing the double bass until you are truly ready, then you are truly open to making the changes to your posture, technique, and mind that force you to sacrifice or frighten yourself when you play.

At this point you may say, "I'll never be ready, if I wait until I'm ready". How do you know, if no one has ever waited on you to be ready to play the double bass? The training so many musicians go through is about deferring to the teacher – playing right away for many teachers, rather than when you're ready.

This gets passed on from double bass teacher to student to teacher to student etc. What I mean, is that since the teacher was once the student, and if he or she was pressurized as they learned the bass, then the teacher may also be impatient with him or herself, as well as the student.

I believe the basis for so many double bass players playing when they're not ready is the counting of the music – when the notes live in time at tempo. This is just a fancy way of saying that the bass player feels the pressure to play at tempo, as strongly as he or she feels she has to play the right notes at all costs.

So, the moment the double bass player has committed to playing, it is as if a clock has started ticking, and the performer better get to it.

I want to say something at this point. I'm talking about changing the relationship of the double bass player to the instrument, and I'm talking about doing it in a loving practice situation. I'm not talking about being on the stage after working out all of the bugs in the music.

So, as you learn a piece of music, whether only for yourself and/or performance, give yourself the extraordinarily loving gift of learning where and when every note lives on the double bass, without compromising your technique or your heart.

Double Bass - Conscious Control in the Alexander Technique

CONSCIOUS CONTROL is what F. M. Alexander called regaining control over the voluntary musculature of the body. The voluntary musculature is defined as the external musculature that you tell what to do with your thoughts and intentions. What happens over time is that many double bass players' ability to let go of pain and tension in specific areas of their bodies is lost, and so they consistently hurt.

If a double bass player comes to me and says her neck and shoulders are hurting, and I tell her to just release these muscles, she'll look at me like I'm crazy. The truth is she has lost conscious control over these muscles, and it seems to her there is no way to get them to release.

It is your ability to tell your body what you want, and your body responds with exactly what you want, that Alexander Technique teachers help double bass players regain on the bass. The ideal body response from a loving intention is a pain-free, elegant, athletic, and coordinated movement, that gives you the note you want effortlessly with the volume, rhythm, and tone quality you choose.

What has to happen for all of the above to happen? You have to be intimately connected to your body, and to accept that THE BODY ALWAYS GIVES US WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT IT, not what we want. Let me explain?

If you believe the volunteer musculature of the body does anything independently of your beliefs and thoughts, then you do not have conscious control over it. Your belief that the body can do what it wants, will block you from being able to release the habits that have gotten you in constant pain on the double bass. You will be unable to tell your hands and arms what you want to hear on the bass without forcing the body to listen to you.

What I just said is critical! If you believe you regularly have to force the body to listen to you when you play the double bass, then you have given the body a mind of its own. But, the only mind your body has is your mind. Let me explain.

I believe many double bass players believe the body does things independently of the bass player's intentions, and that's why they can't do everything they want on the instrument. This isn't true, but boy is it self-fulfilling. Again, the body responds to what you believe about it, true or not true.

When you believe something that isn't true about the body, then what else can the body do but fail you at times, maybe a lot of times. So, when your beliefs are conflicted, then you don't get consistently amazing pain-free double bass performances. Having just said what I said, let me back track a bit.

You can create consistently amazing bass performances if your technique is good enough, and you will NOT tolerate your body not giving you what you want. This is not what I call a loving approach to double bass playing.

What is loving? If you accept/believe you have 100% control over your voluntary musculature, you have a double bass technique that doesn't harm your body, you have a fully upright balanced posture, you trust your body to give you exactly what you want, then you will have conscious control over your bass playing.

Double Bass - Very Slow to Very Fast Playing to Refine Technique

Is playing a double bass piece very slowly, below tempo, a form of making mistakes? This is what many bass players believe, and most double bass players believe mistakes should be avoided at all costs. I've found that almost all bass players believe that a mistake made is a mistake learned. This is the central belief of double bass players that makes for fear based playing. "Thou shalt avoid mistakes at all costs!"

I do not believe a mistake made, and recognized as such as it is being played is a wrong note learned, unless this is believed. What we believe, true or not, is self-fulfilling. In other words, if you believe every mistake made is learned, you will make that same mistake over and over again to prove you are right. Humans love to be right!

So, if you accept that a missed note on the double bass recognized is not a mistake learned, then slow practice is not playing a whole piece wrong.

What is the physical difference between playing slowly and quickly? I ask a double bass player to play a two octave scale and to do so very slowly, and to pay close attention to what the left hand is doing. I ask her to really experience her fingers and their relationship to each other, as she plays the scale at a very slow tempo, ascending and descending nonstop. As she continues to play the scale, I ask her to gradually pick up the tempo, continuing to pay close attention to her hand and fingers. I ask her to get faster and faster until she is going as fast as she can.

I then stop her, and ask her if she was able to feel the place where "slow" playing became "fast" playing, and what the difference is. When she says no, then we do this a few more times, seeing if she can figure out the difference between the two. So far, no double bass player has come up with the answer on his or her own.

Here is the answer. At a certain tempo, for the double bass player to continue to get faster and faster, the finger that plays next must already be on its way down to the neck. You cannot move faster than your reflexes allow you to move.

Ex: If you touch a hot plate accidentally, you will pull your hand away reflexively, but you cannot get off the hot plate any faster than your reflexes will allow you. Even if you touch it consciously and attempt to get off it more quickly, you still can't make the muscles twitch any faster than they can.

If you are playing a scale, and keeping your fingers as close to the strings as possible and articulating each finger 100% independently, in other words you do not move the next finger until the previous note has been played, you will not be able to play at your potential tempo. You simply cannot will your fingers to move faster than your reflexes can move them.

But, if the next playing finger is already on the way down to the neck, then the double bass, not your fingers will determine your ultimate speed.

If your double bass technique does break down, then what are you doing wrong? You may discover your technique has flaws in it that even flowing fingers can't solve, so you need to troubleshoot your bass technique by yourself, with a double bass teacher, with an Alexander Technique teacher or all three. So, perform with love and an accurate sense of what it really takes to physically play the bass, and who knows how good you'll become.

Double Bass - Playing Very Softly (Pianissimo) Effortlessly

Why is playing the double bass consistently very softly through a passage difficult for many bass players? Is playing the double bass pianissimo INHERENTLY difficult, and there is nothing you can do about it?

First, I'm going to describe what double bass players do that makes playing the bass very softly for sustained periods hard. Second, I'm going to describe the remedy, so that playing the double bass pianissimo for long passages can be effortless. It should be effortless, shouldn't it?

A prevalent belief among double bass players is that to play very softly, they need to KEEP themselves from playing too loudly. So, by definition, it is easier to play at a moderately loud volume than it is to play very softly. IT TAKES ABOUT THE SAME AMOUNT OF MUSCULAR INVOLVEMENT TO PLAY THE BASS SOFTLY AS IT DOES TO PLAY IT LOUDLY.

Many double bass players are used to playing moderately loud. So, why is playing pianissimo harder than playing mezzo forte? Because, many bass players believe playing very softly is about pulling back on the reins with effort. They believe they have to muscle the right arm to play pianissimo.

Think about it. If you believe you have to KEEP your right arm from playing the double bass too loud, then you are using muscle to keep yourself from using too much muscle. This is crazy. Is there a better solution? YES!

Why not use the least amount of muscle to play softer. You gain conscious control over the musculature of your arm by using minimally more muscle when you play mezzo forte. You do this by lovingly ordering your body to do the same work to play pianissimo, by not FORCING the shoulder musculature to tense to support the bow lightly on the strings to play pianissimo.

There are two reasons that playing pianissimo on the double bass player is experienced as more work than playing at a mezzo forte. First, it does take minimally more shoulder muscle, the deltoid, to support the bow lightly on the strings. But as I said, this work is minimal, especially if you visualize/experience the arm being held up for you with a free shoulder.

The second reason is the main reason that playing the double bass very softly is experienced as hard work. When it is your intention to play a passage consistently pianissimo, then invariably many bass players tense the shoulder, arm, and hand to control the pianissimo. This tensing is doing two contradictory things at the same time – immobilizing the arm and moving the arm to play softly. This is very hard on the arm and shoulder.

The solution is to experience your arm floating and to trust your intention to play the passage effortlessly soft, using the least amount of arm and shoulder musculature. What I mean by trusting your intention is this: If you hear the performance you want in your head and trust your body to produce it using the least amount of muscle, then your body will give you what you want with minimal work, when your faith in your intentions and your body demonstrates that getting what you want out of the double bass is about trust, not tension.

One last point: What determines how softly you can play? Is it your technique or the double bass? It is the bass. If you use the least amount of muscle, then it is the double bass that will determine how softly you can play. Simply, at a certain point the bass will not produce a sound, with the bow's lighter and lighter contact on the strings, combined with the speed of the bow.

Double Bass - Asking the Impossible of Your Body

The goal of the Alexander Technique is to help the double bass player create the most effortless and balanced bass technique and posture possible, so that the double bass player doesn't have to struggle to play the bass. This isn't always easy, because many double bass players bring misconceptions of what they are doing physically when they play. In other words, the bass player thinks they are doing one thing, when they are doing another thing.

What does this mean? The double bass, as with most instruments, has a history of the rules of playing that has gotten passed from teacher to student etc., over generations of teachers and students. What is taught isn't always an accurate representation of what is physically happening on the bass.

Here are a few of my corrected misconceptions of movement in the body. You can't lock the knees, you lock the thigh muscles to lock the knees. When you rotate the forearm, turning the hands over up and down, it is the biceps that rotate the forearms. When you move your hand side to side in relationship to the forearm, it is from long muscles tied to the elbows. When you move your fingers, it is from the forearms – the flexors and the extensors. When you support bent forearms, it is the brachialis, not the biceps for the most part.

The last two are critical for the double bass player, because when the bass player is aware that he or she moves the left hand fingers from the forearm, this means that the double bass player can create a conscious sense of ease and freedom in the hand and forearm as she or he plays. In other words when you have a misconception of how the body does something, then that belief causes the body to move with tension, because of the conflict between the believed lie and what is really happening.

Another issue with double bass players is that they are not aware there is no muscle in the forearms that supports the forearms. It is the brachialis (half biceps) that supports and moves the forearms. Because so many bass players have experienced tension in their forearms for years, whether it is conscious or unconscious, they experience the forearms as holding up the forearms. This isn't true, and it contributes greatly to forearm pain, tension, and injury.

Returning back to the first paragraph of this article, if you believe the body does one thing, and it actually does another, then the conflict between your misconceptions and what really happens will contribute to pain, strain, and injury. So, when a double bass teacher tells a student something that is not true about how the body works, then it seems to really cause physical problems. Because the student is stacking statements from authority to back up misconceptions of what he or she is doing on the bass. This can really lead to strain and injury. It may take years, but many double bass players get in trouble eventually over a career of teaching and/or performing.

It is an extraordinary feeling when you are made aware of what you are really doing on an instrument. Every time I was given accurate information from an Alexander Technique teacher on what balanced posture and accurate movement in my guitar technique were, my classical guitar playing always improved dramatically. It was truly as if I took off blinders, and could clearly see and experience how easy and free playing the guitar could be.

Double Bass - Orders of Allowance in the Alexander Technique

I coined the phrase ORDERS OF ALLOWANCE. It grew out of what F. M. Alexander, the founder of the Alexander Technique, simply called ORDERS. Orders are telling your body what you want it to do. If you say out loud or in your thoughts, "My neck is free, my head leading my lengthening spine upward, as I play the bass", and if you do this enough times with faith, you will establish a new habit.

Actually, as you're about to play the double bass, all you need to say before you play, and whenever you notice your neck has locked up as you're playing is, "My neck is free, my head leading my lengthening spine upward".

I expanded F. M. Alexander's orders to order(s) of allowance, because I felt that order(s) of allowance was a statement that told your body what you wanted and allowed it to do on the double bass with kindness. The word orders by itself connotes a demand, rather than a loving direction to do something.

In truth, we give our bodies orders all of the time, from loving to harsh. Let me explain. Every time you move the arm or a finger on the double bass, you have given orders of allowance to your body, if it is done with kind intentions. We live by orders to our bodies 24/7, but since they are sent so quickly, we don't usually register the instantaneous intention and thought.

So, with the double bass leaning against you, and you bend your left arm to play, the intention, thought, and lifting of the arm has come and gone so quickly, that your arm seems to bend itself.

When you stop and consciously give an order of allowance, you have chosen to do something few bass players do. Let me explain. You have truly brought to full consciousness the fact that you are always telling your body what you want from it, but like I said, you usually do it so quickly, that it seems to do itself.

In a sense it does do it to itself, because when you play the double bass as you've always played it, then whenever you do something on the bass you've done thousands of times, you will do it the same way – consistently habitually good or habitually bad.

The genius behind Alexander's order of allowance is to consciously tell your body what you want, and that what you order it to do consciously is something new and healing for the body. So, when you order your neck to release before you play the double bass, and as you repeat this order of allowance as you're playing, then you are doing something very new in your bass technique.

You're playing the double bass with a free neck, and this will, in a very short period of time, become a new established part of your bass technique (if you remember to give this order of allowance).

Here's why the concept of orders of allowance can be challenging for some double bass players. When you think the order of allowance, "My neck is free", you are asking for a change in your body that is pretty invisible, except to an Alexander Technique teacher.

But, when you tell an arm to bend, it is very clear that your thought has a powerful effect. **YOU BEND YOUR ARM!** When you order your neck to release, you may not experience the release the first 30 or 40 times you send the order. But, what will happen is, if have faith in the process,

you will begin to experience the releases in your neck as you continue to order it to be free, as you play the double bass.

Double Bass - Primary Control in the Alexander Technique

Primary Control is the basis of organized coordinated double bass playing in the Alexander Technique. When a bass player is playing the double bass with the most organized elegant movement possible, then the head is leading the bass player's spine into lengthening, as the arms and fingers move from a decompressed, vertically balanced, and aligned spine.

This means that all of the nerves that radiate from the spinal cord have no pressure on them. So, the nerves can send the signals from the brain for movement and/or muscular support, as you play the double bass, without being slowed down by the vertebrae and muscles pinching the nerves.

The brain and spinal cord always organize the movement that the body produces, but when the Primary Control is interfered with by muscular tension and compression and poor posture, then that organization is poor organization. THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE IS ALL ABOUT THE QUALITY OF A DOUBLE BASS PLAYER'S POSTURE AND TECHNIQUE.

The Alexander Technique recognizes that a huge amount of wear and tear and physical pain on the bass is caused by how you play, not by what you play or how long you play.

The assumption in the Alexander Technique is that we are born with an innate ability to move with beautiful Primary Control, and that babies crawl with the head leading a lengthening spine naturally, given that the baby is healthy in a healthy environment.

If you were to observe a 1,000 double bass players playing, you'd be hard put to see one bass player playing with beautiful Primary Control (given that none of them had done any Alexander Technique work). What does playing the double bass without a compromised Primary Control look like?

The double bass player sits or stands fully upright with a completely mobile body (not trying to sit or stand straight). The bass player's neck is free and the player is aware that the head is leading a lengthening spine upward, which means that the double bass player is able to see his or her fingers and bow, as the head continues to lead a lengthening spine upward.

This means that the double bass player is completely engaged in playing the bass without being pulled downward into the instrument. This fully upward mobile posture balancing on the sit bones or standing balanced on free legs, gives the shoulders and arms of the bass player a balanced torso to float on, so that the performer can effortlessly generate the tone, volume, and accuracy that he or she wants from the instrument.

When the double bass player's shoulders are floating/supported by a fully upright or pivoted torso from the hips, then the shoulder girdle is free to back up the arms and hands as the bass player performs, and the shoulder girdle doesn't have to tense up to support itself.

When the double bass player's body is organized by the Primary Control, then the performer is free to place all of his or her awareness on a bass technique that isn't being compromised by a compromised Primary Control. In other words, if the double bass player's body is collapsed or over-tense with poor head/neck/spine organization, then the pure specific double bass technique of the bass player can never be what it would be, since it is not backed up by a balanced body.

WHEN THE FOUNDATION OF COORDINATED ELEGANT HUMAN MOVEMENT IS COMPROMISED, THEN THE SECONDARY TECHNIQUE OF A SPECIALIZED ACTIVITY, LIKE PLAYING THE DOUBLE BASS, WILL NEVER BE AS EFFORTLESS OR AS CONSISTENT AS IT COULD BE.

Double Bass - Inhibition in the Alexander Technique

INHIBITION is one of the most powerful tools in the Alexander Technique. It gives the double bass player a tool to change any aspect of his bass technique and posture that doesn't work with what works. Inhibition helps the double bass player identify what is interfering with the bass player creating the most user friendly double bass technique and posture possible, and then to be able to change what isn't working.

INHIBITION ALLOWS THE DOUBLE BASS PLAYER TO LET GO OF WHAT ISN'T WORKING, AND TO REPLACE IT WITH WHAT DOES WORK ON THE BASS.

Inhibition is what you do after you've identified what is not working in your double bass technique. Let me explain. By the time a bass player has discovered, after years of playing, that there are aspects of the double bass player's technique and posture that are interfering with the bass player's ability to play all of the music that the double bass player would like to play, these destructive habits are as central to the bass player's technique as the productive ones are.

So, how do you throw out the bath water, without throwing out the baby? You identify and list what is compromising your double bass playing, and you also make a second list of what it is that works in your bass technique, and you only keep the good list.

There are the typical big postural problems – slumped or over-arched posture, obvious tension throughout the body, from hands to legs. Then there are the much more subtle problems, which may be a matter of degree. What I mean, is there may be postural and technique things that you do that are not obvious to anyone but an Alexander Technique teacher.

Ex: If right before the double bass player plays, he locks his neck, then this can be pretty invisible to most people. If right before the bass player plays, he slightly tilts the head

backward, this can be almost undetectable. If every time there is a difficult passage, the double bass player holds his breath, this can be pretty invisible. If every time, in a very rhythmic piece, the bass player pulls slightly downward, shortening his spine to feel the beat, this can be a very subtle habit that interferes with coordination. This rhythmic hunkering down can compress the nerves that originate at the spinal cord.

So, what is the act of inhibition or inhibiting? If right before you do what you have always done on the double bass, just before you play, you stop and choose to do something new, then you have just inhibited what isn't serving you.

Ex: Just as the double bass player is about to play, he notices he is tilting the head backward and pulling down. The bass player stops – doesn't play. He now chooses not to tilt the head backward, and right after that new choice, he then plays.

What I have just described is inhibition or inhibiting a habit. It very subtle and very powerful, because for the first time, the double bass player has chosen not to initiate playing with a bad habit.

He has chosen to play without unconscious tension and compression of the neck/spine. Bringing this into the double bass player's awareness is moving bass playing away from being something you fix, to being something where you are truly experiencing all of your subtle habits, good and bad, you have played the double bass with. Now you have the tool, INHIBITION, that will allow you to perceive and choose which habits you want to keep or release.

THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE DOES TWO EXTRAORDINARY THINGS. IT TRULY RAISES YOUR AWARENESS OF WHAT YOU ARE DOING ON THE DOUBLE BASS TO A LEVEL THAT SHOWS YOU HOW YOU COMPROMISE YOUR TALENT, AND IT GIVES YOU THE TOOLS TO STOP DOING THIS.

Double Bass - Finishing the Journey of a Loving Radical Technique Change

When you find a double bass teacher who wants to revamp all of your bass technique, or at least a major part of it, and you know you have finally found the right teacher to give you what you need, how do you deal with it? Do you follow through and make the radical changes to your double bass technique, or do you walk away? If you don't walk away, how do you go about making these huge technique changes to your bass technique – letting go of a technique you've lived with for years that is severely limiting?

When I was 19-years-old I got accepted to the Royal College of Music in London, and the classical guitar teacher there wanted to change everything about my right hand guitar technique, and I knew it needed to be done. I did it. Also, two years after I revamped my right

hand guitar technique, I went to an Alexander Technique teacher in London to heal carpal tunnel syndrome in my left wrist.

When I went to the Alexander Technique teacher I had internalized a right hand technique that worked, but I needed an Alexander Technique teacher to create a left hand technique that worked. I also needed the Alexander Technique teacher to create a whole body posture that unified my guitar technique, because when I had changed my right hand technique, I had been incredibly hard on myself.

Looking back on what I went through to finally create a classical guitar technique that worked, I remember how hopeful I was at the time that I would finally have a guitar technique that would let me do what I wanted to do on the guitar. But I was also in despair, because with every revelation from the guitar teacher and the Alexander Technique teacher, I was having to throw out everything I had lived by on the guitar.

As a double bass player who may be in the middle of being confronted by a bass teacher and/or Alexander Technique teacher who can show you how to let go of all of the artificial limits on your double bass playing, how are you dealing with this?

You have the following choices: Walk away. Make the changes in despair. Make the changes in joy. Make the changes resisting making the changes. Spend a minimal amount of time each day, so that the revamping of your double bass technique seems to go on forever. Spend tons of hours every day determined to make the changes as quickly as possible, no matter how hard it is on you physically and emotionally.

Here is the middle ground, or the loving way. First, accept that being offered a chance to solve all of your limiting technique problems on the double bass is a wondrous thing. Better late than never is truly an incredible thing, but only if you're ready to accept the gift. Be gentle, though. You may have to mourn the old technique for a while.

It would also be loving to suspend all of your performing obligations while you revamp your double bass technique. As long as you have performance obligations as you're changing so much about your bass playing, you are pulling in opposite directions, and blocking completing the changes. (This may be what your ego is sneakily doing – blocking transformation.)

When I was revamping my right hand guitar technique, I wasn't aware of the Alexander Technique. It is the Alexander Technique tied to major technique changes on the double bass, that will allow you to lovingly practice as many hours as you want each day to complete your journey to a bass technique that sets you free.

What the Alexander Technique does is focuses you on using your whole body with the most open expansive posture, as you let go of what didn't work on the double bass, and internalize what does work.

The other huge piece you have to provide in this healing your double bass technique process, is the faith that the new technique and posture will become so effortless, that it will quickly wash away years of what didn't work. In other words, if you tell yourself it's going to take forever to replace the struggling old technique with the effortless new, then this is a particularly harsh form of resistance to doing what is a truly loving gift for yourself.

THAT LOVING GIFT IS LETTING YOURSELF ENJOY THE GIFT OF LEARNING TO PLAY THE DOUBLE BASS CONSCIOUSLY, WHICH MEANS TAKING 100% CARE OF YOURSELF AS YOU LEARN TO DO WHAT TRULY WORKS ON THE BASS.

Double Bass - Playing with Effortless Accuracy and Applying This to Life

If you know which note you want to play on the double bass, and you trust your arm, hand, and finger to play it, YOU CAN'T MISS, and if you do miss, you won't the next time. I learned to play this way on the classical guitar. When I read this truth in *New Pathways to Piano Technique* by Luigi Bonpensiere and tested it, I instantaneously got it, and I realized I would never play the guitar the same way again.

This way of playing the guitar made it possible for me to play the guitar fearlessly, without fear of the instrument and fear of myself getting angry at myself for messing up. There is a corollary to this statement of trust in the book. If you miss a note, withdraw even more effort to get it right and trust your finger to play the right note even more the next time, you will hit the mark.

There are double bass players out there playing with this kind of faith. My question is, as you can tell from the title of this article, are they living their lives the same way? In other words are they living moment to moment away from the double bass feeling like they can't miss? I'm not so sure there are many enlightened beings/bass players running around out there.

This is my goal and has been for over 30 years – to hit the mark in all things, if not the first time, the next time. I don't play the guitar anymore, but my still vivid experience I have of absolute trust in my accuracy on the guitar placed me on a spiritual path in my mid-twenties, and I have been on the path ever since.

It has been difficult at times, and now I realize why I haven't done in my everyday life what I did on the guitar. I WOULD NOT LET MYSELF SEE THAT THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN I CAN'T MISS ON THE GUITAR, AND I CAN'T MISS IN ALL OF MY OTHER INTERACTIONS AND ACTIVITIES.

As I write this, it is obvious, but it has taken this long for me realize my ego has kept me blind to the truth.

I believe this is what *Zen in the Art of Archery* by Eugen Herrigel is about. Hitting the bull's eye with the arrow is guaranteed if you watch it happen. This is how I experienced incredible

accuracy on the guitar. I watched it happen, and the reason it happened, is because I let it be done by the holy me, not the human acquired me.

It is now clear why I didn't continue to pursue a concert career on the classical guitar. My ego couldn't handle the implications of playing the guitar with infinite faith and love. So, it has taken me over 30 years to accept that life can be lived trusting myself not to miss, and if I do miss, I apply even more faith that I won't miss the next time or encounter, and I won't.

What this means, is that if you trust yourself not to miss on the double bass and in your everyday life, then you cannot live by the rules of an ego. An ego has a pre-programmed reaction for anyone and every situation because of your past. This means you can never really count on yourself to do the holy loving thing in the present, because you are still saving yourself based on the past and not who or what is in front of you right now.

What if you accepted that you have no choice, that you have to respond appropriately/lovingly all of the time. You have to trust yourself, BECAUSE YOU ARE ALWAYS POISED TO HIT THE MARK – do the loving thing.

So, play the double bass with absolute faith in your ability to hit the mark, and live your life with absolute faith in your inherent desire and ability to hit the mark.

Double Bass - Opposition in the Alexander Technique

Opposition is an Alexander Technique concept that is about the physical relationships within one's body, and your relationship to what you are doing. It is a concept put into practice that teaches you how not to collapse into your body and how not to collapse into what you're doing.

Applied to the double bass, it means you don't collapse into the bass as you play the bass or pull the bass into your body. If you observe a 1,000 double bass players, you will see most of them not in a truly effortless postural upright balance to the bass. They are usually collapsing downward to the instrument and their hands, or arching away from the double bass, even as their heads are pulling toward the instrument.

The internal aspect of opposition means that as you collapse downward to the double bass, it means you're head is closer to your hands and your legs, as you look down and pull your head down to see what you're doing, which means you're skeleton is not in opposition posturally and between your joints.

The psychological component of this is that you are trying to get your head closer to what you're doing, to get control of your double bass playing. You unconsciously are attempting to be more accurate by being very close to what you are doing. It is actually physicalizing fear posturally, because you're afraid of making a mistake.

Most of us learned to do this when we learned to read and write in school, attempting to read or write well for a good grade, with our heads two inches away from the book or paper. You also learned to do this when you were a beginner on the double bass, attempting to get it right.

WHEN YOU ALLOW YOURSELF TO STAND OR SIT FULLY UPRIGHT WITH THE DOUBLE BASS WITH BALANCED POSTURE AND YOUR HEAD RELEASING UPWARD, YOU ARE IN CONTROL OF YOUR BODY, TECHNIQUE, AND SELF, AND YOU WILL ULTIMATELY BE IN GREATER CONTROL OF THE BASS.

Opposition is an extraordinary concept, that when put into practice, allows you to use your body against the double bass in such a balanced way, that you are able to do the least amount of work necessary to play the bass with effortless coordination.

Being in opposition to the double bass is also a physicalizing of how you want your relationship to be to the bass. What I mean, is if you are pulling downward and into the double bass, then you are not conscious in the moment of how you are using your body. In other words, your desire to play the bass well is shaping your posture and your technique, and you are not in control.

When you consciously choose your posture and your technique and remain conscious of how you want to be in relationship to the double bass, then you are choosing also how you want to feel about the bass. This means as you stand or sit fully upright with the double bass, aware of your head, neck, and torso balanced upward and flowing upward instead of into the bass, and you send your hands and arms to the bass instead of pulling the bass into your body, then you aren't playing with tunnel vision.

Tunnel vision leads to tunnel posture, which means as you play the double bass without opposition, your technique and posture is being forced on you, because you are trying to get the music right. Rather than you choosing to stand or sit up and balanced and watching it unfold in the moment, you are using excess tension and poor posture to try as hard as you can to play well.

IT IS AN AMAZING FEELING WHEN YOU PLAY THE DOUBLE BASS MAKING ALL OF THE POSTURAL AND TECHNIQUE DECISIONS, RATHER THAN THE BASS AND MUSIC FORCING YOU TO SACRIFICE YOUR BODY, BECAUSE YOU HAVE BEEN TRYING TO GET WHAT YOU WANT OUT OF THE BASS AT ANY COST.

Double Bass - Troubleshooting with the Alexander Technique

Troubleshooting is the bridge between posture and technique I've created in my work with double bass players. I'm an Alexander Technique teacher and a former concert guitarist. One of my former Alexander Technique teachers gave me the tools to apply all of the principles of Alexander Technique great posture to my guitar playing, and she also gave me the tools to expand the Alexander Technique principles of good postural use to guitar technique.

This is what I've done in my ebook on double bass playing. I go into extreme detail in this ebook on how to use your whole body on the bass for the most posturally mechanically advantageous body use. I also go into detailed specifics of double bass technique.

You can teach a double bass player to have beautiful posture on the bass, but what if the double bass player's technique isn't serving the bass player? There are two major reasons for this.

The first is the double bass player's technique is flawed, completely or partially. In other words, the bass player is asking his arms and hands to do things that really can't be done.

The second major problem is with how the double bass player is approaching his technique – the technique is perfectly ok, but the bass player's approach to it is very inefficient.

This latter is closer to traditional Alexander Technique thinking. It simply means you are doing the right thing the wrong way. The most obvious example of this is using too much muscle to get the job done. So, the double bass player sits or stands with pretty good upright posture, but uses too much muscle to sit or stand upright and causes pain, strain, tension, and compression in the whole body. He looks good and feels bad, and this limits how well he plays.

When this happens in the specific double bass technique of how the bass player uses his fingers, then if the double bass player is always poised with tension in his hands and fingers to play, then no matter how externally good his technique looks to everyone else, he is compromising his hands and is probably on his way to arthritis.

Now, the first problem – the double bass player's technique isn't the best choice. This can only be solved if the bass player is ready to become his own teacher, his own master. What do I mean?

THE MOMENT THE DOUBLE BASS PLAYER PUTS EVERYTHING, WITHOUT EXCEPTION, THAT HE OR SHE HAS EVER LEARNED ABOUT PLAYING THE INSTRUMENT UP FOR SCRUTINY, THE BASS PLAYER IS TRULY READY TO BE HIS OR HER OWN MASTER. AT THIS POINT THE DOUBLE BASS PLAYER ISN'T A BASS STUDENT ANYMORE AND IS NOW CONTRIBUTING TO THE DOUBLE BASS WORLD.

When I started questioning everything I had ever learned about guitar technique, it was the most freeing thing I had ever experienced as a classical guitarist. It was an amazing feeling to take total control of my guitar technique. I revamped nearly my whole technique.

WHEN YOU REPLACE WHAT DOESN'T WORK, AND WILL NEVER ALLOW YOU TO BE THE DOUBLE BASS PLAYER YOU COULD BE, WITH WHAT WORKS, THEN YOU ARE FREE TO HAVE FUN ON THE BASS.

One final point – when you replace what hasn't been working for you on the double bass with what works, the internalizing of the new technique can be very fast. When you experience how effortless the new way can be, then you can very quickly let go of the old way. The old way only takes a long time to change, if you resist the new way by holding onto to the false security of what never completely worked.

Double Bass - Renewing the Thought in the Alexander Technique

Double Bass players repeatedly tell their bodies what they want from their bodies when they play the bass, but this is usually done subconsciously. It feels like, to the double bass player, that the body is doing technique and posture by itself. In other words, the technique and posture that the double bass player has established, maybe a long time ago, just do themselves.

THE TECHNIQUE AND POSTURE A DOUBLE BASS PLAYER PRACTICES AND PERFORMS WITH DO NOT DO THEMSELVES. They are informed by the beliefs that the double bass player plays the bass with, and these beliefs/thoughts constantly determine what your body does. So, for many fine double bass players, the only thing that is still conscious in their playing is how they interpret the piece.

But what if you realize that there are some things that you would like to change about your posture or technique on the double bass? Other than saying to yourself stand or sit up straight or place the hand in a new position and force yourself to remember to do the changes you want to make to your bass playing, there is a specific tool that the Alexander Technique offers.

It is RENEWING THE THOUGHT, and renewing the thought is based on giving ORDERS OF ALLOWANCE to your body. Orders of allowance are conscious orders given to the body telling the body what you want it to do on the double bass. So, when you are making a postural or technique change on the bass, you are bringing to full consciousness what needs to be done to improve how you play the double bass.

Ex: An example of a postural change is that you realize your neck is collapsed and locked when you play. So the order of allowance you give to your body just before you play the double bass is, "My neck is free and my head is leading a lengthening neck and spine upward". An example of a bass technique change to a tight bow arm shoulder is, "My shoulder is free as it supports and moves the bow". And you order/let your body make these changes.

Notice, in both cases you're telling your body what you want with very clear orders or directions. The question is, is saying this once to yourself as you begin your double bass practice session enough? No. That is where the tool of RENEWING THE THOUGHT comes in. Let me explain.

As you have probably experienced in your past on the double bass, when you were making changes to your bass technique or posture, that you would make the changes, and then realize

after 30 minutes of practice you had forgotten about the changes. You had reverted back to your old technique and/or posture.

What did you do? I don't know what you did, but I got angry and redoubled my effort to make sure I did the new changes no matter how mean I was to myself. I eventually got to the point in my classical guitar playing that the new technique or posture were part of my established new way of playing the guitar. But what a painful emotional and physical price I paid to make these changes.

The loving act of renewing the thought is the kindest way to establish changes in your double bass technique or posture. It is the quickest way to replace the old with the new. So, as you practice to establish a new technique or posture in your bass playing, and you realize you forgot the changes, then repeat the order of allowance. This is renewing the thought and letting your body make the improvements to your double bass technique or posture. Very quickly you will internalize and kindly habituate the new way.

How often do you renew the thought? You repeat it gently every time you become aware, as you practice the double bass, that you "forgot" to do the new technique or posture. This truly places you in charge of how you want to play the bass, and it does it very consciously and very kindly.

Double Bass - Directing (Direction) in the Alexander Technique

When you play the double bass with the head flowing upward, this is called DIRECTION or DIRECTING in the Alexander Technique. Directing means that there is an upward flow, upward direction, an upward vector in the bass player's body. This means that the double bass player is ordering the head to lead the spine upward, so that all of the disks and vertebrae are decompressed, so the bass player can have superb posture and technique organization.

This is a central principle of the Alexander Technique – the body is organized in vectors, directing, and not in held positions. Directing is the head LEADING the spine into lengthening. This is not an alignment to be held. Think about it. When you play the double bass you are in constant motion, so trying for a specific placement/position of any part of the body is asking the impossible of your body.

You can look good holding a specific posture and holding a specific double bass technique, but you will eventually feel bad, because you have immobilized part or all of your body, as you simultaneously move to play the bass. You have asked the impossible of your body, which means you have put yourself/body in a double bind. When you attempt to move your body and immobilize it at the same time, the result is pain, strain, compression, and injury.

The Alexander Technique is extraordinary at asking the body to do THE POSSIBLE. It does this incredibly well, because the Alexander Technique uses a belief system and vocabulary that is

very accurate. What I mean, is that what we teach double bass players is very clear and very possible and very kind to the body.

When you are directing on the double bass, there is a very light, powerful, and dynamic spine being led into lengthening upward, as you send your fingers into the bass and hold the bow. Directing is bringing to full consciousness what the healthy happy baby does, but usually loses once in school and possibly on the double bass.

So many double bass players have learned that the goal of fine bass playing may override taking care of your body, and, “that’s just the way it is”. This does not have to happen if you play the double bass directing, you trust your hands to be accurate, and you don’t do anything in your bass technique that will eventually cause harm to the body.

Implicit in directing is that you are taking care of your body as you play the double bass. To make directing an integral part of your bass technique, you have to practice the double bass as you direct. This means that you treat directing the same as your fingers, hands, and arms. (I’m assuming that you treat your fingers, hands, and arms with love and patience, and that is how you will approach reclaiming directing.)

Remember you naturally directed when you were a crawling baby, so when you organize your body on the double bass with direction, you are reclaiming your birthright.

Double Bass - Grounding in the Alexander Technique

Alexander Technique is focused very much on the double bass player finding UP in her body. UP means that there is an upward flow, upward direction, an upward vector in the bass player’s body. This means that the double bass player is ordering the head to lead the spine upward, so that all of the disks and vertebrae are decompressed, so the double bass player can have superb posture and technique organization.

Since many double bass players are pulling downward in their bodies, then it is primarily the Alexander Technique teacher’s job to help these downward pulling bass players organize their bodies with an upward flow. But there is an equal and opposite and just as important component to the organization of the body in the Alexander Technique.

It is called GROUNDING, not down. GROUNDING is the body releasing/lengthening in opposite directions muscularly, so that the body is fully expanded in all directions. The reason for this is twofold.

When a double bass player is grounded, then the bass player is feeling the full support of the chair and the floor, feet fully on the ground. Or the double bass player is feeling the full support of the legs and feet as the bass player stands.

The second reason for grounding is the downward flow in the legs from the hip joints downward, creates space in the hip joints, knees, and ankles.

When there isn't a down flow in a body with a head leading the spine into lengthening on the double bass, it means that the bass player is playing with bunched up muscles, especially in the thighs. The effect of the locked up thigh muscles on the body of the double bass player, is to pull the legs up into the pelvis/torso.

Physically and energetically it is as if you are trying to pull yourself up off of the chair and/or your feet off of the floor, and this means you are playing the double bass without a base. What do I mean?

So many double bass players are only aware of their arms and hands, but do not have an awareness that the shoulders float on and are supported by the torso. The torso is supported by the pelvis, and the pelvis is supported by the legs. Even sitting, it is the musculature of the upper legs – quadriceps, biceps femoris, and psoas, that helps balance the torso upright on the chair.

When this lower body musculature is at ease, releasing to the chair and the floor or the feet in standing, then you are supported from the ground up, but there is another very very important Alexander Technique principle here at work. When you play the double bass it should be with the least amount of muscular work, a balanced body with great posture, and with a high dynamic (high energy).

When you sit or stand for hours playing the double bass with unnecessary tension in your legs, then you are doing totally unnecessary work in your body as you play the bass. Since, in the Alexander Technique, we view technique as what the whole body does when you play the double bass, then locked legs are compromising your bass technique. This excess tension is exhausting you and keeping you from experiencing yourself as supported from the ground up. Simply, you are not grounded.

One final point, whatever you do in your body, no matter how not directly connected to the specific technique of the double bass, it will have an effect on the tone, accuracy, and effort necessary for you to play, for good or bad.

Double Bass - Sensing When You're Hurting Yourself

HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT YOU'RE NOT DOING ANYTHING PHYSICALLY HARMFUL IN YOUR DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE AND POSTURE? This question seems like it would be very easy to answer, even if it isn't always easy for you to create a double bass technique/posture that is benign. One answer is, when you are hurting as you play the bass, you are doing something wrong when you play the double bass.

But what if you aren't hurting, and you're doing something wrong in your double bass technique that will eventually get you in physical trouble. How do you know if this is happening?

There are two signs that hint at future physical problems. First, you can't play the most difficult music written for the double bass that is worth playing, without a struggle, so you can't count on your hands to make it through the most difficult sections of these pieces on the bass. Second, you are physically exhausted on a daily basis after practicing. Maybe a better word for exhausted is that your practice wearies you and your body.

If you are a double bass player who has played for a very long time, and the above two things are happening in your bass playing on a regular basis, and you don't have any consistent aches or pains on the double bass, then you probably have not paid any attention to your struggle and weariness on the bass.

In fact they may have been with you for such a long time, that you never ever questioned whether struggling with the major double bass literature and being exhausted by it was inevitable.

STRUGGLING WITH AND BEING WEARIED BY THE MAJOR LITERATURE OF THE DOUBLE BASS IS NOT INEVITABLE. IT IS HOW YOU LEARNED TO PLAY THE BASS. IT ISN'T THE NATURE OF THE INSTRUMENT TO HURT YOU WITH ITS BEST COMPOSITIONS.

So, you have two choices here. You can hold it together doing what you've always done, and you may never get into physical trouble. Do you really never ever want to explore whether you have what it takes to play the great literature of the double bass with great ease and joy and be ecstatic at the end of a practice session?

Or do you want to preemptively take a very close look at your double bass technique and posture, and discover whether the bass's best music is available to you?

Having said what I just said, let me back up a bit. Most double bass players do not question their technique and find their way to an Alexander Technique teacher, until they get into physical trouble. I can understand it. Many bass players do not want to back up to almost being a beginner again, even for a short period, to solve technique problems they never knew existed or shouldn't exist. What do I mean by "shouldn't exist"?

I mean that after years of training with teachers you believed in, it can be very scary to accept that there may be a much better way to play the double bass. Is confronting this fear worth it? The better question is, are you worth making the changes to how you play the bass, so that you can create the performance you want on the double bass, without struggle and angst?

Yes! But be aware that if you live by the motto, "no strain, no gain", then you can't continue to live by this belief, if you pursue the holy grail of effortless double bass playing you deserve.

Double Bass – Making Technique Changes AND Letting Go of What Isn't Working

There is a very profound thing that the Alexander Technique does for double bass players. It simultaneously teaches the bass player how to do something new and let go of something old at the same time. The more I delve into this, the more unique and profound I realize it is. Let me explain.

IF YOU DON'T LET GO WHAT ISN'T WORKING IN YOUR DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE, AS YOU LEARN SOMETHING NEW IN YOUR BASS TECHNIQUE, THEN YOU WILL COMPROMISE THE CHANGES YOU MAKE AND KEEP THE NEW FROM WORKING.

I see this as physical, psychological, and spiritual. There is a spiritual book called A Course in Miracles. The most famous saying that many people know from A Course in Miracles is, "Love is letting go of fear".

As a double bass player, love is letting go of what is compromising your bass technique, which means letting go of what is creating physical limitations in your double bass playing.

How do you know if you're doing something changeable on the double bass, or if you have built in limitations to your playing? Let me restate this. How WILL you know if much of what appears to be in your way in your bass technique is inherent or learned, if you don't attempt to let it go?

Ex: Play a two octave scale on the double bass, at a moderately fast tempo. Now play it with the most tension possible in your fingers, hands, forearms, and shoulders, at a moderately fast tempo. Now play it with the least amount of tension possible in your fingers, hands, forearms, and shoulders, at a moderately fast tempo.

Repeat the above as many times you wish, noticing the effects of the increased and lowered tension on your playing the double bass. Question: Were you able to consciously raise and lower the tension level in your fingers, hands, forearms, and shoulders?

Congratulations! You've just had your first Alexander Technique lesson. You just discovered you have conscious control over what is fairly invisible to many double bass players, but is one of the main culprits in making you think you have limited talent on the bass.

So, let's say you go to a wonderful double bass teacher who makes very visible changes to your posture and technique on the bass, and all of these changes are valid. Will they work?

THE BEST TECHNIQUE CHANGES TO YOUR DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE WILL NOT WORK, IF THE "INVISIBLE" OLD HABITS THAT COMPROMISED YOUR PLAYING IN THE FIRST PLACE ARE NOT CONSCIOUSLY RELEASED, INHIBITED, AS THEY SAY IN THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE.

Here's a word of encouragement. If you go to an Alexander Technique teacher, and he or she makes big changes to your posture and underlying habits on the double bass, then you have

been limiting your own talent in a big way, so you are not lacking in what it takes to be a fine player.

Double Bass - Do Less and Less Work

When I was an aspiring concert guitarist at the Royal College of Music in London, I developed carpal tunnel syndrome. I went to an Alexander Technique teacher, and realized for the first time that I was ruining my left wrist, because I was pressing the strings incredibly hard to create the cleanest guitar playing possible. I also had poor posture.

If I had continued to do what I was doing to create clean playing on the guitar, I would have permanently damaged my wrist. So, what is the Alexander Technique solution for a double bass player who plays with too much tension, potentially causing physical problems?

PLAY THE DOUBLE BASS WITH FULLY UPRIGHT BALANCED FLOWING POSTURE, AND DO THE LEAST AMOUNT OF PHYSICAL WORK TO GET THE JOB DONE WITH THE HIGHEST DYNAMIC (ENERGY). YOU CAN ALWAYS DO LESS THAN YOU'RE DOING ON THE BASS TO CREATE THE PERFORMANCE YOU WANT. What do I mean?

First, if you have poor posture on the double bass, your body HAS to do more muscular work to hold you up on the bass, because your whole body is off balance. Simply, when you play the double bass with a misaligned posture, your musculature has to compensate for your skeleton stacking up poorly, and you CAN'T do the least amount of work possible as you sit or stand.

Second, if you play the double bass with excess tension, then your whole body is working too hard to create an accurate performance, and you can't do the least amount work necessary to create the physically most effortless performance. You are playing the bass with fear – trying to avoid mistakes, rather than trusting your hands.

What does it mean to play the double bass doing less work? It is about what your whole body is doing as you play the bass. It is about you starting a practice session consciously asking your whole body to do less and less work, as you play a scale. When you do this, then playing a scale is not an unconscious ritual you do at the beginning of your practice session daily.

As you play the scale on the double bass, do a very slow internal inventory of what is happening in your whole body. This means that you observe and ask your thighs to do less work as you play. You observe and ask your neck to release as you play. You observe and ask your hands to do less as you play. You observe and ask your shoulders to float on your torso as you play.

This places your warm up on the double bass in the service of you being in loving conscious control of your whole body, and doing less daily is cumulative. This means that every day on the bass, if you monitor and release the amount of work you are doing from head to toe, you will continue to do less and less muscular work.

You will do less and less work on the double bass to create a superior performance. The psychological and spiritual implications are profound. In other words, as you do less and less work to create the bass performance you want, you will begin to experience playing the double bass as something that does itself truly effortlessly.

Double Bass - Focus Without Tension

If I was to give a traditional definition of FOCUS when playing the double bass, I'd say that focus is ALL of your attention on playing the piece exactly like you want it to sound from beginning to end, with no mistakes and no memory slips.

What I just described is what the Alexander Technique would call end-gaining. End-gaining is performing on the double bass with all of your attention placed on getting to the end of a piece as flawlessly and musically as possible, no matter the physical or emotional price.

So, when I see a double bass player performing this way, there are some very consistent things I see being done physically. The bass player's head is usually pulled down to the double bass, as the bass player tries to guarantee accuracy and no memory slips by focusing like a laser. There is tension in the whole body, as the double bass player holds it together. The bass player's brow is usually furrowed, concentrating on playing well.

What if we flip this over, and have the double bass player perform with the means-whereby. When the bass player performs with the means-whereby, then the double bass player is playing with his or her focus on a fully open and upright posture and ease throughout the whole body, as the performer trusts the body to realize the bass player's intentions.

This is performing in the means and not focusing on the ends. The result is a double bass performance without excess physical tension and poor posture – in other words, not sacrificing his or her body for the result.

The question is, does the double bass player who plays this way create just as wonderful of a performance as a bass player who sits or stands with the determination to play great no matter what? Yes!, and even better, once the double bass player is willing to let go of a lifetime of playing for the best results, no matter the cost.

This is a very powerful and at times emotional thing for a double bass player to go through. After years of placing all of your focus, energy, practice time, and performances on trying to guarantee the best possible playing, and then to place your focus on how easy you can make the bass, by taking 100% care of your body, this can be a very big jolt to your psyche. But, you're worth it!

Back to my question: Will you play better from the means instead of the ends? Yes!, because you will actually end up with an evolving technique and evolving performances that keep getting better and better and better. How?

Because, if every time you sit or stand to warm up, you focus on how upright and balanced your posture on the double bass can be, and how much less muscular work you can do to sit or stand fully at ease on the bass, then you're really in the moment without straining your body.

If, as you warm up, you let go of tension in your arms, hands, fingers, and your brow, as you watch your body do less and less work to create a more effortless and more accurate performance, this is an amazing gift to yourself.

IN OTHER WORDS, IF YOUR FOCUS IS ON HOW LITTLE YOU CAN DO TO CREATE THE MOST POWERFUL AND DYNAMIC PERFORMANCE, THEN YOU TRULY FLIP THE DOUBLE BASS PLAYER'S TRADITIONAL DEFINITION OF FOCUS ON ITS HEAD. FOCUS BECOMES AN ACT OF RELEASE, NOT AN ACT OF HOLDING IT TOGETHER.

Double Bass - Recovery from Pain and Strain

What is the most loving way to recover from pain and/or strain on the double bass? In writing this post, I'm assuming you've done nothing to your hands, arms, or body that requires surgery. There is no actual physical damage, but your musculature is making comfortable playing difficult.

Because of this pain and strain, do you stop playing the double bass until you can return to the instrument pain-free? Or do you use the bass to heal your body, as your own form of rehabilitative therapy? I vote for using the double bass to rehab your body.

IF YOU HAVE CAUSED PAIN AND STRAIN TO YOUR BODY ON THE DOUBLE BASS, THEN YOU ARE DOING SOMETHING WRONG IN YOUR TECHNIQUE AND/OR POSTURE AS YOU PLAY. YOU DO NOT HAVE TO EVENTUALLY HAVE PAIN AND STRAIN ON THE BASS, BECAUSE THIS IS A GIVEN GUARANTEED OCCURRENCE WHEN YOU PLAY THE MOST DIFFICULT LITERATURE WRITTEN FOR THE INSTRUMENT.

So, how do you use the double bass to heal your body? Before I answer this question, I want to say that using the bass as the primary therapy to heal yourself is uniquely Alexandrian. It is a principle central to the Alexander Technique.

THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE TEACHER SEES MOST PAIN AND STRAIN ON THE DOUBLE BASS AS CAUSED BY MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT TECHNIQUE AND POSTURE. WHICH MEANS, OVER TIME YOU WILL EVENTUALLY CAUSE YOURSELF TO GET INTO PHYSICAL TROUBLE, IF YOU ARE SOLELY FOCUSED ON WHAT COMES OUT OF THE BASS, RATHER THAN HOW EFFICIENTLY AND EFFORTLESSLY YOU CAN PLAY.

Now, how do you use the double bass to heal your body? You do what I did when I got carpal tunnel syndrome on the classical guitar. I used the guitar as an activity to find the most mechanically advantageous posture and the most mechanically advantageous technique, as I sat and practiced for hours.

Everything I had ever been taught or learned from guitar teachers and acquired by default on posture and technique on the guitar was questioned. I tested everything I was doing on the guitar, and if it didn't feel balanced and powerful in my whole body when I was doing it, then I replaced what I was doing.

Let's apply this to double bass technique and posture. As you sit or stand with the bass, could you sit or stand the way you're sitting or standing and play for an hour without pain and strain and aches? If not, you're doing something wrong. Can you play and breathe effortlessly nonstop in everything you play? If not, you're doing something wrong. Can you play effortlessly and powerfully equally with both arms? If not, you're doing something wrong.

Let me explain this "you're doing something wrong" statement. It isn't a statement of blame, of saying you've chosen to consciously do bad things on the double bass. It is a statement that says because you are getting into trouble physically on the bass, it is time to take control of everything you do on the double bass. Let the bass be at least the one place in your life where you don't feel off balance, don't strain to play well, and don't have aches and pains.

If you are incredibly perceptive, you can do much of what I suggest alone, but it is an amazing gift to yourself to have the feedback of an Alexander Technique teacher, who can easily and objectively help you find a posture and double bass technique that is loyal to YOUR body.

THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE TEACHER NEVER LETS WHAT SHOULD WORK GET IN THE WAY OF WHAT WORKS.

Double Bass - Your Body's Language and Posture in Performance

When a double bass player is performing, one of the major ways that the bass player conveys what he or she is feeling to the audience is through his or her posture and body language. As an Alexander Technique teacher and former concert guitarist, do I think that there is a negative way to show the audience how much you love what you're doing? Yes.

What is the positive and negative effect on the double bass player and the audience of showing the audience what the bass player is feeling, through the performer's body's movements and postures?

Here's the negative side. If you create a hunkered down posture to convey to the audience that you really really want to play incredibly well, that you're trying like mad to do so, then you're paying a physical price as you perform. What do I mean?

If you are trying very hard to perform well, then by definition you are using too much effort and muscle to get the job done. (We have a saying in the Alexander Technique – DON'T TRY, DO!) It is fairly obvious when the double bass player hunkers down and loses the support of the torso and/or legs for the shoulder girdle, because the bass player now has to tense neck, back, shoulder muscles, and legs to compensate for the body slumping forward.

This also sends excess tension into the hands and arms, as the hands and arms don't have a fully supported shoulder girdle and/or legs backing them up, because the shoulder girdle isn't floating on the torso and ribcage.

SIMPLY, WHEN THE DOUBLE BASS PLAYER CREATES AN EXPRESSIVE POSTURE TO CONVEY HOW MUCH THE BASS PLAYER LOVES WHAT HE OR SHE IS DOING AND HOW WELL THEY WANT TO DO IT, AND THEY USE POOR HUNKERED DOWN POSTURE TO CREATE THIS, THE BASS PLAYER COMPROMISES HIS OR HER TECHNIQUE.

Here is the positive side of showing the audience what you're feeling. In other words, what does a whole body expressive double bass posture look like that doesn't make you pay a physical price, and lets you convey to the audience your love of music?

YOUR HEAD, NECK, AND SPINE ARE RELEASED AND LENGTHENING, AS YOUR ARMS RELEASE OUT OF SHOULDERS FLOATING ON A SUPPORTIVE TORSO BALANCING ON THE SIT BONES, WHETHER YOU'RE STANDING OR SITTING. SO, YOU SWAY FORWARD, SIDEWAYS, AND BACKWARD WITH INCREDIBLE FREEDOM, WITH YOUR HEAD LEADING A CONTINUOUSLY LENGTHENING, FLEXIBLE, AND DECOMPRESSED SPINE UPWARD OFF OF THE SIT BONES, OR FREE LEGS IF YOU'RE STANDING.

IN OTHER WORDS, YOU CONVEY YOUR LOVE OF THE DOUBLE BASS AND ITS MUSIC BY HOW EXPRESSIVELY FREE YOUR BODY CAN BE, AS YOU SIMULTANEOUSLY LET YOUR TORSO BE AT ITS FULL HEIGHT, WIDTH, AND DEPTH. YOU GET TO TAKE UP A WHOLE LOT OF SPACE, RATHER THAN BE HUNKERED DOWN IN A TIGHT BALL, WHICH IS INCREDIBLY HARD ON THE BODY.

When your body is telling the audience you love the music, and you're simultaneously not sacrificing your body and compromising your technique, then the audience gets to be as at ease in their seats as you are on the double bass. The audience will unconsciously (or consciously) pick up on your expansive, expressive, and high energy posture and movements, and they will sit and listen wide open with high energy and lengthening spines and free necks.

Double Bass - Effortless Poor Technique

When you've played the double bass for a long time, then the way you play the bass does itself. This means that even if parts of your double bass technique make playing the bass unnecessarily hard, the way you play the double bass is still doing itself effortlessly.

I've always been fascinated by how effortlessly double bass players do some of the things they do, when some of these things are hard work. So, poor technique is both effortless and hard, interfering with the bass player's freedom to play the most difficult double bass music with ease.

When an internalized poor technique is effortless, it can make it difficult to change, even when a double bass player discovers a better way to play. Why do many bass players resist change for the better?

ONE OF THE WAYS OUR MINDS CAN BLOCK A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER, IS TO TELL US THAT IT IS TOO HARD TO MAKE TECHNIQUE CHANGES AFTER YEARS OF DOING WHAT THE DOUBLE BASS PLAYER HAS DONE. IF THESE KINDS OF THOUGHTS ARE GOING ON IN YOUR HEAD, THEY CAN BE SELF-FULFILLING, MAKING CHANGES TO YOUR TECHNIQUE DIFFICULT.

But what if you tell yourself that making changes to the parts of your double bass technique that are making you pay a physical price can be easy and quick, then you've opened the door to effortless great technique.

WHEN YOU ACCEPT THAT MAKING CHANGES TO YOUR DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE CAN BE EASY, WHEN YOU HAVE BELIEVED THAT CHANGES ARE HARD YOUR WHOLE PLAYING LIFE, YOU'VE OPENED YOURSELF TO BEING A GOOD LEARNER. What is a good learner?

A GOOD LEARNER is a double bass player who finds great joy in making changes to his or her bass technique, because it is fun to make the double bass easier and easier to play. This means you may have to revisit how you were taught the bass as a child.

If your double bass teacher and others created a pressurized experience, then this means you were always being pushed by the teacher, others, and yourself to play better and better. The result is that gaining control of your bass technique needed to be done as quickly as possible, no matter the physical and emotional costs.

IN OTHER WORDS, WHEN YOU COULDN'T DO SOMETHING ON THE DOUBLE BASS, THE EXPERIENCE OF LEARNING SOMETHING NEW WASN'T TO BE SAVORED, IT WAS TO BE GOTTEN THROUGH AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE.

So, here you are now, and you want to make changes to some of your double bass technique. You've got a couple of choices. You can come to the bass as the child you were, and strain and rush to make the changes as quickly as possible. Or you can come to the double bass with faith that you can learn easily and enjoy this joyous time of technique transformation, between what you have always done and what you will be able to do guaranteed.

So, is it possible to psychologically flip what you've always believed, that learning is hard, to learning is easy? LEARNING IS EASY! BUT YOU'LL NEED TO FORGIVE YOUR DOUBLE BASS TEACHER AND YOURSELF AND WHOEVER ELSE PRESSURIZED YOUR LEARNING, IF YOU DON'T WANT TO KEEP GETTING EVERYONE BACK, BY NOT LETTING YOURSELF BE AS GOOD AS YOU CAN BE ON THE BASS.

Double Bass - How Your Body Can Compromise Your Technique

WHEN YOUR POSTURE IS NOT AS GOOD AS YOUR DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE, THEN YOU CANNOT PLAY AS WELL AS YOU COULD WITH A POSTURE AS GOOD AS YOUR BASS TECHNIQUE.

Here is a very simple explanation for this. By definition, poor posture takes a whole lot more muscle to maintain than balanced posture. Balanced posture in the Alexander Technique means that you have such a gentle balanced posture going on in your body as you play the double bass, that sitting or standing fully upright is very close to effortless.

When a double bass player with poor posture goes to an Alexander Technique teacher who makes gentle radical changes to how the bass player sits or stands with the double bass, why does it feel like a whole lot more work to sit or stand at ease with the bass?

A double bass player's posture with the bass is usually a long term devolution of the body getting in shape to handle poor posture. What does this mean? It means that over time, if your posture with the double bass becomes poorer and poorer, then your musculature handles these usually gradual changes, as you become more and more off balance, by using too much muscle and you become more and more immobile.

Think about it. If, as you age and/or try to play the double bass better and better, you hunker down and collapse your torso and tense your legs more and more, you are actually doing more and more muscular work to play the bass. So, as you get older and usually weaker, you are working harder to play the double bass, when you should be evolving a technique and posture over the years, that makes playing the bass more and more effortless to sit or stand with and play.

If your posture is degrading over the years on the double bass, and you are tensing more and more as you go further and further off balance, then your technique is going to suffer. You cannot keep the tension of your whole body's poor posture out of your shoulders, arms, and hands.

There is another side to this issue of posture compromising your double bass technique. YOU CAN BE IN GOOD POSTURAL ALIGNMENT, BUT IF YOU ARE USING MORE MUSCLE THAN IS NECESSARY TO SUSTAIN GOOD POSTURE ON THE BASS, YOU WILL STILL COMPROMISE YOUR DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE. This is core to how the Alexander Technique works with bass players.

Simply, if you are doing UNNECESSARY work in any part of your body as you play the double bass, you will have a negative effect on your bass technique. This means the tension level will rise in your shoulders, arms, and hands.

What if you created a balanced posture that evolved using less and less muscle on the double bass over the years? What if there was constant flow in your body on the bass? What if your whole body embodied effortless double bass technique? What if you played the bass as if you were getting younger and younger every year?

Double Bass - Getting in Playing Shape

GETTING IN SHAPE ON THE DOUBLE BASS IS THE ENDS NOT THE MEANS. What do I mean?

IF YOU FOCUS ON HOW YOU PLAY WHAT YOU'RE PLAYING ON THE DOUBLE BASS, RATHER THAN ON TRYING TO ACQUIRE GREATER STAMINA, THEN YOU WILL NOT COMPROMISE THE QUALITY OF YOUR PLAYING, AND YOU WILL END UP IN SHAPE ANYWAY. What do I mean you will end up in shape anyway?

If you put in the practice time, you will get in shape. That's a given. But if you raise the level of tension in your body in an attempt to build up your stamina on the double bass, you will compromise your technique.

In fact you will change your technique in a negative way, if you spend hours and hours of practice time with the intention of getting in playing shape by hunkering down and trying harder and harder to build your stamina on the double bass.

Getting in shape on the double bass while learning a difficult piece can create physical problems for the bass player. What do I mean? If you are focused on getting in shape or getting the piece learned, then you may not be paying attention to the quality of your technique as you play. It's like a runner who wants to get to the end of his run, no matter how poorly he runs.

When you focus only on the quality of your technique as you practice scales, arpeggios, chords, and/or difficult pieces on the double bass to increase your stamina on the bass, then you are doing two loving things. You're getting in shape and you're reinforcing the valid technique that you've chosen for the double bass. In the southern part of the United States where I'm from, we call this a twofer (two for one).

When you get in shape on the double bass not compromising your technique, you are really giving yourself an amazing gift. It means when you play for long periods and/or play difficult pieces, that you can count on your technique not to degrade. This means that you have established a powerful habit of placing yourself first, so you don't just hunker down and do whatever it takes to get to the end of a piece or concert.

Making music is not an athletic event, where winning may be enough. Making music is about offering a gift to yourself and the listeners, and sacrificing your body is unnecessary.

IF YOU ARE SACRIFICING YOUR BODY NEEDLESSLY TO PERFORM, THEN YOU WILL NOT BE OFFERING YOURSELF AND THE LISTENERS THE SAME QUALITY GIFT PHYSICALLY, PSYCHOLOGICALLY, EMOTIONALLY, AND SPIRITUALLY, THAT YOU WOULD BE OFFERING IF YOU TOOK CARE OF YOURSELF MOMENT TO MOMENT ON THE DOUBLE BASS.

What I just wrote is core to how I teach the Alexander Technique, and how I write about the Alexander Technique in my ebook on the double bass.

Double Bass - Integrating New Technique and Posture

To INTEGRATE changes into your double bass technique and posture is to MAKE THE CHANGES RIGHT. You stop resisting the changes to your posture and technique that you know are valid, and you accept that they are better. In other words, you stop MAKING THE CHANGES WRONG and you let yourself learn easily.

The reason that incorporating changes to your double bass posture and technique can seem to take forever, is you are unconsciously resisting them. On the surface you really see how valid the changes are, but unconsciously they are a threat to who you are on the bass, because of what you've always done.

Integrating these changes is much easier than suppressing them. A major reason for suppressing them, is because they challenge what you've always believed is good double bass technique and posture. And the stronger your identification with what you've always done on the bass, the more resistance to the new, and the slower you integrate.

MAKING SOMETHING WRONG is how double bass players block what is in their best interests. When you integrate something, you aren't doing something, you are letting go of the massive work it takes to resist what is new and true.

In other words you cease to make the changes wrong, rather than work at making them right. You have to work at making these changes right, if unconsciously you are making the desired changes to your technique and posture wrong. This is the psychological equivalent of non-doing.

In the Alexander Technique non-doing is to do the physically minimum necessary to play the double bass. It means you have created a posture and technique that allows you to play the bass as effortlessly as you can. When you truly non-do, it feels as if playing accurately is effortless.

SO, WHEN YOU INTEGRATE CHANGES INTO YOUR DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE AND POSTURE THAT MAKE THE BASS MUCH EASIER TO PLAY, YOU HAVE TO LET GO OF RESISTING WHAT IS RIGHT. THIS IS A STATE OF BEING; IT IS NOT WORKING TO DO SOMETHING ELSE.

You can't integrate changes that are loving to your technique and posture on the double bass, as long as you aren't experiencing how much work you do to maintain a technique and posture that makes playing the bass hard work.

This sounds obvious, but it is amazing how sneakily a double bass player's ego can make it impossible for the bass player to realize how much hard work the double bass player is putting in to do what he or she always done on the bass. In other words, the double bass player is unconsciously blocking him or herself from being able to sense how hard their inefficient

technique or posture is. Or, if the bass player's technique and posture is good, how much unnecessary muscular effort the double bass player is making.

So, let the loving new changes to your double bass technique and posture be right, and they'll quickly become an effortless part of your playing.

Double Bass - Clearly Stating the Obscured Obvious

IS THE OBVIOUS STATED EVER TOO OBVIOUS? What do I mean? If I point out to a double bass player something they are doing technically and/or posturally, am I ever telling the bass player something that is so obvious that it doesn't need to be stated? No! Never! Nyet! Why?

Because what is so incredibly obvious to me as an Alexander Technique teacher and possibly other double bass players – that what the player is doing technically and posturally is blocking the bass player's ability to play his or her effortless best, and this is NOT usually obvious to the performer.

There is a psychological equivalent to this. We can usually see what the other person is doing that is not good. But the person rarely can see how he or she is harming themselves with their habitual behaviors and words.

So, over time as a double bass player works with me to make technique and postural changes that have been compromising the bass player's ability to play his or her best, I point out EVERYTHING I observe in the double bass player as he or she plays, whether I suggest they change it or not. Why do I do this?

THE MORE CONSCIOUS A DOUBLE BASS PLAYER IS ABOUT HIS OR HER POSTURE AND TECHNIQUE ON THE BASS, THE MORE LIKELY OVER TIME THE DOUBLE BASS PLAYER WILL NOT CREATE POOR PLAYING HABITS.

The perfect analogy is general human posture. The main reason most people look old as they age, is because all of their unconscious poor postural habits become more pronounced over time. So, many, if not most people, end up slumped over and shuffling as they age.

To me the best and most famous example of not being conscious enough was Fred Astaire. When he was young, he had what was considered by Alexander Technique teachers to be the most amazing postural use when he danced or acted in his movies. When he got old he lost this incredible postural good use. Why? I don't believe he was conscious of exactly what it was he did posturally that made him such an exceptional dancer.

I don't mean he didn't know how good he was. I believe he didn't consciously know how he organized his whole body to move better than any other dancer in the world, so he lost what he had as he aged.

What are the effects on a double bass player's technique and posture when an Alexander Technique teacher brings everything the bass player is doing to consciousness? IT MEANS THE DOUBLE BASS PLAYER IS GIVEN THE ABILITY TO CHOOSE EVERYTHING THE BASS PLAYER DOES ON THE BASS TECHNICALLY AND POSTURALLY; TO CHOOSE THE MOST EFFORTLESS POSTURE AND TECHNIQUE, AND TO BE ABLE TO SUSTAIN OVER A LIFETIME THE MOST EFFORTLESS TECHNIQUE AND POSTURE EFFORTLESSLY.

I know this is a mouth full, but you cannot underestimate what knowing what you do on the double bass consciously can mean to a lifetime of bass playing. It means you have the tools and the awareness to do the least amount of work to sustain the technique and posture you have fully consciously chosen to use on the double bass.

It also means that because you are so completely aware of what you do from head to toe on the double bass and how you do what you do, that you have a complete set of tools to troubleshoot what you're doing wrong, if you ever get in trouble on the bass. THE LIKELIHOOD OF YOU GETTING INTO TROUBLE GOES DOWN DRAMATICALLY WHEN YOU ARE AWARE OF THE OBVIOUS.

Double Bass - Thinking about the Bass

When you think about the double bass away from the bass, what do you feel? Do you feel you can't wait to play? Do you fear whether you'll play well when you practice or have a performance? Do you usually assume you'll play wonderfully whenever you think of playing the double bass?

When I was still pursuing a concert career on the classical guitar and simultaneously working out emotional problems, I discovered *New Pathways to Piano Technique* by Luigi Bonpensiere, and I applied what Bonpensiere said to my guitar playing.

Bonpensiere said if you know what you want to play and trust your hands to play it, you can't miss if you play with total abandon. I did this and I experienced the faith of the prodigy on the guitar from that point on.

I was able to trust my hands to play accurately effortlessly. I went from practicing the guitar trying not to make a mistake to expecting myself not to miss. And I didn't, and when I did miss I expected myself not to miss the next time, and I didn't.

As long as I was actually playing the guitar and withdrawing all effort to get the right notes, I experienced this extraordinary faith creating incredible accuracy on the guitar. But there was a problem that showed up away from the guitar.

Away from the guitar I would have these intense feelings of self-doubt, when I thought about playing the guitar. Even though I had experienced supreme accuracy on the instrument a few

hours before, I began scaring myself in my thoughts feeling I couldn't count on myself to play with effortless precision.

And I mean really feeling scared that I couldn't replicate what I had done on the guitar again. You need to understand that when I was playing the guitar with faith and trust and getting out of the way of my hands, even when I missed, I had stopped attacking myself for making mistakes.

This was so profound, because in a very short time I went from being afraid of an instrument that I had a love/hate relationship with for 15 years, to I can't wait to play. So, these incredibly painful doubts about whether I'd have to go back to beating myself up whenever I made a mistake were overwhelming.

What did I do? I realized how cruel I was being to myself with these doubts and overwhelming fears. Then I said to myself, "I have no choice, if I trust my hands, I can't miss. Trusting my hands/self is the only choice I have that is loving". It was the "I have no choice" part that flipped me out of my fear and doubts. It took away my insane choice to keep frightening myself, whenever I thought about not being able to do what I wanted on the guitar.

This has to become the same for you on the double bass. Imagine never playing the bass again afraid of making mistakes, because you know you don't have to make the same mistake the next time. And you won't have to avoid the bass ever again.

Double Bass - Sensing What Is Happening

If a double bass player can't sense what is interfering with the bass player's ability to do what he or she wants on the double bass, then instead of the bass player assuming there is something wrong with the player's posture and/or technique, the double bass player may come to one of two conclusions. THE DOUBLE BASS PLAYER DOESN'T UNDERSTAND WHY HE OR SHE CAN'T DO WHAT HE OR SHE WANTS, OR THE BASS PLAYER'S BODY IS FLAWED AND DOESN'T HAVE WHAT IT TAKES.

When you can't sense whether you are causing a problem in your body on the double bass, do you assume you aren't? If you assume you're a victim of circumstances, then you're tossing out cause and effect. THERE IS ALWAYS CAUSE AND EFFECT, EVEN IF WE CAN'T SENSE THE CAUSE.

Here's a perfect example. If you have always played the double bass with a specific level of tension in your hands, arms, and body, and that tension is causing wear and tear and limiting your ability to play what you want to play, and you can't sense you're doing this, because you've done it all of your life, what do you do?

This is a very crucial point in time here. What I mean is this is a point between sensing you are causing your postural and technique problems on the double bass, since you aren't sure you're

causing your problems, and finally accepting you are, and finding a way to feel what you've been doing to your body on the bass for years.

It is such a weird experience to bring to consciousness what is your norm. I'm doing this right now in my emotional life. I am struggling to realize and ACCEPT that I have been defending myself from the world for so long, that this is me doing something that doesn't serve me. What I mean, is I believe I create 100% of everything in my life, and since there are still unloving occurrences in my life, then I have to be doing something to cause them.

That something is me constantly protecting myself. There is Lesson 135 in the book 'A Course in Miracles', "If I defend myself I am attacked". I believe this, but until now, I kept blinding myself to the fact that I was defending myself 24/7.

When you finally realize that your norm on the double bass is damaging your body, or at the very least compromising your ability to play what you want to play, then you have the ability to choose whether to continue to do what you've done or choose to do what works.

It is a double bass player's inability to sense what he or she has been doing to his or herself on the bass that allows the double bass player to separate cause and effect. I believe it is our inability to sense what we do to ourselves in so many areas, from sports to psychological and emotional habits, that keep us from realizing that we have the power to stop causing ourselves grief and be in loving control of our whole existence.

Double Bass - The Tools to Be the Master

IF YOU HAVE NOT ALLOWED YOURSELF TO PERSONALIZE YOUR POSTURE, TECHNIQUE, AND INTERPRETATION ON THE DOUBLE BASS, THEN YOU ARE STILL THE STUDENT, WHETHER YOU'RE FIFTEEN OR FIFTY.

You have a choice here. I believe that some double bass teachers and some Alexander Technique teachers do not fully consciously teach bass players to be their own arbiter of what they do technically, posturally, and musically. THIS DOESN'T MATTER, IF YOU RECOGNIZE IT.

What do I mean? If you are working with a wonderful double bass teacher and/or a wonderful Alexander Technique teacher, it is up to you to take what they teach you and be able to be your own teacher and solve your own postural, technique, and musical problems. In other words, be your own teacher away from these mentors and even with these mentors.

This means that as you work with these teachers, you want to start making your own decisions as to what works, once you're able to generalize the wisdom of your double bass and Alexander Technique teachers onto the bass. This will allow you to leave them and not feel lost, continuing to only mimic your teachers.

It isn't that you shouldn't use these teachers as resources once you're on your own. But once you're on your own, if you can't troubleshoot solutions to technique, posture, and interpretation, then you are still the student of the master, even if you aren't working regularly with your masters anymore.

I had a pianist as an Alexander Technique student, who said that whenever she ran into a problem on the piano, she would ask herself what would I say, if she was in an Alexander Technique session with me. I asked her what she meant.

She said that the solution she was seeking was a combination of using the Alexander Technique principles of good technique and body use I taught her, moving me out of the way, and then finding her personal solution that was 100% loyal to what she wanted from the instrument.

This is how you become the master. YOU GO TO THE DOUBLE BASS TEACHER AND/OR ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE TEACHER TRUSTING YOURSELF. So many music students go to bass teachers or Alexander Technique teachers feeling that they don't have the ability to discern what is best for themselves.

What I mean is that the double bass student has always had a bass teacher tell them what to do, so he or she may have never considered what they would rather do in technique or interpretation radically different than the teacher.

There is a fine line between trust and rebellion. SIMPLY, IF YOU CHOOSE A TECHNIQUE, POSTURE, AND INTERPRETATION ON THE DOUBLE BASS THAT PHYSICALLY MAKES THE BASS EASY TO PLAY AND OPENS YOUR HEART AND OTHERS' HEARTS IN PERFORMANCE, THEN YOU ARE MAKING LOVING DECISIONS, AND YOU ARE YOUR OWN MASTER.

If what you choose is either constant dismissing of what you were taught, and/or gets you in trouble in your technique, posture, and lowers your life energy, then you are in rebellion. Rebellion is NOT being your own master. It is you still being only the student, because all you are doing on the double bass is in reaction to teachers who aren't even in your life anymore.

Double Bass - Gently Being in the Gap Between the Old and New Technique

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU HAVE FINALLY ACCEPTED THAT ELEMENTS OF YOUR TECHNIQUE AND POSTURE AREN'T SERVING YOU ON THE DOUBLE BASS, AND YOU KNOW WHAT YOU WANT TO DO MUSICALLY, BUT YOU CAN'T DO IT YET? This is the gap I'm referring to, which is between letting go of the old and integrating the new.

Many double bass players get stuck in this place. This means they attempt to revamp their technique and posture, but only partially do so. They may end up with an improved technique and posture, but they don't complete the process of adopting what works best.

THE GAP can be a pretty uncomfortable place to be, because the new way of playing isn't second nature, and you aren't playing as well as you did with your old technique and posture.

There are two things that need to happen for you to be able to complete the process of revamping your technique and posture. First, you stop MAKING IT WRONG to feel out of control and uncomfortable as you change your technique and posture. The second thing is that you enjoy how it feels to put 100% of your attention on taking care of your body and mind as you integrate something very new.

All of the above comes down to one central thing. YOU WILL MAKE THE CHANGES NECESSARY TO BECOME THE DOUBLE BASS PLAYER YOU CAN BE, IF YOU OFFER YOURSELF LOVING PATIENCE IN THE GAP.

The longer you've played the double bass the way you've played it, the more you identify with your established technique and posture. When you change what you've always done on the bass, then your ego may feel threatened. A threatened ego will do anything to stop change, even if the change is for the better, because egos are amoral, are only about survival. So, if your ego is threatened by the new technique and posture you're attempting to learn on the double bass, it will probably do two things.

The ego will subconsciously slow down your ability to integrate the new technique and posture, and then it will tell you it is too hard and will take too long to make the necessary changes. But the changes aren't too hard and are worth it, if they are going to make the double bass easier to play. As to taking too long, if you realize you are resisting incorporating the new posture and technique, then you now have a choice.

You can stand up to your ego, and tell yourself you are doing what is loving and worth it in making these changes. Or you can give in and not fight for yourself. The part of your ego that will do anything to manipulate you into not making the loving decisions to make the double bass more user friendly is a bully. If you are willing to stand up to the bully, then like any bully, it will back down.

Offer yourself love, as you commit to winning by completing the changes to your technique and posture. This makes every moment spent on the double bass an affirmation of self-love, and the bass not a place to preserve the status quo.

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE AFRAID AS MOTIVATION TO MASTER THE NEW TECHNIQUE IN THE GAP, BEFORE YOU MASTER THE NEW TECHNIQUE.

Double Bass - Facial Expressions in Performance

When are facial expressions an enhancement of your double bass playing, and when are facial expressions a detriment to your performing?

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS IN PLAYING THE DOUBLE BASS ARE A POSITIVE WHEN THEY'RE SHOWING THE JOY YOU'RE FEELING WHEN YOU PERFORM. THEY'RE A NEGATIVE WHEN THEY'RE REINFORCING YOUR STRUGGLE TO MAKE IT THROUGH THE PERFORMANCE.

The question is, do the facial expressions of intense determination to make it through a piece help? No! You may make it, but it will be at a physical cost. What a double bass player's face does when it is "helping" you hold it together, is that tense facial expressions of determination are reinforcing tension and poor posture and poor technique throughout the body.

Posture and technique can still be poor even if the double bass player's technique and posture are inherently good, if the bass player is tensing to hold the performance together. What this means is you can play from beautiful postural alignment and elegant double bass technique, but the moment you tense your face and whole body, you are compressing all of the joints in your body.

You may look good, but this excessive facial and whole body tension means you AREN'T doing the posture and technique that you appear to be doing.

What role do facial expressions play in compromising your double bass playing? There is a term used in weightlifting. It is called "recruiting". Recruiting during a lift means you tense up parts of your body unnecessarily for the lift. The most obvious example is scrunching up your face as you lift. It does not help, and it is usually unconscious to the weightlifter.

So, when you "recruit" your face to play the double bass, you are doing way too much unnecessary work to play. Simply, you cannot play the bass with struggle in your face, without this affecting your technique and posture.

There is another important piece to this. What do you think the audience is thinking and experiencing when they watch you struggle in a performance with your face telegraphing your struggle to the listeners? IT STRESSES OUT THE AUDIENCE! This means the listeners can't truly enjoy the performance, if it is obvious you're on the verge of losing it.

Years ago I went to see a very famous classical guitarist in concert. You could tell by his nonstop changing facial expressions (almost facial contortions), he was really afraid as he performed. It was intolerable for me. He was truly a fine performer, so I closed my eyes for the rest of the concert.

When you apply the Alexander Technique principles of good posture and great technique to double bass playing, one of the best gifts you can give to yourself, is to lovingly make your whole body part of your bass technique.

What does this mean? It means that you don't unconsciously let any part of your body compromise making the double bass as easy to play as possible. For yourself and the audience, this gift of having a joyous face reinforce beautiful technique and posture and interpretation

rather than struggle, is a remarkable thing to offer to everyone listening. So, let your face express your love and contentment with your performance, rather than reinforcing discontent and fear.

ISN'T IT TIME THAT TRYING AND STRUGGLE BE RELEASED FROM YOUR DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE?

Double Bass - Not Believing What the Majority Believes

My experience is that many double bass players believe it is easier to make mistakes, than believe it is easier to play the right notes. What if these double bass players are wrong, even if the evidence says that they're all correct?

What I mean by the evidence proving them right, is that most double bass players find making mistakes consistently easy, because they make mistakes easily.

As an Alexander Technique teacher, when I look at the way most people use their bodies on the double bass, many bass players move poorly and wear out their bodies over time. Does this mean poor posture and poor use is easier than good posture and good use on the bass?

IT IS INCREDIBLY HARD ON YOU EMOTIONALLY TO PLAY THE DOUBLE BASS BELIEVING IT IS DIFFICULT TO PLAY ACCURATELY, THAN TO BELIEVE IT IS EASY TO PLAY THE RIGHT NOTES. This means every time you play, at least at the deepest emotional level, you will approach the bass with fear, if you believe the bass is a difficult instrument.

So, it seems to me, it is actually incredibly hard to approach the double bass hedging your bets. Hedging your bets means that when you begin to play, you DON'T assume you will play the notes easily and accurately.

I really like challenging double bass players on what they believe. When you go with what the majority believes, you're going to find the bass a struggle to play with ease and accuracy. But what about the double bass prodigies that find the bass easy to play?

In a very perverse way many double bass players find it easier NOT to trust themselves to play with extraordinary ease, so is this going with the flow? What do I mean?

IF IT IS EFFORTLESS TO BELIEVE THE DOUBLE BASS IS DIFFICULT, AND THAT ITS BEST MUSIC IS HARD TO PLAY, THEN YOU ARE EFFORTLESSLY BELIEVING THE BASS IS HARD.

Beliefs and habits based on what the majority of double bass players believe about the bass are pretty unforgiving, when these beliefs and habits make the instrument something to be feared.

Again, what about the double bass prodigies? They have found a way to make the bass easy, and accuracy and interpretation something they do with ease and facility.

So, what is the hardest part of making the double bass a joy to play? Is the bass hard to play, or does it seem incredibly difficult to give up your belief that the instrument is hard to play, given that probably the majority of double bass players frighten each other to death when talking about the finest bass repertoire?

Look, I understand. As a former concert guitarist, I believed the guitar was an incredibly difficult instrument to play with ease and accuracy. At a certain point in my twenties I realized I was wrong.

IT FINALLY BECAME EASIER FOR ME TO ACCEPT THAT THE CLASSICAL GUITAR COULD BE EASY, THAN TO GO WITH THE MAJORITY OF GUITARISTS I HAD KNOWN, WHO BELIEVED THE GUITAR WAS INCREDIBLY DIFFICULT TO PLAY WONDERFULLY, ACCURATELY, AND MUSICALLY.

Double Bass - It Is Easier to Be a Great Player

IT IS EASY TO BE A GREAT DOUBLE BASS PLAYER. IT IS HARD TO NOT LET YOURSELF BE A GREAT DOUBLE BASS PLAYER. I really enjoy being on the flip side of what most people believe is true. What I mean, is that “common sense” says it’s hard to become an extraordinary bass player, and it is easy to be a mediocre player.

It is the opposite! Let me explain. If you are practicing two hours or more a day, why not become extraordinary? There is a cause and effect thing happening here. What you expect of yourself on the double bass – how you practice, and whether you’re choosing the best technique (most effortless way to play), will determine whether you’re standing still as you practice, or are choosing a way to make the bass a place to fully express yourself with ease.

Whether it’s conscious or unconscious, I believe most double bass players believe it is much harder work to become a fine player, than muddle through being an average player. There are two major considerations here that show it is much harder not to be as good as you can be.

The first is, if you are an average double bass player, do you have the potential to be a great bass player. If you have the potential to be a great player, and you’re practicing consistently, and you’re hiding this from yourself, THEN YOU ARE IN PAIN.

Why? Because if you really love the double bass and its music, and you’re muddling through, isn’t this an attack on yourself? What I mean, is that if you know what you would love to hear coming out of the bass as you play, but all you’re offering yourself is pain, strain, struggle, and boring interpretations, this is incredibly unloving, when you could do infinitely better.

The second major unloving thing a double bass player can do to him or herself, is to believe it is too hard to be as good as want to be and can be. “Too hard” is based 100% on a lie. IT IS TOO HARD NOT TO PRACTICE SMART, SO THAT YOU ELIMINATE ALL OF YOUR TECHNIQUE WEAKNESSES AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE, BY CHOOSING A TECHNIQUE AND POSTURE THAT MAKE THE BASS EASY.

But this isn't all, when it comes to beliefs that make being an extraordinary double bass player too hard. When I was an aspiring concert guitarist, I was told that I had to think about the guitar ALL OF THE TIME, if I wanted to be one of the best concert guitarists. WHAT A CRUEL THING TO TEACH A KID!

I believe there are a whole lot of double bass players out there that believe smart limited practice sessions aren't enough. That if you want to be any good, you have to eat, sleep, drink, and think bass 24/7. I can't think of a quicker way to burn out a double bass player, than to NEVER get away from the instrument.

PRACTICE A LIMITED AMOUNT OF HOURS WITH INCREDIBLY CLEAR AND SMART GOALS WITHOUT SACRIFICING OUR BODY, AND "PUT THE DOUBLE BASS DOWN" WHEN YOU'RE NOT PRACTICING THE BASS OR IN YOUR HEAD.

When you "put the double bass down" most of the day, then it is psychologically and emotionally possible to commit 100% to effortless playing when you "pick the bass up". Then it will be easy to be a wonderful double bass player without exhausting yourself or attacking yourself by muddling through in your designated finite practice time.

Double Bass - Main Reason for NOT Committing to Great Playing

IT IS TOO HARD TO MAINTAIN GREAT PLAYING, SO IT IS EASIER TO NOT ATTEMPT TO BECOME AN EXTRAORDINARY DOUBLE BASS PLAYER. Is this true? I believe that if bass players look deeply at their beliefs about being great players, this is the one that would be at the top of the list for not striving to be their best.

It is a lie, but it is an extraordinarily powerful self-fulfilling lie. What I mean, is that if it is running your performing life, then it is running your whole life. This means you will probably not let yourself be great at anything.

There is an exception to being great at anything. You may find a way to allow yourself to be a great writer or painter. These are activities that have completion. But as a performing double bass player, every time you perform for yourself and/or someone else, it can be an excruciating test of constantly proving how good you are.

Is there a way around this, so that letting yourself be a wonderful double bass player is easier than not? YES!

What has to happen? You have to first bring to consciousness that you believe it is intolerably hard to sustain great double bass playing once you've achieved it. You have to realize that probably you are projecting onto your listeners that they are pressuring you to be a consistently great bass player.

Nobody makes us do anything! We make ourselves do everything we do and then may blame others, if we are making our lives too hard to tolerate. If you feel nonstop pressure from others to strain to sustain great double bass playing, ONLY you are doing this to yourself.

So, how do you attain great double bass playing and sustain great bass playing effortlessly? Try this affirmation: "It is easy for me to be a great double bass player all of the time." What was your response to this affirmation? I bet you felt this was an incredibly huge lie.

What if you wrote and said this to yourself until you believed it? It is possible. But are you willing to give up your sacrosanct belief that to sustain greatness on the double bass is unbelievably exhausting? If you are willing to repeat this affirmation consistently enough, and if you are willing to entertain the possibility that sustaining great bass playing over the years is easy, then you will eventually accept this truth.

One final piece to the psychological aspect of great double bass playing, you may have to do some psychotherapy to uncover and release the reasons why you may want to hold onto great bass playing as too hard.

What I just described is the psychological aspect of attaining great double bass playing. What about the physical component of great bass playing sustained effortlessly? If you are willing to stop making the great double bass playing too hard to sustain psychologically, then you may as well go all of the way, and look at what physically works and doesn't work in your bass technique and posture at the instrument.

If you only get out of your way psychologically and accept being a great double bass player can be easy to allow day in and day out, then you do NOT want a bass technique that proves you're wrong.

What do I mean? If your double bass technique isn't based on letting go of what doesn't work physically, which means it makes playing the greatest bass repertoire unnecessarily hard, then you are putting yourself in a double bind. This double bind means that if you know that your playing doesn't have to be a struggle to do and sustain, and if your technique will NOT allow this to happen, then your ego gets to win, and you may not let yourself play wonderfully day in and day out.

Then you get to say, "I was right. It is too hard to be a wonderful double bass player consistently." There is only one problem with this. It is a lie. You cannot live by a lie and not hurt. So, I ask you to entertain the possibility that great bass playing can be easy to allow day to day to day to day.

One final point: If you allow yourself to become and be a great double bass player without pain and strain and struggle, then the final piece that makes this easy is that you always play for yourself and others as a gift, as an offering of love.

Double Bass - What Has Happened When You Can't Do What You've Always Done?

Two things have come to a head when you can't do what you've always done on the double bass. Physically you are either hurting too much or can't do what you want to do and one or both. The second thing is that emotionally and psychologically you are unwilling or unable to do what you've always done, and this is intolerable.

It seems like the physical and the psychological could occur at different times, but they always happen simultaneously.

This is a real crossroads. Because this is the place where a double bass player either does something radically new or quits. What has to happen for the bass player to continue?

YOU HAVE TO BE WILLING TO TRULY LISTEN TO YOURSELF. THIS MEANS THAT YOUR BODY AND YOUR EMOTIONS AND THOUGHTS ARE TELLING YOU THAT WHAT YOU'RE DOING ISN'T WORKING. Are you willing to hear this? If you're not, you will probably quit or relegate your double bass playing to the background in your life.

If you are willing to hear the emotional signals and body signals that refuse to go away, then you will have to change your technique or at least parts of it, and you also need to reassess why you play the double bass – your approach to practice and performance.

What do I mean by body and emotional signals? When you are not listening to what your body and your mind are telling you about your approach to playing the bass, then negative emotions and physical pain and discomfort intensify to get your attention.

Another way of saying this, is that you're doing things with your technique and emotional approach to the double bass that are not loving. You have suppressed the escalating physical and emotional pain you're in, because you believed your bass technique and attitude toward practice and performing was "just fine".

This place in your career can be viewed negatively or positively, and whether you view it negatively or positively, you can use it to make positive changes in your technique.

If you view it negatively, and use it to make positive changes to your technique, you probably will not use it to make loving emotional changes and stop using negative reinforcement to improve your playing. What this means is you will be tough on yourself, as you adopt a double bass technique that makes it possible to do what you want.

But what if you use positive reinforcement, playing only as a gift for yourself, to make the technique changes that make all of the great double bass literature available to you?

If you are able and willing to do this, then this place you're in that is a crisis emotionally and technically, can be a turning point. You can finally bring to consciousness how much you have not wanted to learn the double bass the way you learned it, but didn't know that was the problem.

THIS IS WHAT I MEAN BY, "WHAT HAS HAPPENED WHEN YOU CAN'T DO WHAT YOU'VE ALWAYS DONE?" If you've been in this place for a long time and have suppressed it, it may be tough to make the changes you will have to make. But you have no choice, because now you are too conscious to keep doing what you've done.

In other words, you can't put the genie of what has finally come to consciousness back in the bottle. If you try to not feel what you're feeling physically and emotionally, you won't believe how much more you will hurt physically and emotionally.

IT'S TOO LATE IF YOUR EMOTIONS AND TECHNIQUE ARE INTOLERABLE. YOU MAY AS WELL CHOOSE LOVING SOLUTIONS TO BOTH, OR YOU CAN MUDDLE THROUGH, OR YOU CAN QUIT.

CHOOSE WHAT IS THE TRULY LOVING SOLUTION FOR YOU ON THE DOUBLE BASS EMOTIONALLY, TECHNICALLY, AND POSTURALLY, AND YOU WILL WONDER WHY YOU EVER PUT OFF DOING THIS.

Double Bass - Resistance to Change Can Disempower What Works

THE GREATER THE TECHNIQUE AND POSTURAL CHANGES YOU CHOOSE TO MAKE ON THE DOUBLE BASS, THE MORE INTENSELY YOUR EGO MAY PUSH BACK. Another way to say this, is the longer you have not been able to do what you want on the bass, the harder it may be to accept and take the steps to discover you can do what you want to do.

All you have to draw on is your history on the double bass of what you could do or couldn't do. It is extraordinary how much you can define your future by what the past has been like. Simply, if something was too hard on the bass, it will always be too hard on the double bass.

What is the way out of this depressing/despairing situation? There is a definition of insanity that says if you do the same thing over and over and expect different results, then you're insane.

BUT WHAT IF YOU DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT AND EXPECT THE SAME RESULTS, ISN'T THIS ALSO INSANITY? This is how the ego works. It tells you that even if you do something different on the double bass, it still won't work. The result of this thought is one of two things.

You won't do something new on the double bass, which guarantees you'll be stuck where you are on the instrument, not being able to play the finest literature with ease.

Or you'll attempt to do something new that works, but it won't work. What do I mean? IF YOU DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT WITH YOUR TECHNIQUE ON THE DOUBLE BASS, AND IT SHOULD WORK, BUT IT DOESN'T WORK, THEN YOU HAVE SET YOURSELF UP FOR FAILURE.

What do I mean? There is a famous saying that is true, "The truth shall make you free", but is this true? Let me restate a truer version of this saying, "The truth shall make you free, only if you believe the truth shall make you free".

Within the following, "The truth shall make you free, only if you believe the truth shall make you free", are the seeds of your incredible power to save or screw yourself.

I believe that you are so powerful, that your thoughts and beliefs and choices are so powerful, that you can prove anything not true that is true as long as you choose to. Think about this statement. It means that when you are offered a way to be the incredible double bass player you are capable of, that you are offered a technique able to accomplish this, you have the power to make a technique that will work not work.

Can you take a double bass technique that works and without any faith in it working make it work? Yes, only if you practice the new technique daily until it begins to sink in against your will. So, despite yourself, you get it done. (Isn't this a cruel way to learn?)

This isn't usually what happens. If you don't have faith that you can do what you've never done on the bass, you usually conveniently stop practicing the new changes.

The ultimate gift to yourself would be accept that the changes you want to make to your double bass playing will work, that you will ALLOW them to work as quickly as possible. Stand up to that part of yourself that tells you he or she is on your side, because he or she is telling you the truth for your own good – that you don't have what it takes.

One of the most profound gifts you can give yourself, is to realize you have the power to accept or discount the truth. YOU ARE SO POWERFUL, THAT YOU CAN ALWAYS CHOOSE WHETHER TO WIN OR LOSE, NO EXCEPTIONS.

Double Bass - The Music Must Be Secondary If You Want to Fully Heal Your Body

IF YOU WANT TO MAKE MAJOR TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGES TO YOUR DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE, SO THAT YOU DON'T HURT ANYMORE AND CAN PLAY ALL OF THE GREAT LITERATURE WRITTEN FOR YOUR INSTRUMENT, THEN YOU NEED TO DO WHAT YOU PROBABLY HAVE NEVER DONE. THAT IS TO PLACE ALL OF YOUR ATTENTION ON YOUR TECHNIQUE AND POSTURE AND LET THE MUSIC ONLY BE THE VEHICLE FOR RETRAINING.

If you truly place all of your attention on how you're using your body on the double bass and none of your attention on what is coming out of the bass, then for maybe the first time in your

playing career, you will make COMPLETE changes to your double bass technique that take all of the artificial limits off your talent.

As long as you split your attention between changing your technique and making sure that what is being played meets your standard of fine double bass playing, you will do neither. This means that the music will compromise the changes you are attempting to make to your technique, and these changes you're attempting to make will certainly compromise your intended accuracy and interpretation of the music.

So, the music must be absolutely secondary and subservient to the technique changes you are wanting to make. Implicit in all of this is that you are taking care of yourself by making it as easy as you can, so you can internalize the changes as quickly as you can. Then you can place all of your attention on how beautiful the music is, because you have created a technique that makes your double bass playing effortless.

In this essay I used the word COMPLETE to refer to changes you make to your technique. What do I mean? Complete is a great word in this context. I'm using it to mean that you have come to the END of refining your double bass technique, so that you can finally do what you want to do on the bass.

How many double bass players do you know that have a completed bass technique? Possibly none. What does this mean? It means that not having a complete double bass technique is the norm. What does THE NORM mean? It means that if no bass player you know has a truly flawless double bass technique, then that is the way it is supposed to be. Is it? NO!

It simply means that you don't know any double bass players who have taken the steps to eliminate all of the weaknesses in their technique, which I grant is many bass players. Let me state the problem and its solution.

YOU CAN TAKE THE STEPS NECESSARY TO DO WHAT YOU WANT ON THE DOUBLE BASS, IF YOU ARE WILLING TO ACCEPT THAT WHAT YOU HAVE DONE HASN'T WORKED AND THERE IS SOMETHING OUT THERE THAT WILL WORK. IF YOU ARE WILLING TO NOT FOLLOW THE CROWD OF BASS PLAYERS UNABLE TO DO WHAT THEY WANT, THEN YOU ARE FREE TO FOLLOW A PATH THAT CAN ONLY BE TAKEN, IF YOU ARE WILLING TO MAKE THE MUSIC SECONDARY AND YOU AND YOUR TECHNIQUE AND POSTURE PRIMARY.

One final comment about complete. Complete doesn't mean that your technique will not evolve and become even more effortless. It means you have finally arrived at a point in your double bass playing where what is difficult and worth playing is easily playable, and you can finally HEAR the music.

Double Bass - Sensing Suppressed Ongoing Physical Aches and Pains

WHEN YOU ARE FULLY WILLING TO SENSE THE SUPPRESSED ACHES AND PAINS IN YOUR BODY, YOU ARE READY TO MAKE CHANGES TO THE ELEMENTS OF YOUR DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE THAT CAUSE THESE ACHES AND PAINS.

The above statement may seem rather obvious, but for so many hurting double bass players it has been long term aches and pains that the player has pushed away like a bad headache. There are only three cures for a long term headache. Sit down and observe the headache until it passes, take an aspirin, or both.

There are three cures for the aching double bass player. Sit or stand and observe your technique, change your technique, or both.

When the double bass player truly observes his or her technique, he or she is sensing what is happening whole body and where there are consistent aches and pains as the bass player plays. Does this mean the bass player needs to make major changes to his or her playing? Not necessarily. If the double bass player can release any excess tension from head to toe, and the bass player has good posture, then the player may realize that he or she has been playing with excessive tension throughout the whole body, and this has been what's causing the aches and pains.

What I just described is the observing part. Simply, you cannot observe your technique and sense whether you're hurting without making or causing change to your technique and posture. To make sure it is good change, you want to release the excess tension rather than tense even more against the aches and pains you've brought to consciousness.

Once you've brought to consciousness where you've been hurting and begin to release the tension, you will probably become aware of a whole new level of discomfort in your body. That discomfort is the extra physical work you are doing unnecessarily to support a body slumping over overarching as you play the double bass.

Now would be a really good time to bring balanced whole body posture to your double bass playing. Because if you sit or stand with the bass with an overarched back or hunkered down slumping as you play, then you can never truly release the excessive tension out of your arms. When you are fully upright using the minimal amount of musculature with a free neck and a head released leading a lengthening spine, then you can truly release the tension throughout your whole body through observation and intention.

What I just described is doing both. You are observing your technique and applying the Alexander Technique principles of good body use to your whole body, so that observation and intention come together to help you play the double bass without hurting.

Now, not having any aches or pains on the bass is a very good thing, but it may not be enough. IF YOUR POSTURE IS BALANCED AS YOU PLAY THE DOUBLE BASS, BUT YOU CANNOT PLAY

WHAT YOU WANT WITH EASE, THEN YOU HAVE NOT FULLY CREATED A BASS TECHNIQUE THAT WORKS.

To create a double bass technique that truly works, a technique that brings ease to playing the difficult bass music, you have to bring the Alexander Technique principles of good body use to the specifics of your bass technique. This means you really have to explore if what you do from your elbows to your fingertips works as you play.

This means, you want to see if how you use your fingers, wrists, and arms is truly to your loving advantage. So, explore how you use your whole body on the double bass, and examine what you have believed is the right way to play the bass and keep what works and release what doesn't.

Double Bass - Striving for Perfect Technique

As an Alexander Technique teacher who was also a concert classical guitarist, I strove for perfect technique as a concert guitarist. It was the Alexander Technique that saved me from permanently damaging my wrist on the guitar and took the limits off of my ability to play what I wanted on the guitar.

The holy grail of the performing double bass player is perfect technique. It is usually an unspoken goal that the bass player aspires to. Since striving for perfect double bass technique is usually never really talked about, is it a sane reachable goal? Or is it what keeps the bass player going, even though it makes no sense, like Sisyphus pushing the rock up the mountain forever, hoping one day the rock will not roll down the other side?

“PERFECT TECHNIQUE” IS ATTAINABLE WHEN THE RULES OF PERFORMANCE THAT THE DOUBLE BASS PLAYER IS APPLYING MAKES SENSE. THIS MEANS THAT THE POSTURE OF THE WHOLE BODY AND THE WAY THE HANDS AND ARMS ARE USED ON THE BASS, MAKE THE MOST DIFFICULT PASSAGES AND PIECES EASIER AND EASIER AND EASIER TO PLAY.

As obvious as this sounds, so many double bass players do the same things over and over that aren't working, because these are the rules of good bass technique that they were taught. Again, another unspoken exchange between the double bass student and the bass teacher is, “If you just work HARD ENOUGH, eventually you will be able to play anything. I promise!”

The unspoken hook that keeps you doing what the teacher asks is that it will work, because it is SUPPOSED TO WORK. (This is what your double bass teacher was taught by his or her bass teacher.)

At what point do you pull the plug? What do I mean? At what point do you question what you're been doing to perfect your double bass technique? The sooner the better!

Understand that I'm asking you, the double bass player, to pull the plug on what is NOT working that you've been doing for years, instead of doing what you've been doing, because it is SUPPOSED TO WORK AND YOU WERE PROMISED WOULD WORK.

This is MAGICAL THINKING. What I mean is that you have combined two things to keep you striving the same way you have been for years. Magical thinking, in this circumstance, says that if you do what I ask you to do on the double bass, combined with endless hours of practice, will magically make you a great bass player.

So, at what point do you realize that the technique you are trying so diligently to make work is the problem, and that you're not the problem? What do I mean that you're not the problem? I mean that if you had been mastering a double bass technique that wasn't conflicted, that the promise of easeful fine bass playing would already be yours.

Since most of the thousands upon thousands of practicing endless hours double bass players out there are at best mediocre players, does that mean that these mediocre players lack the talent to be fine players, or are they trying to make work on the bass what will never work? I choose the latter.

I used the term conflicted double bass technique two paragraphs ago. Let me define it. CONFLICTED DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE IS A BASS TECHNIQUE THAT IS A COMBINATION OF WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOESN'T WORK. WHEN YOU COMBINE WHAT WORKS WITH DOESN'T WORK, THEN YOU WILL NEVER REACH THE GOAL OF EFFORTLESSLY PLAYING THE MOST DIFFICULT WORTHWHILE DOUBLE BASS REPERTOIRE.

The sooner you keep what works on the double bass, release what doesn't work, and add what else works, the sooner the rock will not roll down the other side of the mountain.

Double Bass - The Main Strength of an Alexander Technique Teacher

What makes the Alexander Technique teacher so extraordinarily good at working with double bass players is our ability to work outside of the box, whether the Alexander Technique teacher has played the bass or not. In fact, the Alexander Technique teacher who has never played the double bass may be able to give the bass player what he or she needs in a way that is way outside of the box. What do I mean?

When I was an aspiring concert guitarist, I went to an Alexander Technique teacher, because I was causing carpal tunnel syndrome to my left wrist, practicing the guitar hours and hours every day. Because the Alexander technique teacher I worked with was not a classical guitarist, she effortlessly got me to question everything I did on the guitar from head to toe.

It was extraordinary for me after years of playing and after many fine guitar teachers, to dismantle everything I thought was necessary to be a concert guitarist, and create my own personal guitar technique.

I kept what worked, let go of what didn't work, fine tuned what almost worked, and added whole new ways of accomplishing for the first time what I was truly capable of on the guitar.

What I bring to the double bass player are the eyes of an Alexander Technique teacher. I assist the bass player in being able to consciously use his or her whole body in a completely elegant, athletic, and coordinated way. I teach the double bass player how to play extraordinarily accurately without paying a physical price by collapsing or hunkering down to play.

How do I do this? I went through a three year training, and in my Alexander Technique training I learned to use my whole body with ease and balance in everything I do, from running, to brushing my teeth, to playing the guitar, to teaching the Alexander Technique.

My training also taught me to look at any activity, from walking to playing the double bass, and to spot when the person is sacrificing his or her body for the activity. What does this mean? It means when I work with the bass player, I can clearly see when the double bass player is hunkering down paying a painful physical price to play with accuracy and feeling. I can see when the bass player is not connected to his or her torso and legs when playing. I can see when the double bass player is not balanced from head to toe when he or she plays, and because of this whole body imbalance, is using too much upper body muscle to play.

What I also bring to the double bass player is that I embody whole body good use as I assist the bass player in creating his or her personal effortless and accurate bass technique. This means, even if the double bass player doesn't know it consciously, I demonstrate to the bass player with my own posture how to play without pain, strain, and compression. I also use verbal directions and directing hands on the double bass player's body to communicate what is needed to create a pain-free bass technique.

SINCE I AM NOT SACRIFICING MY BODY AS I TEACH THE DOUBLE BASS PLAYER, EVERYTHING ABOUT MY POSTURE, WORDS, AND HANDS COMMUNICATE TO THE BASS PLAYER HOW TO DO THE SAME ON THE DOUBLE BASS.

An Alexander Technique teacher is extraordinarily unique in the world of postural teaching, because the Alexander Technique teacher is teaching the double bass player to do as the Alexander Technique teacher EMBODIES and says, rather than doing only as I say. Simply, if I tell you to play without locking your neck, and I tell you this with poor posture, you will have one heck of a time learning to play the bass with a released and lengthening neck and decompressed spine.

You won't know why playing the double bass with a free neck seems so hard, but it is because unconsciously you are receiving conflicting messages from me talking about good posture and exhibiting poor posture. A certified Alexander Technique teacher can truly say do as I do, do as I say, and do as my hands are communicating to your nervous system through my free nervous system.

Double Bass - Preparation for Playing by Doing Something Different

What do you usually do if you are about to practice or perform, and you feel that your body is not going to go along for the ride easily, that you simply will not be able to perform with a comfortable sense of ease and accuracy? Do you just ignore it and play a quick series of scales and/or arpeggios for a warm up, and hope for the best?

If so, you are essentially saying, "I have to take what I get from my body". I also believe you are also saying, "I have to get what I get from my mind", and this may be subconscious. (I believe that everything the body does is from the mind, whether you're aware of your thoughts running your body at any given moment or not.)

This is a very tough way to treat yourself, and it is totally unnecessary. A few years ago a very wise woman told me that whenever I get into a very bad place emotionally to do something different. What did she mean?

Have you ever noticed that whenever you are down emotionally, in despair or depressed, that you don't feel like doing anything, and you probably don't? So, instead of finding a loving way to get out of your yukky emotional place, you just collapse into it. I have no problem surrendering to a down mood. Sometimes you just need to for your sanity.

But if we look at this as a double bass player who would like to practice or has a performance, it just doesn't sound like a loving thing to drag your body screaming and crying to the bass. What seems more loving is that you find a way to bring your body back into balance and lightness, so it isn't at odds with your intention to practice or perform.

There are three ways to bring your body into balance before you play the double bass. THE FIRST IS TO GIVE YOUR BODY LOVING ORDERS OF RELEASE. Ex: My neck is free. My shoulders are floating on my ribcage. My hands are free. My forearms are free.

THE SECOND IS TO DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT. Years ago, before I played a guitar concert, I went out and ran a very slow mile, paying attention to running with ease and balance. It was probably the best concert I ever gave.

THE THIRD IS TO DO SOMETHING WITH COMPLETE ABANDON. What if you screamed into a pillow with a wide open throat repeatedly, until you felt finished/complete? This would totally get you out of your head. What do I mean? Screaming into a pillow out of control is as about as far from playing the double bass as you can get. You can also do something else as intense as screaming into a pillow, like hitting a pillow with a tennis racket, if you are concerned about your throat.

Also, the act of screaming into the pillow or hitting a pillow will dramatically change the balance and muscular tone throughout your whole body. It will dramatically interrupt all of the

conscious and unconscious ruminating you've been doing in your head. In other words, it will interrupt the thoughts you're thinking that are making you crazy and your body uncoordinated.

DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT. What if you swing your arms over your head in a circle continuously, clockwise and then counterclockwise? This is an incredible way to release the holding in your shoulders you're creating with your fear you won't play well.

This can be done with as much abandon as you screaming into a pillow. But I would like to also add the first action of a loving order into your body being done simultaneously as you swing your arms. As you swing your arms, order your neck, shoulder blades, and collarbones to be free as you swing your arms. This will dramatically increase the effectiveness of releasing all of the holding in your arms, neck, shoulders, and torso that was going to compromise your double bass playing.

When all three of these steps are taken before you play the double bass, you are really doing something extraordinarily loving. You are aligning your body with a loving intention to play the bass with ease, poise, and balance. Simply, you will not be at the mercy of the illusion that your body always tells you what you can and cannot do on any given practice or performance day.

Double Bass - Technique Compromised by Split Loyalties

Why would a double bass player not choose the best technique to get the job done? Here are two reasons. One is you aren't willing at this point to be a beginner again. The second is you aren't willing to deal with the feelings of guilt that come up, if you go against everything you've been taught or almost everything you were taught that is supposedly great double bass technique.

Why is being a beginner again such an overwhelming thing to do? BECAUSE, IF YOU NEED TO REVAMP YOUR TECHNIQUE TO REACH YOUR POTENTIAL ON THE DOUBLE BASS, THEN YOU HAVE NEVER COMPLETED YOUR JOURNEY TO CREATING AN EFFORTLESS BASS TECHNIQUE YOU CAN COUNT ON. In other words, working on your technique has always been an open ended endless process of struggle and hard work, trying to do what you can't do on the double bass.

Consciously or unconsciously you believe it will always be this way, so why do anything different? BECAUSE IT IS TIME TO FIND A TECHNIQUE THAT WORKS AND COMPLETE IT, AND ACCEPT THE TRUTH THAT COMPLETION IS POSSIBLE!

Now to the second part of the problem: It is possible to see what you need to do, but if it goes against everyone and everything you did to get to where you are, and it is the loving solution, then you may be conflicted.

WHEN YOU EXPERIENCE REVAMPING YOUR DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE AS A BETRAYAL OF ALL OF THOSE WHO HELPED YOU TO GET TO THE LEVEL OF PLAYING YOU ARE AT, RATHER THAN AS AN ACT OF SELF LOYALTY, THEN WHEN YOU ATTEMPT TO DO THE NEW LOVING THING, YOUR

ENERGY MAY DROP DRAMATICALLY. In other words, you may go into a depression, the moment you commit to doing what is 100% loyal to yourself.

Why? It is an difficult thing to realize that being loyal to parents and double bass teachers, even when these loyalties are blocking you from being the joyous and technically proficient bass player you could be, may cause such powerful feelings of guilt, that you collapse rather than do the loving thing.

Simply, if you have been taught by double bass teachers that there is only one way to play the bass, and if unconsciously or consciously these double bass teachers have taught you they are the way and the light, then following your own path can bring up tremendous guilt, and you won't be able to follow through in making the technique changes that could make you an amazing bass player.

You can't do both. What do I mean? Once you see what needs to be done for you to create a complete double bass technique that works for you, you have to let go of what doesn't work. WHAT DOESN'T WORK WILL NOT LET WHAT WORKS WORK, IF YOU CONTINUE TO DO WHAT DOESN'T WORK ALONG SIDE WHAT DOESN'T WORK ON THE DOUBLE BASS.

Now, as to the guilt of betraying your double bass teachers and parents: I went to a psychotherapist that I told I felt overwhelmed with guilt, when I thought of doing what was loving for me, but went against everything my parents and guitar teachers had taught me was true. You know what his answer was? BETRAY THE HELL OUT THEM. KEEP BETRAYING THE HELL OUT OF THEM, BECAUSE TO DO SO IS AN ACT OF SELF LOVE. Try it, you may like it, and it may just free you up to pursue an amazing bass technique with great joy.

Double Bass - The Ease of What Doesn't Work

The double bass technique that you have used for years seems to demand that you use it, and that it is easy to do. But if your bass technique sets limits on your ability to play the finest double bass literature with ease, then it is a perverse ease. I want to explore what it means, when the bass player experiences what isn't working as the path of least resistance.

Why does the double bass player continue to do what doesn't work? A part of it is the comfort of what you have done for years. What do I mean? Bass technique can, like an old shoe that has through wear and daily tear and molded itself to your foot, be very comfortable.

But there is a negative side to wearing old shoes that the Alexander Technique teacher is very aware of. Instead of an old shoe supporting your feet and body with comfort and ease, an old shoe can exacerbate the walking patterns that take your body off balance and out of alignment.

Ex: If you walk on the outside of your feet, you will wear out the outside edge of the shoes, and exaggerate your poor walking pattern even more. When you put on a new pair of shoes, you are now standing on shoes not collapsing feet to the outside.

What is the implication of this for the double bass player? Ex: If you play with a bass technique that causes you to hold your breath and tense your fingers through difficult passages, this habit will escalate over time.

IMAGINE A DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE THAT OVER TIME CAUSES YOU TO WORK LESS AND LESS TO PLAY BETTER AND BETTER. THAT IS MY DEFINITION OF A BASS TECHNIQUE THAT WORKS AND WILL CONTINUE TO WORK.

What I just described sounds like it must be heaven to a double bass player, so why don't most bass players pursue this goal, rather than a minority? Here's my answer.

MOST DOUBLE BASS PLAYERS DO NOT PURSUE AND MASTER A BASS TECHNIQUE THAT MAKES THE MOST DIFFICULT DOUBLE BASS MUSIC EASIER AND EASIER, BECAUSE THEY ARE RUNNING AWAY FROM THE INADEQUATE BASS TECHNIQUE THEY ARE USING DAY AFTER DAY.

What do I mean? What I'm going to describe is one of the most consistent psychologically poor habits of so many people in general.

INSTEAD OF THE DOUBLE BASS PLAYER CHOOSING TO DO WHAT WORKS, HE OR SHE IS RUNNING AWAY FROM THE TRUTH THAT WHAT THEY'RE DOING ISN'T WORKING. The bass player is in denial, and just keeps playing away, not admitting to him or herself that what they're doing isn't working.

As an Alexander Technique teacher, it is apparent to me that for many, if not most people, the way the world is, is the way the world is. So, just accept that you don't have control over much of your life, don't have control over wear and tear to your body on the double bass, and that the most difficult bass music is going to inherently give you a fit (as they say in Tennessee English).

If you have spent years as a double bass player telling yourself your technique is the best, you're doing your best, and that you are inherently a fair to middling bass player, that it is the nature of things that difficult music is hard, then to flip this over and accept none of it is true is pretty darn radical.

IT ALSO MEANS THAT YOU WILL WANT TO REALIZE THAT SETTING UP THE CONDITIONS THAT HELP YOU ACQUIRE A GREAT DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE, MAKE IT WORTH LETTING GO OF THE SAD HABIT OF RUNNING WAY FROM THE PAIN OF A BASS TECHNIQUE THAT ISN'T WORKING.

Double Bass - Slow Playing in a Lesson

I was working with a pianist, Mary, recently, and we were talking about piano technique and about playing a piece very slowly to work out technique, fingering, posture, and interpretation.

One of things that has been difficult for Mary is giving herself permission to slow the piece down enough to work out all of the above elements. As I've worked with Mary, it has been very difficult to allow herself to play slowly enough for this to happen.

I attributed this way of learning pieces to Mary's piano training, and I was right. Most, if not all of her piano teachers, expected and demanded that she play the piece at tempo as quickly as possible.

I knew this, but in this particular Alexander Technique piano lesson we were having, she said something to me that I had never considered. Here it is in a nutshell.

"IT WASN'T THAT I WAS TOLD I SHOULDN'T PRACTICE SLOWLY ENOUGH TO WORK OUT THE TECHNIQUE, FINGERING, AND POSTURE OF THE PIECE. THIS WAS EXPECTED, BUT WHAT WAS EXPECTED BY THE PIANO TEACHER WHEN I CAME TO MY LESSON, WAS THAT I ALWAYS PLAY THE PIECE AT TEMPO.

This really struck me as a very high pressure expectation. Why? Because it meant that every time she went to her piano lesson, the piece had to be played at tempo, even if it meant that it caused her to tense horribly and try to hold it together to make it through the whole piece.

At that point I understood why it was nearly impossible for her to play very slowly for me, even when I gently requested it. She had been conditioned so powerfully over her student piano years to always play at tempo for her piano teachers.

I'm NOT a piano teacher. I'm an Alexander Technique teacher, who was a concert guitarist, who clearly is communicating to Mary that I only want her to take care of herself. I want her to play the piano as slowly as is necessary, so that she can learn the piece or a new technique at a tempo that doesn't cause her to sacrifice her mind and body.

When I work with Mary at the piano, I want her to gradually pick up the tempo, and the rate of speeding up is totally subservient to her not stressing her mind and body. I work with the faith in her that she will exceed tempo. This has been hard for Mary to accept. The reason this is hard for Mary to accept, is because none of her piano teachers let her play slowly in her lessons, so she unconsciously came to believe that slow playing does not lead to playing at tempo.

This is an extraordinarily cruel belief, because it has taught Mary that she could not arrive at tempo without sacrificing her body. Here is what is implied in this way of learning music: Even if you're making a mess of the piece and your technique, if you'll just keep plowing ahead at tempo, eventually you'll gain control over your mind and body.

THIS JUST AIN'T SO! If it were so, why do you think so many pianists get into physical trouble and either quit, have surgery, or go to an Alexander Technique teacher?

This not that uncommon in all of the other instruments out there. If this has been your experience in learning to play, sing, or conduct, then it is NEVER too late let yourself perform or conduct slowly enough to acquire a loving technique that works.

Now you know why you couldn't slow down enough to learn what needed learning on your instrument or in conducting, and that it is not a flaw in your character that you couldn't slow down. You now can choose to make your technique and approach to your instrument and conducting right and kind.

Double Bass - Tension and Disbelieving What Is True

I've been in the middle of writing a loving affirmation a 100 times a day. I want to stop resisting what is a loving truth about myself, even though my feelings are telling me it is not true. As I've been writing, I realized I'm having one heck of a time writing the affirmation over and over using everything I know about posture, tension, and staying with how I'm writing what I'm writing, rather than just trying to get all 100 repetitions done.

It finally dawned on me why I couldn't write the affirmation over and over with the ease of the trained Alexander Technique teacher, which I am.

IT IS NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO WRITE A TRUTH OVER AND OVER WITHOUT PHYSICAL TENSION, IF YOUR MIND AND EMOTIONS ARE RESISTING THE TRUTH OF THE AFFIRMATION.

Then it occurred to me, this is what can happen to a double bass player revamping his or her bass technique using the principles of the Alexander Technique. If the double bass player is changing the parts of his or her bass technique and posture that interfere with playing with ease, it may not only be resistance to changing bass technique and posture creating tension, it may be resistance to what hasn't been stated about the process, the goal of the changes.

Here is the unstated goal of the dedicated double bass player: IF I MAKE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE POSTURAL AND TECHNIQUE CHANGES TO MY DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE, THE BASS WILL BECOME EASY, AND I'LL BE ABLE TO PLAY ALL OF THE DOUBLE BASS'S GREAT LITERATURE WITH EASE.

Let me restate this in a very short concise affirmation: IT IS EASY FOR ME TO BE A GREAT DOUBLE BASS PLAYER! What is your emotional reaction to saying this? I'm guessing it is that Ethan Kind is an idiot! He doesn't know what he's talking about. IT JUST AIN'T SO, AND IT NEVER WILL BE SO.

Here is what is happening: If you're making changes to your double bass technique, wanting to be a great player but not believing it is possible, then the combination of changing how you've always played the bass, in conjunction with believing the double bass will always be a difficult instrument to play, means you're pulling in conflicting directions.

What's the solution to letting go of the lie that: IT IS TOO HARD FOR ME TO BE A GREAT DOUBLE BASS PLAYER?

Make a list of all of the people, mother, father, double bass teacher, etc., that taught you that the bass was too difficult, and that you didn't have the talent to be a great double bass player. Write a scathing letter to each of them.

Read the letter or letters out loud only to yourself and then burn it or them. Then write the following affirmation 100 times a day: IT IS EASY FOR ME TO BE A GREAT DOUBLE BASS PLAYER. Write a truthful response at the end of the first 30 each day, and then finish writing out the 70 left without a response.

Example of the affirmation with a response: It is easy for me to be a great double bass player. Are you an idiot?

Do this for 7 days, and at the end of 7 days sit down and write out the affirmation and how you now feel about it. If you are still resisting the truth of it, then take a couple of days off and begin the process again. Write the letter or letters again to those who taught you the lies you came to believe about your talent and the double bass. Then do the 100 affirmations and responses to the first 30 each day for 7 more days.

YOU ARE GOING TO RUN INTO RESISTANCE, BUT BE WILLING TO FIGHT AS COMPULSIVELY AND LOVINGLY FOR THE TRUTH ABOUT YOU AND THE DOUBLE BASS, AS YOU DID FOR THE LIES THAT TORTURED YOU FOR YEARS AND YEARS. AS AN INCREDIBLE ACT OF SELF LOVE COMPLETE THE JOURNEY TO THE TRUTH ABOUT YOUR TALENT ON THE BASS.

Double Bass - Technique and Postural Problems: To Solve or Not to Solve

THIS MAY BE THE MOST IMPORTANT ARTICLE I'VE EVER WRITTEN FOR THE DOUBLE BASS PLAYER, AND QUITE POSSIBLY THE MOST IMPORTANT ARTICLE I WILL EVER WRITE FOR THE BASS PLAYER.

I want to look at why the double bass player, when offered a chance to be free of all technique and posture problems on the bass, doesn't jump at the chance. Here's the answer.

IF YOU COULD PLAY EVERYTHING YOU WANTED ON THE DOUBLE BASS WITH EXTRAORDINARY EASE, THEN WHAT WOULD THERE BE TO LIVE FOR, GIVEN THAT PLAYING THE BASS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN YOUR LIFE?

Let me say it a different way. If you had no more problems to solve on the double bass, could you handle such a unique situation psychologically and emotionally and continue to play the bass?

In my mid-twenties I discovered the book NEW PATHWAYS TO PIANO TECHNIQUE by Luigi Bonpensiere. It said if you trusted your hands and played with absolute abandon, you couldn't miss. I experienced this on the guitar.

I finally had what I always wanted on the guitar. I had already created a really complete guitar technique, and now I had extraordinary accuracy through faith, so I didn't have to get angry at myself anymore when I played the guitar.

What did I do? I quit playing the guitar. Why? Because I couldn't handle what had been the most important goal in my life – striving for effortless “perfection” on the guitar. Simply, I found it and couldn't handle it.

As I'm writing this, I realize all of the above has come together just in the last couple of weeks in my awareness. It finally explains why performing double bass players who come to me in physical trouble don't always continue with their Alexander Technique sessions.

I show them their potential on the double bass; that they can truly solve all of their problems on the instrument, and many don't come back. This really puzzled me, until I had the epiphany that most, if not all, humans give meaning to their lives by living in a steady state of problems that are TOO IMPORTANT TO BE SOLVED.

(At this point I want to give credit to my brother, Alan, for helping me in a discussion we were having. He helped me see this.)

IF WHAT I'VE JUST WRITTEN IS TRUE ABOUT YOUR DOUBLE BASS PLAYING, THEN WHAT DO YOU DO? DO YOU SEE THE TRUTH OF WHAT I'VE JUST WRITTEN, AND CONSCIOUSLY DECIDE TO NOT SOLVE ALL OF YOUR PROBLEMS ON THE BASS, THUS GIVING YOURSELF SOMETHING TO LIVE FOR?

I really don't like the idea that you'd have to live your life with artificial limitations on what you could do on the double bass to give meaning and purpose to your life. In fact, I'm not sure you could consciously do such a thing without feeling more and more conflicted over not solving all of your problems on the bass, knowing you could.

Here's the obvious question. COULD YOU LIVE A LIFE WITH MEANING, IF THE DOUBLE BASS WAS SOMETHING YOU DID EVERY DAY, AND IT TRULY WAS EFFORTLESS?

There are 5 solutions to being able to psychologically and emotionally be at peace on the double bass after solving all of your problems on the bass. YOU CAN FOCUS ON NON-DOUBLE BASS OLD PROBLEMS THAT SEEM UNSOLVABLE, CREATE NEW PROBLEMS THAT MAY OR MAY NOT EVER GET SOLVED, WORK ON BOTH OLD AND NEW PROBLEMS, SOLVE PROBLEMS AND KEEP CREATING NEW ONES, OR YOU CAN BECOME ENLIGHTENED.

By definition a double bass player who truly realizes that life has meaning and purpose and joy without problems is enlightened. Why not let the bass be the place in your life where you solve most if not all your problems playing the bass?

In other words, why not let the double bass be the place that you come to as an enlightened being with no problems, and let the rest of your life be where you create and solve or not solve your problems?

This allows the double bass to be the most important thing in your life artistically, creatively, and spiritually; a place where you truly get to play in pure joy, peace, bliss, and ease.

Double Bass - Tension, Holding, and Technique

When a double bass player begins to refine his or her technique, usually it is about the bass player wanting to play in a more efficient way. What does a more efficient way look and feel like? It usually means the left hand fingers are kept close to the strings during the performance of a piece.

This is admirable, but it is very easy in your attempt to be very close to the strings, for you to do this with tension and holding in the whole body. I want to share my experience as a formerly aspiring concert guitarist and as an Alexander Technique teacher to describe what needs to happen, so that hugging the double bass strings doesn't degenerate into massive tension.

The intention of "gently hugging" the strings is to be able to play more accurately and to be able to play fast with great ease. This isn't what happens much of the time when a double bass player's technique is revamped. Why? Let me use the example of what I did with my hands on the guitar to deal with these issues of you staying very close to the bass strings with ease.

I made a decision as a classical guitarist that all of my fingers on both hands needed to be poised within a quarter of an inch, .6cm, from the strings at all times, no exceptions. My right hand solution: I rested the thumb and three of the fingers on the strings, and then I chose a finger or thumb to pluck the string it had been resting on, as the other fingers and/or thumb remained on the other strings. The plucking finger never moved more than a quarter of an inch away from the string it was plucking, and I always moved the finger reflexively. This meant the finger struck the string as quickly and effortlessly as my reflexes would allow. (We don't use the little finger of the right hand to pluck the strings. It's too short.)

My solution for keeping all four fingers of the left hand within a quarter inch of the guitar neck was to play a scale over and over, vigilantly watching all four fingers, making sure all four fingers never moved more than a quarter inch away from the strings, when they weren't pressing a string to the guitar neck. Also, like the right hand fingers, I twitched all of the fingers effortlessly reflexively to the guitar neck when they pressed the strings.

As you can surmise, hours a day of this was excruciatingly exhausting, but I wanted to internalize this way of playing the guitar as soon as possible for two reasons. The first reason is that I knew it was part of an exceptional guitar technique, and the second reason was that I've always felt that the sooner I internalized a loving change to my guitar technique, the sooner I could get back to making music.

Within a few days I became aware of how much I was TRYING with massive tension to keep my fingers close to the strings, because at this same time I was taking my first Alexander Technique lessons in London. Here is what I did, making this new guitar technique truly transformative.

I REALIZED, WITH THE AID OF THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE TEACHER, THAT I HAD TO BE LOVINGLY VIGILANT OF MY WHOLE BODY AS I INTERNALIZED THIS NEW TECHNIQUE. THIS MEANT I NEEDED TO SIT FULLY UPRIGHT WITHOUT HOLDING ANYWHERE IN MY WHOLE BODY AND BREATHE. THIS MEANT THAT WHAT WAS HAPPENING INSIDE OF MY WHOLE BODY, ARMS, HANDS, AND FINGERS, WAS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS WHAT APPEARED TO BE HAPPENING. AS I MONITORED MY WHOLE BODY, I CONTINUED TO ORDER MY FINGERS TO REMAIN VERY CLOSE TO THE STRINGS WITHOUT TENSION WITH A GENTLE CURVE IN ALL OF MY FINGERS, BOTH HANDS, AS THEY PLAYED.

As a double bass player, releasing unnecessary tension in your whole body as you master new changes in your bass technique is both invisible and visible, as you keep releasing the sneaky visible and invisible tension of trying, as you internalize a new double bass technique.

One of my Alexander Technique teachers, who trained me to become an Alexander Technique teacher in New York, had a saying that continues to guide me in everything I do. She said, "Do less." This simply means YOU can always play the double bass with less muscular work throughout your whole body, with balance and high energy.

So, play the double bass with your whole body, gently ordering your fingers to be very close to the strings, as you lovingly order the whole body to do less, by being balanced from head to toe with high energy.

Double Bass - Waiting for What Already Is

If you're waiting for your double bass technique to become extraordinary, and you're also taking the steps for it to happen, is it guaranteed to happen? No! Why?

Because if you're waiting for an average double bass technique to transform into a wonderful technique, and you have NO faith that it will happen, then your beliefs can override all of the great practice you're putting in and block the transformation of your technique.

Let me look at this from a strictly psychological perspective. If you have grown up waiting for what you really wanted and never got, then you will probably set up a lifetime of PROVING you

can never receive what you want, even if you set aside the time in your day to work for and hope for what you want, consciously or unconsciously.

It is usually unconsciously that you set yourself up day in and day out to never receive what you really want, because you never received the love or comfort that you truly wanted and deserved as a child. So, when this is carried over and projected into most the aspects of your adult life, then you are constantly pursuing and waiting for what will never arrive, unless.....

Unless you see what you've been doing, and realize it isn't that life is denying you what you want; that you won't and can't let yourself have what you want, if you are to continue your story of, "I can never have what I want".

To pursue non-stop what you can never have is an extraordinary act of DOING. DOING in the Alexander Technique is using too much muscle to play the double bass, because you are posturally off balance and/or don't know that you are using the minimal amount of muscle necessary with high energy to play the strings.

Think about it, if you are in a steady state of wanting what you believe you can never have, then you will be in the constant physical tension of DOING. You will be in a non-stop state of sadness, anger, and physical tension, and you will not consciously acknowledge it, because this is an intolerable situation to admit you're in.

It is the not knowing it part, that will trap you in a lifetime of pursuing great double bass technique and NEVER EVER LET YOURSELF ACHIEVE IT.

Now, this is really sad and incredibly conflicted, because you are denying yourself what you're capable of, by both telling yourself you ARE capable of great double bass technique and NOT capable of great bass technique. Let me explain.

Since you are pursuing great double bass technique by putting in the practice time, then the expectation that one day you will achieve an effortless bass technique must be motivating you. It is! But if simultaneously you have come to believe over your life that you can never have what you truly want, then you are really in trouble. You will spend a lifetime promising yourself great double bass technique and denying yourself great bass technique at the same time.

You know what the result will be? IT WILL PROBABLY NOT BE GREAT DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE! And you will live a life of never getting what you want, not because great talent on the bass isn't in you, but because it is more important for your ego to be right, than for you to have what you truly want.

Now, let me explain the title of this article, "Waiting for What Already Is". If you have been practicing doing what is necessary to create a fine double bass technique, and you can't demonstrate a great bass technique, then is there a great bass technique waiting to pop out the moment you stop believing that you can never have what you want? Yes!

This is an amazing place to be in your double bass consciousness, because IT MEANS YOU ARE ALREADY A GREAT BASS PLAYER, AND YOU DON'T KNOW IT, BECAUSE YOU HAVEN'T DEMONSTRATED IT. What do you do at this point?

YOU ACCEPT THAT YOU ARE ALREADY A GREAT DOUBLE BASS PLAYER BEFORE YOU HAVE DEMONSTRATED THIS TO YOURSELF. Spiritually, this is what A Course in Miracles teaches, which is that you are already a holy spirit, even if you don't know and/or deny it. Also, A Course in Miracles teaches you you can never forever change this holy truth, no matter how hard or how long you deny or reject it.

SO, YOU CAN'T CHANGE WHO YOU ARE OR WHAT YOU'VE ACCOMPLISHED ON THE DOUBLE BASS, YOU CAN ONLY HIDE IT.

As a double bass player who has done the smart practice, even if you can't demonstrate wonderful technique, here and now is the time to realize you've done the work, and your great technique is simply waiting on you to let yourself accept and demonstrate it.

Double Bass - Repetition with Kindness

When I was practicing to play a classical guitar concert, I always memorized all of the pieces in the concert. What I found incredibly stressful was the pressure I put myself under to learn the pieces as quickly as possible. So, I would play the piece a few times, and then see if I had memorized it yet. This was not a kind thing to do to myself, given that I had an average ability to memorize.

What was the KIND solution? IT WAS TO GO THROUGH THE PIECE AND WORK OUT THE FINGERING AND AN INTERPRETATION VERY QUICKLY. AND TO PLAY THE PIECE SLOWLY ENOUGH, SO THAT I COULD PLAY ALL THE WAY THROUGH TRUSTING MY HANDS TO PLAY ALL OF THE NOTES IN THE PIECE WITH EASE. IF THERE WAS A PLACE IN THE PIECE THAT WAS ESPECIALLY DIFFICULT, THEN TO PLAY SLOWLY ENOUGH TO GET THAT SECTION OR SECTIONS UP TO THE STILL BELOW TEMPO I WAS REPEATING THE PIECE AT. Then I did the following.

After years of pressuring myself to memorize as quickly as possible, I made a decision one day that I would repeat the piece 30 or 40 times a day for week, and NOT TEST WHETHER I HAD MEMORIZED THE PIECE, AND TO NOT CONCERN MYSELF WITH WHETHER I WAS MEMORIZING IT OR NOT.

It is the latter of the above paragraph that was so crucial to two things happening. The first, is to not concern myself with whether I was memorizing or not, allowed me to play fully taking care of my body and my technique. I only focused on playing and trusting my hands not to miss, and to play the whole piece with ease. The second thing was that I got to listen to the piece. As I played and truly listened to the music over and over, I did not focus at all on getting it memorized.

What happened at the end of a week, is that when I played without the music, I discovered there were huge chunks of the piece that were memorized or nearly memorized, so I was able to now comfortably complete the memorization, after having given myself the luxury of goalless repetition. What I mean by goalless, is there was no pressure to get the piece in my hands or memorized. I was playing with great trust that everything would work in the end.

How does the above apply to learning a new technique on a musical instrument? As a double bass player, let's say that you want change the relationship of your left hand fingers to the bass neck, to keep them very close to the neck always.

Simply choose a simple finger pattern or a very simple scale, and practice hours each day doing these very easy patterns over and over. Only focus on the hand's and fingers' relationship to the neck and play without tension in the hand, arm, shoulder, and fingers.

Do this for a week for hours each day. Don't test what you are transforming in your technique in a piece of music.

At the end of a week begin playing at a stepped up tempo that doesn't create flying fingers or tension in the hand. Also, begin integrating this new technique into easy pieces at tempos, again, slowly enough that they don't compromise your posture or the new technique changes.

The above descriptions of memorizing or changing technique with kindness and goalless practice really prepares you for finding memorizing or changing a part of your double bass technique as something you need not avoid. In other words, if you know that you can set up a way of memorizing or changing technique that helps you turn off the critic, then you will probably memorize more repertoire or refine your bass technique quickly, since it is now a loving nonthreatening thing to do so.

So, by definition, REPETITION WITH KINDNESS is letting the obvious goal of getting a piece ready for performance or integrating a double bass technique change, NOT be in the forefront of your mind.

It's like you're doing what is typical brain-dead mind-wandering repetition, but with all of your awareness on how easy you can make the repetition of the music in the moment.

LET THAT FIRST WEEK OF MEMORIZING OR MAKING A DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE CHANGE BE A TIME OF HANGING OUT IN KIND REPETITION, AND HAVE THE FAITH THAT YOUR ULTIMATE GOAL IS BEING TAKEN CARE OF FOR YOU.

Double Bass - Accuracy Is Inherent

What if it is easier to play, sing or conduct the right note than it is to miss a note? What if so many musicians have this wrong, believing it is easier to make a mistake than not make a mistake? In this article I look at the UNCONSCIOUS OBVIOUS.

What do I mean by “unconscious obvious”? It is my term for describing what so performers or conductors believe, even talk about at times, but don’t fully accept it is what they believe. They may believe it is easier to miss the mark than hit the mark, which means they perform avoiding mistakes rather than always LOVINGLY WITH FAITH expecting the right notes to be performed.

When I used the main principle of the Luigi Bonpensiere book New Pathways to Piano Technique in my classical guitar playing, which is you can’t miss if you know where you’re going if you have an adequate technique, I discovered it was EASIER to play the right note than to miss. WHAT A REVELATION!

What I’m talking about here is the faith that you will always play, sing or conduct the right note or passage, and when you don’t, you continue to perform or conduct with the assurance that you won’t miss the next time, so there is no problem.

Inherent in the above statement that I fully and completely experienced on the guitar, is that accuracy on an instrument or in conducting is inherent, and that making mistakes is learned.

I know this is a pretty radical statement. Even if you always perform avoiding mistakes, don’t you avoid making mistakes most of the time?! What tends to happen to a performer, or conductor who plays, sings, or conducts avoiding mistakes, is that every time he or she makes a mistake, their egos magnify the hell out of the mistake. So, you say to yourself the unconscious obvious – “I always make mistakes!”

When you reflexively tell yourself you always make mistakes, this is an extraordinarily cruel way to talk to yourself. It sets up the love/hate relationship to an instrument or conducting, and you avoid practicing or make yourself practice.

I always make mistakes is not the same as saying to yourself, “I make mistakes, but I usually don’t”. What I just wrote can be a bridge to playing, singing, or conducting with the faith that it is inherently easier to play, sing, or conduct the right note, than to miss.

How does believing accuracy on an instrument or in conducting is inherent change everything? It does so two ways. First, you can now approach the instrument or conducting in total control, not afraid your instrument or conducting will GET YOU that day.

SECOND, IF YOU KNOW MAKING A MISTAKE DOES NOT HAVE TO BE MADE THE NEXT TIME, THEN A MISTAKE MADE AND RELEASED IS NOT SOMETHING YOU USE TO ATTACK YOUR SELF-WORTH WHEN YOU PERFORM.

This heals the love/hate relationship with your instrument or in conducting, and you are left with only a love relationship.

So, if you were to write the affirmation a 100 times a day, “I let go being afraid of making mistakes on my instrument. It is easy and inherent for me to play the right notes”. What do you think?

I think this will be a major loving confront to what you have always believed about your instrument or your conducting, and that if you will hang in there until you believe it, you create a major transformation in your performing or conducting life.

Your performing or conducting life depends on it. CHOOSE!

Double Bass - Technique and No Limits on Your Expression

If your technique is good enough for you play a double bass piece with ease, what stands between you and playing the piece magnificently expressively? Fear of breaking the rules stands between you and unfettered expressive playing.

Fear of what rules? Fear of playing without a net. What do I mean? I mean fear of playing without any set rules, of playing without all of your double bass teachers sitting on your shoulders telling you what to do where.

If as a double bass player you say to yourself, “I’m throwing out everything I was ever told I had to do by my bass teachers who set strict limits on what is musical playing”, then what are you left with? YOU ARE LEFT WITH THE FREEDOM TO EXPRESS YOURSELF ON THE DOUBLE BASS WITHOUT ANY PHYSICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, OR SPIRITUAL LIMITS.

Why do we see many double bass performers rarely doing this? What you do see among a lot of wonderful double bass players are those who play by all of the limiting rules they’ve been taught, but they do it so incredibly well with extraordinary technique!

Now, I want to clarify something here. I’m not talking about playing a piece so eccentrically that it totally departs bizarrely from what the composer intended, or so eccentrically that the listeners can’t connect to the performance.

I’m talking about playing with such fearless unguarded emotion being expressed through the notes, that the double bass player and the audience know they’re in the presence of a performance where the performer is communicating everything he or she is feeling through the notes, forte, piano, crescendo, decrescendo, color changes, rubato. All of the above is incorporated at their most subtle and to their greatest expressive extreme.

For the above to happen, the bass player has to know, to be shown, that it is nearly impossible to be too expressive. When I ask a double bass player to play a piece with too much expression, what I typically get is a performance with just the right amount of expressiveness in it.

Here are two other non-musical examples of expressiveness, of freedom, where the person asked to exaggerate creates an incredibly more interesting activity: walking and public speaking. When I ask a public speaker to wildly experiment with speaking faster/slower and louder/softer, it is amazing how much more interesting the speech is.

When I ask someone I'm teaching how to walk with the principles of the Alexander Technique, to swing their arms too much, it is usually for the first time in that person's life that he or she is truly swinging their arms enough. To the walker, he or she may feel like they're doing something from the Monty Python's Ministry of Funny Walks, but they truly look free with their walking arms swinging easily

So, why do a great many double bass players play with what I call flat expressiveness? (I consider playing everything too loud as flat expressive playing.)

THEY DO SO BECAUSE THEY ARE PLAYING IT SAFE LITERALLY AND FIGURATIVELY. FLAT EXPRESSIVE PLAYING IS NEITHER RIGHT NOR WRONG, AND WHEN TIED TO GREAT TECHNIQUE, THE LISTENER IS BLINDED BY THE FACT THAT THE PERFORMER WASN'T ALL THAT INTERESTING – WAS NOT INSPIRING!

I want to define GREAT TECHNIQUE here in the Alexander Technique sense. Great technique is the ability to play the greatest literature of the double bass with ease without harming your body over your years of playing. Traditionally great technique is defined as being able to play the great bass literature with ease and accuracy with minimal concern for the wear and tear you're causing your body. THIS WEAR AND TEAR IS UNNECESSARY WHEN A WHOLE BODY DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE PLACES CARE OF YOU FIRST.

If you usually play it safe, why? What is the payoff? Let me flip this over. What is the great danger in playing massively expressively? I'm really exaggerating in this article, (or maybe not. Ha!ha!)

This is a very good place in this article for me to be an Alexander Teacher. Playing "massively expressively" is about expressing yourself musically, BUT NOT ABOUT SHOWING THE AUDIENCE HOW TENSE YOU CAN PHYSICALLY BE TO CONVEY MUSICAL CONTRASTS AND FEELINGS.

DO NOT CONFUSE INTENSITY IN PERFORMANCE WITH INTENSITY IN PERFORMANCE. Intensity in performance is pure contrasting expression heard, when you're being listened to by an audience with its eyes closed. Tension in a performance is when the audience closes its eyes, and realizes you're just not all that interesting of a performer.

If you play the right notes in a piece with flat expressiveness then you are neither right nor wrong. This means you're not wrong. NEVER UNDERESTIMATE HOW POWERFULLY THE TRAINING DOUBLE BASS PLAYERS GO THROUGH THAT TEACHES THEM TO ATTEMPT TO ALWAYS BE RIGHT IS!

NOT BEING WRONG WHEN YOU PERFORM IS NOT BEING RIGHT. It is time to take the lid off of your expressiveness, and show yourself and the audience who you are when you perform on the bass.

Double Bass - A Free Neck as Part of Technique

What if you bring as much awareness to your neck being free as you play the double bass, as you do to how you use your arms and fingers? What I'm talking about here is central, absolutely core to how the Alexander Technique approaches playing the bass.

The Alexander Technique believes that an unlocked neck in playing the double bass is central to playing the bass with the ultimate coordination and PREVENTS INJURY.

How does a free neck prevent injuries on the double bass? It allows you to play the bass with a released lengthening spine, and this released lengthening spine allows the body to play with its finest coordination. When you play the double bass with your finest released coordination, then you are much less likely to FORCE the body to play well, because you are already allowing your body to play well.

What is a free neck? Think about what this means. It is such an obvious statement to say play the double bass with a free neck, but I can't count the times that I've asked a new Alexander Technique bass student to play with a free neck, and he or she looks at me not knowing what I'm talking about.

HERE IS A DESCRIPTION OF PLAYING THE DOUBLE BASS WITH A FREE NECK. It means that as you play the bass, and I place my hands gently on both sides of your head, that I can easily turn your head and/or move it from side to side.

If I place my hands on sides of the head of a performing double bass player, and say let me move your head, usually one of two things usually happens. I can't move the head, or the bass player moves his or her head for me.

In the Alexander Technique we talk about allowing the head to be available for movement as you play the double bass. What does this mean? IT MEANS YOU ARE USING THE MINIMAL AMOUNT OF NECK MUSCULATURE TO SUPPORT THE HEAD WITH HIGH DYNAMIC. HIGH DYNAMIC MEANS THE HEAD IS SUPPORTED WITH THE MINIMUM OF MUSCULATURE SUPPORT, BUT NOT FLOPPY AND THE HEAD IS FLOWING UPWARD.

YOUR HEAD AVAILABLE TO BE MOVED WITH AN UPWARD FLOW, IS WHAT INVITES THE SPINE TO LENGTHEN AND CREATES A FREE CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM THAT ORGANIZES THE WHOLE BODY ON THE DOUBLE BASS. WE CALL THIS ORGANIZED UPWARD FLOW "DIRECTION".

How do you invite your neck to be free as you play the double bass? You gently order it to be free! Just before you play a simple note pattern, you say to yourself, “My neck is free leading my spine into lengthening”, and then you play.

What if this doesn’t work? Let me restate the question. What if you can’t tell if this is working? Sit or stand without the bass, so that you let go of any intention to play the bass. Now, let your head drop forward resting on your chest with no support. Experiment with how little neck muscle it takes to bring your head to fully upright and balancing on your unlocked free neck.

There is also another way to connect to how much tension you have in your neck. Tense your neck as much as you can and then release it. This is an excellent way to bring to your consciousness how much tension you live with in your neck. Simply, there is almost never any reason to do anything with a rigid immobile neck, from double bass playing to lifting weights.

One last point, as you play the double bass and you become aware of how part of your bass technique a held neck has been, realize that an immobilized neck and head ISN’T necessary to play the bass. MAKE PLAYING WITH AN UNLOCKED NECK PART OF YOUR DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE.

THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE PRINCIPLE OF NOT DOING SOMETHING AS PART OF YOUR DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE IS THE GENIUS OF THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE.

Double Bass - The Hands and Fingers in Performance

This is an unusual article on the hands and fingers in a musical performance. I want to look at the hands of a performer, whether the performer uses the hands and fingers to perform or not. So, this article pertains to double bass players, as well as singers, conductors, drummers, and trombone players.

I’m going to look at hands in musical performance physically and psychologically. What do I mean? There is the pure Alexander Technique principle of good body use and how to use the hands to play an instrument without causing wear and tear, by using the hands with mechanical advantage.

And there is the psychological implication of what hands and fingers demonstrate in performance when you are a singer, conductor, drum set player, or trombone player.

Here is a definition of the Alexander Technique principle of “good use” applied to the hands. WHEN YOU MOVE THE FINGERS TO PLAY THE DOUBLE BASS, YOU WANT TO DO SO WITHOUT CREATING ANY COMPRESSION IN THE JOINTS OF THE FINGERS AND THE WRISTS, WHETHER YOU ARE PLAYING EXTREMELY LOUDLY OR EXTREMELY SOFTLY OR EXTREMELY FAST.

This means that you DO NOT tense your hands in anticipation of controlling pianissimo or fortissimo or playing fast. This tensing of your hands to control volume or play at a high tempo

is usually very unconscious to the double bass player. What I mean is that tense hands are usually one of those UNCONSCIOUS things that a bass player does to control volume or play at high tempos.

DO NOT TENSE YOUR HANDS ON THE DOUBLE BASS TO CONTROL VOLUME OR PLAY FAST. WITHDRAW ANY TENSING OF THE HANDS TO PLAY VERY SOFTLY OR VERY LOUDLY OR VERY QUICKLY, AND USE LESS OR MORE MUSCLE BACKING UP SOFT HANDS AND FINGERS, AND MOVE THE FINGERS REFLEXIVELY.

MOVING THE FINGERS REFLEXIVELY MEANS PLACING THE FINGERS AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE AND EFFORTLESSLY WITH A BIT MORE MUSCLE FOR FORTISSIMO, AND LESS MUSCLE FOR PIANISSIMO. MOVING REFLEXIVELY WITH SOFT HANDS GIVES YOU EXTRAORDINARY CONTROL OF THE DYNAMICS AND SPEED, WITHOUT USING TENSION TO RAISE OR LOWER THE VOLUME OR PLAY FASTER.

When you use tension to slow the fingers down to play softly or use tense fingers to play loudly or use tension to play faster, you are doing two negative things. Musically you are creating a double bass sound that isn't clean and pure. A sound produced on the bass with slowed and/or tensed fingers is not as pure as a sound produced with reflexive movements.

Physically you are forcing the bones of the fingers and of the wrist closer together, and years of this compression damages the cartilage in the joints. TRULY, YOU CAN PLAY THE DOUBLE BASS AS LOUDLY OR AS SOFTLY OR AS FAST AS YOU WANT WITHOUT TENSING YOUR HANDS AND FINGERS BEFORE YOU PLAY, AND STILL HAVE ABSOLUTE CONTROL OVER YOUR HANDS.

Here is the psychological component of hands. Hands don't tense themselves independently of the performer. They tense for two reasons that reinforce each other. Two truths: Almost all double bass players experience the fear of wanting to play the bass well. Almost all double bass players could make changes to their bass technique that would make their playing more mechanically advantageous.

When a double bass player performs with fear, then the tension of fear in the hands and moving fingers can compromise a bass technique that could be more user friendly. This means the double bass player tenses the hands and fingers more and more to gain more control.

The double bass performance then usually goes downhill, and the bass player tenses the hands even more to try to regain control.

WHAT IF THE DOUBLE BASS PLAYER CHOSE TO WITHDRAW THE TENSION BUILDING IN THE HANDS AND FINGERS CAUSED BY FEAR, AND LEARNED TO TRUST THE HANDS TO PLAY BEAUTIFULLY AND EFFORTLESSLY. This would end the cycle of tension and fear and tension and fear etc. the performing bass player was in.

It would bring to consciousness the unconscious technique habit of raising the tension level in the hands the more difficult the piece, and give the double bass player back "CONSCIOUS CONTROL" of his or her hands and fingers.

NOW, the hands and fingers of the singer, conductor, drummer and trombone player: The singer's technique doesn't use the fingers and the hands, and the conductor's, the drum set player's, and trombone player's technique don't utilize moving fingers (or at least minimally).

But in all of the above cases a clear sense of what is going on the hands and fingers has an effect on the performance.

Let me combine the Alexander Technique here with psychology. IF THE SINGER, CONDUCTOR, DRUM SET PLAYER, OR TROMBONE PLAYER EXPRESS THEMSELVES WITH EASY SOFT HANDS, THEN THE HANDS AND FINGERS ARE NOT REINFORCING FEAR BY EXPRESSING FEAR WITH TENSION. THIS ENABLES THE PERFORMER OR CONDUCTOR TO PERFORM OR CONDUCT MUCH MORE FEARLESSLY.

WHEN THE LEVEL OF FEAR OF THE PERFORMER OR CONDUCTOR DROPS LOWER AND LOWER, THEN THE PERFORMER OR CONDUCTOR IS ABLE TO OFFER A PERFORMANCE OF GREATER AND GREATER LOVE.

LOVE IS LETTING GO OF FEAR.

Double Bass - Warming Up

Most of the double bass players I have worked with over the years warm up. Most of them say they are not happy with how well they play when they practice 50% of their practice time. So, three to four days out of each week most bass players are not happy with how they're playing/practicing. This means that warming up by playing scales, arpeggios, etudes, etc. does not work half of the time. Why?

BECAUSE MOST DOUBLE BASS PLAYERS PRACTICE FOCUSING ON THE ENDS OVER THE MEANS. The Alexander Technique calls this end-gaining. END-GAINING means that the double bass player doing his or her warm-ups is focusing only on what is coming out of the bass and not taking care of him or herself.

Simply, the warm-ups are not being used as a place for the double bass player to bring him or herself into balance on the instrument. They are a place to do a daily mostly unconscious RITUAL, and hope that at the end of the warm-ups they will play well. AS I SAID, MOST BASS PLAYERS DON'T PLAY WELL AT LEAST HALF OF THE TIME.

How does the Alexander Technique solve this problem of making warming up on the double bass effective? IF AT LEAST HALF OF THE TIME THE WARM-UPS AREN'T HELPING, THEN WARMING UP IS NOT EFFECTIVE!

Here is a famous definition of insanity: Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and over expecting different results. This seems to be what is happening to most double bass players. They believe that warming up before playing works, because isn't this what everybody does? And even though it doesn't at least half of the time, this doesn't seem to shake most bass players' faith in warming up. They just keep warming up!

So is this faith misplaced in most double bass players? No! Why? If the intention of warming up is to take the bass player to a place each day that they can play with ease and grace, this intention is perfectly sane. IT IS HOW THE AVERAGE DOUBLE BASS PLAYER WARMS UP THAT DOESN'T WORK.

So, in an Alexander Technique session I have the bass player sit or stand, and I ask the bass player to play a scale for me for a few minutes. I ask the double bass player what they thought. Usually I get a response telling me they are NOT HAPPY with what they're hearing.

I now ask him or her to play a scale at a very easy slow tempo. They're usually happier with the performance. I then ask the double bass player to place all of their awareness on sitting or standing fully upright WITH EASE and not care how the scale sounds. They're usually even happier with the playing. I now ask the bass player to focus on releasing any unnecessary tension out the hands and arms, and the double bass player is really beginning to like what he or she hears. Why?

I'VE ALTERED THE WHOLE INTENTION OF THE WARM-UP. I'VE MADE THE WARM-UP A PLACE WHERE THE DOUBLE BASS PLAYER CAN CONSCIOUSLY BRING THEIR MIND AND WHOLE BODY INTO BALANCE WITH THE AID OF THE SCALES, ARPEGGIOS, ETC.

Now, the warm-up is a place where the bass player can fully connect to what is happening in his or her body at that very moment on the bass, and can consciously choose with the Alexander Technique knowledge of what a balanced poised body is on the double bass. The bass player is now using the warm-up as a place to consistently, day after day, create physical and emotional well-being with the aid of the bass.

This approach truly turns the double bass into something you do daily into a place where you know almost every time you sit or stand to play, even if you are in a bad place, the bass can be used to lovingly return you to a good place.

So, after a warm-up where you bring your whole body into coordinated poised balance on the double bass, then making music can be what you do daily to make yourself happy almost every single day.

Double Bass - The Profound Effects of Physical Release on Performance

YOU CANNOT UNDERESTIMATE THE EFFECTS ON YOU OF PLAYING THE DOUBLE BASS WITH THE LEAST AMOUNT OF PHYSICAL TENSION, THE HIGHEST MUSCULAR AND EMOTIONAL DYNAMIC, AND WITH EXTRAORDINARILY BALANCED POSTURE.

When all of the above is happening simultaneously, then you are guaranteed to be playing in the zone, but more importantly, when all of the above is happening simultaneously, you are just about guaranteed to be playing with an amazing sense of well-being. What do I mean?

When you are PLAYING THE BASS WITH THE LEAST AMOUNT OF PHYSICAL TENSION, THE HIGHEST MUSCULAR AND EMOTIONAL DYNAMIC, AND WITH EXTRAORDINARILY BALANCED POSTURE, then your body frees up your mind, as your mind is directing your body to play at the highest level of physical organization.

SIMPLY, A FEARLESS BODY ASSISTS THE MIND IN A FEARLESS JOYOUS PERFORMANCE.

There is an unbelievably good feeling of physical well-being when your body is playing the double bass with less and less work, more and more postural balance, and higher and higher energy. High energy and high dynamic are synonymous, and is the experience of performing with great joy and technical ease.

What is the effect on the body, on the musculature and joints when this is happening? I'm writing this from my experience of having been a concert guitarist. I'm not trying to capture what I've seen happen in my Alexander Technique double bass students, but share my visceral memories with you.

WHEN YOU ARE CREATING AN EXTRAORDINARY PERFORMANCE ON THE BASS AS YOU PLAY A DIFFICULT PIECE, AND INSTEAD OF THE MUSIC CAUSING YOU TO TENSE UP AND HUNKER DOWN TO PLAY WELL, YOU USE THE MUSIC TO KEEP RELEASING MORE AND MORE THROUGHOUT YOUR BODY, THEN IT'S LIKE BEING ON THE BEST HIGH IN THE WORLD.

You begin to sense an ongoing decompression of all of the joints in your body, from head to toe. Even if you didn't know there tension in your whole body, the sense of physical euphoric release through the act of playing the double bass doing less and less physical work, I've got a feeling this releases endorphins in the brain. I believe you are experiencing a runner's high at this point.

But a runner only experiences a runner's high, when the runner is experiencing running as effortless, either accidentally or by using the Alexander Technique principles of effortless running to choose to run effortlessly.

So, the principles of the Alexander Technique applied to double bass playing, used to assist you in creating physically expansive playing, releases the body's inherent chemicals of well-being, endorphins, even though bass playing is not an aerobic activity.

If you allow this and direct this, and choose to do this on the double bass, then you will become addicted to bass, playing in the most loving of ways. The bass then becomes a place where you find physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

In this circumstance I'm using addiction as an act of love. What do I mean? When you play the double bass to bring yourself into postural balance, and use your body to play the most difficult bass literature with the greatest of ease, releasing the body's natural chemicals of well-being, then you are showing yourself through playing the bass, what your life should ideally be all of the time.

And if you can handle this amazing sense of well-being on the double bass, WHICH MEANS YOU TRUST PLEASURE, then you will run to play the bass every day.

Double Bass - Not Hunkering Down

IT IS AMAZING HOW EASY IT IS TO JUST HUNKER DOWN AS YOU PLAY THE DOUBLE BASS WITH PASSION, AND DRIVE YOURSELF WITH GREAT LOVE AND CRUELTY TO THE GOAL OF PLAYING A BEAUTIFUL PIECE BEAUTIFULLY, NO MATTER THE PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL COST.

I really love to write about double bass players who demonstrate their love for the instrument by practicing consistently many hours a day, playing beautiful bass literature incredibly difficult to perform, because of this love for the bass.

From my perspective as an Alexander Technique teacher, is it truly loving to play the double bass hours a day, if you're learning music that opens your heart, if you're HARMING your body? Let me state it a different way: Do you have to pay a physical price to play the most amazing bass music well?

I believe many, if not most double bass players believe so. As far as I can see, highly motivated bass players are the same in approach and expectations as highly competitive athletes. They both drive themselves to excel, no matter the physical price. They both figure they'll get injured at some point, go through rehab, and eventually get back to their sport or the bass.

Let me give an Alexander Technique definition of playing the double bass lovingly.

YOU CAN PLAY THE DOUBLE BASS WITH GREAT PASSION, AND MOTIVATE YOURSELF WITH GREAT LOVE IN YOUR GOAL OF PLAYING A BEAUTIFUL PIECE BEAUTIFULLY, WITHOUT PAYING A PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL COST, IF YOU STEP BACK AND ACQUIRE AND OBSERVE A BASS TECHNIQUE THAT WORKS.

What is a double bass technique that works? IT IS A BASS TECHNIQUE THAT BRINGS GREAT EASE AND FACILITY TO PLAYING THE GREATEST DOUBLE BASS LITERATURE WITHOUT CAUSING WEAR AND TEAR TO THE BODY, NO MATTER HOW EXPRESSIVELY YOU PLAY.

Here is where I wanted to get to in this article. A bass player is more likely to hunker down and get into physical trouble, the greater his or her love is for the instrument and its finest compositions.

Why? Because it is at this point of wanting to play the extraordinarily beautiful literature of the double bass at the concert double bass level, that the bass player hunkers down to the bass, to MAKE the bass do what he or she wants.

So, can you play amazingly expressively with great facility, and not get injured on the double bass eventually? YES!

How? You realize you can be 100% present on the double bass, fully in the moment as you play. What does being “fully in the moment” on the bass mean? THIS MEANS AS YOU PRACTICE, YOU ARE FOCUSING ON CREATING/USING A DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE THAT ALLOWS YOU TO BE FULLY AND EFFORTLESSLY SITTING OR STANDING BALANCED WITH THE BASS, AND YOU ARE NOT MAKING A HEROIC EFFORT TO PLAY WELL. YOU TRUST YOUR HANDS TO PLAY WELL AND TO EXPRESS WHAT IS IN YOUR BRAIN WITHOUT STRAINING FOR THE GOAL OF MUSICAL PERFECTION.

In other words, you are simultaneously in the present, consciously doing the least amount of physical work as you learn the piece, as you listen to what is coming out of the double bass. This means you don’t listen to the inner critic, who wants to FORCE you to just go for the notes at the expense of your mind, heart, and body.

Here’s why going for the performance at any cost is not loving. IF YOU DRIVE YOURSELF MERCILESSLY TO PERFORM A PIECE BEAUTIFULLY, THEN YOU ARE NOT GOING TO BE IN A LOVING PLACE MOST OF THE TIME. Why?

Because, if you are always striving nonstop for the perfect performance, you definitely will NOT create the best possible double bass technique, you will NOT reach this goal most of the time, and you will attack yourself when you fail to play the way you want.

So, I’m asking as you learn to play the most beautiful difficult double bass literature at the highest level, you use the most user-friendly bass technique. Sit or stand expansively balanced with the double bass, using the least amount of physical work, with great self-awareness throughout this whole learning/mastering the piece process.

Double Bass - Brute Force

Recently I’ve watched a lot of tennis and golf tournaments, and I’ve been astounded by how consistently certain players win and how consistently certain players always come up short.

I listen to the commentators, like John McEnroe or Arnold Palmer, and they clearly see what it is that the tennis player or the golfer who is coming in second needs to do to win. Do the

coaches of these players not see what these expert commentators, who won all of the time, see? Do the players not know what people like McEnroe or Arnold Palmer are saying?

I think they do know what these experts are saying. So, it begs the question, “Why aren’t these athletes, who have every bit the potential to win as the ones winning, do what needs to be done?”

Now, why doesn’t the almost amazing double bass player do what needs to be done to be a first tier performer, given that it would be easy to gather a group of fine bass players together who could make a list of what the double bass player needs to do to be phenomenal?

Here’s why. I LISTENED VERY CLOSELY TO WHAT MCENROE AND PALMER HAD TO SAY ABOUT THE TENNIS AND GOLF PLAYERS. AS A FORMER CONCERT GUITARIST I LISTENED INCREDIBLY CLOSELY TO WHAT GUITAR TEACHERS AND OTHER FINE MUSICAL PERFORMERS SAID I NEEDED TO DO, AND I REALIZED THEY WERE TALKING ABOUT GETTING FROM HERE TO THERE WITH BRUTE FORCE. What do I mean?

My guitar teachers were very clear about what my weaknesses were on the guitar, and they could tell me what I needed to do, and that I should do it over and over and over until I got it. But they had no idea of how to do what they thought I needed to do and let go of what isn’t working, tied to what really works.

Let me explain. If I tell a double bass player to play without immobilized shoulders, and the bass player realizes his or her arms begin to drop as he or she plays with free shoulders, then the bass player is likely to tense and immobilize the shoulders again to keep the arms up. So, what I teach the bass player is how to support the arms with the shoulders with the least amount of muscle, given that the right arm is always in movement and the left arm is almost always moving.

IF YOU MOVE ARMS WITH RIGID SHOULDERS, YOU IMPAIR COORDINATION AND CAUSE WEAR AND TEAR TO THE SHOULDERS, AND YOU WILL EVENTUALLY GET INJURED.

There is a famous saying, “The devil is in the details.” These details can keep a double bass player, a golfer, or a tennis player from performing at the highest level, when someone points out the performer’s or the athlete’s weaknesses, and wants them to do endless repetition trying to HOLD the right posture, hand, and arm positions etc.

I believe intuitively every performing musician or athlete with amazing potential knows something is wrong, when they can’t ever seem to become the best no matter how much endless repetitive work they put in.

In the non-Alexander Technique world musicians and athletes simply don’t understand what they call refining their technique is using BRUTE FORCE to get where they want to get to. How do you know when you are using brute force to attain a goal?

There are two indicators. First, you're not as good as the best double bass players in the world. Second, you're consistently in pain and/or getting injured.

This does not have to be. Identify the weaknesses in your double bass playing, and then go find an Alexander Technique teacher to show you how to reach your goals without bullying yourself, by continuing to do what hasn't worked yet.

Double Bass - Awareness as You Perform

How do you incorporate the subtle changes and not so subtle changes you've made to your double bass technique into a bass performance? How do you do in performance what you've been doing when you practice?

THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE IS AS MUCH ABOUT WHAT YOU'RE LETTING GO OF IN YOUR OLD TECHNIQUE THAT WAS NOT WORKING, AS IT IS ABOUT WHAT YOU'RE INCORPORATING INTO YOUR PLAYING TO MAKE IT WORK.

So, how do you simultaneously let go of what isn't working as you perform and do what is new? YOU DO THIS WITH SOMEONE OR A GROUP LISTENING. So, instead of asking someone or a group to listen to you to hear how well you can play the whole piece, you ask someone or a group to listen to you as you play fragments or larger sections, as you focus SOLELY on the changes you're making or have made to your double bass technique.

You ask the person or persons listening to give you feedback on what they're seeing, letting hearing be secondary. THIS MEANS THE LISTENER(S) IS FOCUSING ON HOW YOU'RE PLAYING THE DOUBLE BASS, NOT ON WHAT IS COMING OUT. This is the pure Alexander Technique approach of teaching the bass player to take care of themselves before taking care of the music – THE MEANS OVER THE ENDS.

When I demonstrate the basic principles of good posture of the Alexander Technique to a group of double bass players, it is amazing how quickly they begin to see as I see, after I work with a couple of performing bass players in front of the group. Truth is they could always see the poor posture etc. of their colleagues! When I demonstrate how much more comfortable it is to sit or stand fully upright, and how much better the quality of the sound coming out of the bass is with Alexander Technique posture, they begin to see the value of whole body good posture on the bass.

There is another crucial element to this, and this is at the core of asking other double bass players or non-players to observe you as you're playing: YOU ARE ASKING THE OBSERVERS TO SEE AND HEAR WHAT THEY SEE AND HEAR WITHOUT JUDGEMENT.

This is very new for most of the observers, especially the double bass players, because performing musicians clearly get the message over time that you only improve if you are critical of your playing. This gets projected onto all other bass players, who you usually are consciously

or unconsciously in competition with. By definition “to be in competition with” means if the other bass player is better than you, YOU LOSE! I find this pretty sad and unnecessary and a detriment to wonderful music making.

IT IS A GREAT GIFT TO YOURSELF TO GATHER A GROUP OF OBSERVERS/LISTENERS TOGETHER TO LOVINGLY HELP YOU BECOME THE AMAZING DOUBLE BASS PLAYER YOU ARE BY LETTING GO OF WHAT DOESN'T WORK.

When you ask someone to observe/listen to you, and you place all of your awareness on the refinements you are making to your playing, and the listener(s)/observer(s) understand this, then you have done an extraordinarily loving thing.

YOU HAVE BROUGHT TOGETHER A GROUP OF MUSIC LOVERS, YOU BEING PART OF THE GROUP, WHOSE ONLY PURPOSE IS TO ASSIST IN CREATING A KIND AND LOVING WAY FOR YOU TO MAKE MUSIC ON THE DOUBLE BASS!

This has be a brand new experience for you the performing double bass player because possibly for the first time you are in control of the intention of the performance. Rather than sitting down or standing up to prove to the listener(s) how well you can play, and hoping (worrying) you do well, you are lovingly asking the listen(s) for HELP.

When you ask an observer/listener to help you test whether the changes you've made to your double bass technique are part of you or is not, it is a remarkably kind thing you do for yourself. It is a threefer (three for one).

YOU TRANSFORM THE OBSERVER/LISTENER INTO A SUPPORTER, YOU FIND OUT WHAT IS LEFT OF THE OLD TECHNIQUE THAT WASN'T WORKING THAT STILL NEEDS TO BE RELEASED, AND YOU SEE IF THE NEW TECHNIQUE HAS COMPLETELY REPLACED POOR LIMITING TECHNIQUE.

Double Bass - A Spiritual Consideration and the Body

In this article I want to take a look at what I believe spiritually, apply it to playing the double bass, and tie it to the Alexander Technique.

If I had a formal religion it would be A Course in Miracles. A Course in Miracles is a profound spiritual publication that appears to be a direct channeling from Jesus. It says that we are all holy spirits of God, and the Fall was about us forgetting that God is the life source of every one of us. In that moment of denying God completes us, we went insane, and we emotionally cut ourselves off from God as the Source. This caused the physical universe to come into being, because in our insanity we all miscreated this representation of limitation – the physical universe and we as dying bodies living on dying planets circling dying suns.

So, what does this have to do with playing the double bass and the Alexander Technique? If you believe you are your body, THEN YOU ARE HOLDING ONTO YOUR BODY FOR DEAR LIFE, FOR

YOUR VERY EXISTENCE. ODDS ARE, EVEN IF YOU BELIEVE YOU ARE MORE THAN YOUR BODY, THAT YOU HAVE A SOUL, EMOTIONALLY YOU ARE YOUR BODY. A Course in Miracles has a unique definition of the ego – the ego is your complete identification with your body as who you are, so you would cease to exist without your body.

It is almost impossible to escape the power of this belief that you must have your body to exist, and what this means is MOST DOUBLE BASS PLAYERS HOLD ONTO THEIR BODIES FOR DEAR LIFE. So, the body is massively important to the performing bass player, BECAUSE HOW ELSE WOULD YOU PLAY THE BASS IF NOT WITH YOUR BODY? This also means you have to live IN FEAR OF YOUR BODY HAVING PHYSICAL PROBLEMS THAT WOULD MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR YOU TO PLAY THE DOUBLE BASS!

What are the implications of this from the Alexander Technique perspective? IF YOU ARE HOLDING ONTO YOUR BODY FOR DEAR LIFE, YOU ARE IN FEAR, AND IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO KEEP THIS FEAR OUT OF THE BODY, AND THIS MANIFESTS AS TENSION TO THE VERY CORE OF THE BODY. FROM A COURSE IN MIRACLES PERSPECTIVE, THIS IS WHAT CAUSES THE BODY TO GET SICK AND EVENTUALLY DIE.

What this means, is if you impose on the body a function that is not valid, you cause the body to break down eventually. A Course in Miracles says the body's only function is communication, not to keep us in existence.

PLAYING THE DOUBLE BASS FOR YOURSELF AND ANYONE ELSE IS ONLY AN ACT OF COMMUNICATION. So, if you were gently in a body that you don't have to fear is going to betray you, then you get to use the body to ONLY make amazingly beautiful music.

If you combine this with the Alexander technique principles of good posture and good body use and great technique, then imagine how effortless it will be to communicate. Let me explain.

If you are in a holy peaceful relationship with your body, then you do not have to fear it getting sick or damaged, because you are NOT putting pressure on the body to keep you alive. This means your tension level goes down to zero or near zero, and the body can be in balance as you play the bass.

But assuming you've got some pretty poor postural and technique habits left over from fearfully trying to HOLD your body together, the Alexander Technique can help you consciously release and replace these habits with amazing posture and technique.

This means by being in a sane, loving, kind, and holy relationship to your body, tied to a double bass technique that works without straining your body, you get to play the bass at the highest level fearlessly.

Double Bass - Correcting Your Technique Can Cause Emotional Pain

F. M. Alexander said that it is difficult to change poor posture, because what you are doing wrong posturally feels right, because you have done it for so long. Conversely, when you change a poor posture to a new habit of balance and ease it will feel wrong at first, and that if you don't continue with the new habit until what's right feels right, you'll revert to the old posture unconsciously.

I want to look at the emotional/psychological equivalent of "what is right feeling wrong" on the double bass, and what you experience emotionally when you attempt to change your bass technique.

You would think that when you are shown a new technique and posture that will make it possible to play the most difficult double bass literature with ease, that the process of replacing what hasn't worked with what works would be easy physically and emotionally. Maybe not so!

I BELIEVE THE EASE WITH WHICH YOU CHANGE SPECIFIC INADEQUATE DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE AND POSTURAL CHOICES TO ONES THAT WORK CAN BE QUICK OR SLOW, DEPENDING ON YOUR RESISTANCE TO THE NEW TECHNIQUE AND POSTURE. Let me explain.

Let's assume you really see clearly, objectively, the benefits to changing some of the elements of your double bass technique, does this guarantee an easy and quick transition to the new? NO! Why? I'll use my classical guitar training as an example.

After years of struggling with my guitar technique, I finally found a truly fine guitar teacher who could NOT help me with the hurting in my hands and body, even though he improved my sound dramatically. So, I sought out an Alexander Technique teacher who could show me the changes I needed to make to my guitar technique, whole body and hands, to stop hurting and create a pain-free efficient guitar technique.

When I look back at that time, I remember there were lots of moments when, even though what I was doing with the Alexander Technique teacher was truly transforming my poor posture and guitar technique into a unified whole, I was DEPRESSED.

So, there I was in England and had found exactly what I needed to be the guitarist I wanted to be, and I was emotionally hurting. I was doing exactly what I needed to do to be the best guitarist I could be, and I was hurting. Why? I want to generalize my answer, because I have seen as an Alexander Technique teacher some of my double bass students go through the same emotional discomfort. So, what is going on?

WHEN YOU CHANGE WHAT YOU HAD BELIEVED WRONGLY WAS RIGHT IN YOUR DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE, EVEN KNOWING THE CHANGES ARE RIGHT AND LOVING, YOUR EGO MAY MAKE YOU FEEL BAD. THIS MEANS YOUR LOVING ACT, CHANGING AN INADEQUATE BASS TECHNIQUE INTO ONE THAT MAKES PLAYING THE DOUBLE BASS AN EFFORTLESS JOY, IS EXPERIENCED AS YOU DOING SOMETHING WRONG! SO, THE LOVING CHANGES YOU'RE MAKING TO YOUR BASS TECHNIQUE MAKE YOU HURT EMOTIONALLY. Why?

BECAUSE YOU HAVE SO STRONGLY IDENTIFIED WITH YOUR OLD DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE, YOUR EGO FEELS THREATENED, AND SO YOUR EGO MAKES YOU FEEL BAD!

It isn't the intention of this short article to go into depth psychologically about why what is good posturally, technically, and psychologically is feeling bad, but to have you be conscious that you are hurting as you do such a nice thing for yourself.

So, first acknowledge that the changes you're making to your double bass technique are loving, and acknowledge that you are feeling bad, because EGOS USUALLY DON'T LIKE CHANGE, loving or not.

Second, be gentle with yourself as you feel sad or depressed on the double bass, and be willing to gently observe these feelings, gently being with them and then moving them to the side, as you continue to do what you need to do posturally and technically on the bass.

I'm asking you to acknowledge that when what you are doing to change your double bass technique is loving, and even if you don't feel good as you make these changes, that it is loving to complete the journey to great technique. Let go of incapacitating yourself with the lie that what is working will never work. HANG IN THERE AND COMPLETE THE JOURNEY!

Double Bass - Negative and Positive Perfectionism

Here is my definition of a NEGATIVE PERFECTIONIST. He or she is a double bass player who uses negative reinforcement to become a very fine bass player. This means practicing to become a fine bass player is based on hours and hours of practicing and being very critical of your playing. Your intention is to see how well you can perform with the LEAST AMOUNT OF THINGS GOING WRONG with the performance – not missing notes, how close the performance is to your ideal interpretation, ease of playing, etc.

Here is my definition of a POSITIVE PERFECTIONIST. It is similar to being a negative perfectionist, but the difference is a positive perfectionist is a double bass player who trusts the hands to do what they need to do to play flawlessly, rather than trying NOT to make mistakes.

So, the goals are the same but the means are radically different. The negative perfectionist plays with the critical eye of the ego to improve. The positive perfectionist plays with the gentle eye of the ego, and says, "What can I do to get out for my way, to let myself approach the perfect performance FEARLESSLY?"

We know that negative perfectionism on the double bass works. If you're willing to put in the practice time, do the work to create a good enough technique, and NEVER give up, no matter how critical you are of your playing, you will become a great player.

Can you become a great double bass player with positive perfectionism? Yes. Here are some of the strengths of positive perfectionism.

You are LESS LIKELY to make as many mistakes on the double bass than the negative perfectionist, if you trust yourself to be accurate, and you have a technique good enough to play what you want. Why? Because the tension level in the body is usually much lower in the bass player who plays fearlessly, with trust rather than trying to avoid mistakes.

An Alexander Technique point here: A negative or positive perfectionist double bass player can both create an incredibly efficient bass technique and bass posture with the help of an Alexander Technique teacher. But the double bass player who uses negative reinforcement will probably have to be more mindful of excess tension throughout the body, because he or she uses criticism to play well.

As a positive perfectionist are you as willing as a negative perfectionist to make changes to a double bass technique that is letting you down, given you don't use the inner critic to DEMAND flawless playing? Yes. I believe it is the bass player who uses positive perfectionism, who is MORE likely to make changes to a bass technique that needs refining, than someone who uses negative perfectionism. Why?

When you learn by avoiding mistakes, you have created an inner critic who expects you do everything you can to NOT make mistakes. Is that inner critic going to let you make changes to your technique, since you will lose control over your playing, if you make changes to your technique? Possibly not. I've had Alexander Technique double bass students who stop coming to me, when I suggested a better way to play the bass, and they couldn't play as well initially after making the posture and technique changes.

Here is the crux of the matter. Can you be as mindful on the double bass without the critic and play as well or better, than when you are always critical of your playing? I'm asking this question as only an objective question, rather than as an implied statement that positive perfectionism is always better.

Negative perfectionism can be better for some double bass players, if it produces amazing performances. But my only caveat is that the negative perfectionist needs to have the inner strength to override the inner critic, when it is necessary to make a valid improvement to your technique. THIS MEANS THAT ACCEPTING THAT LOSING CONTROL OF YOUR PLAYING IS A REALLY GOOD THING, WHEN IT LEADS TO GREATER EASE IN PLAYING THE DIFFICULT LITERATURE.

Here is the shadow side, negative side of positive perfectionism. It is not loving when you play consistently carelessly and seem not to threaten yourself. In other words, you seem to be gentle on yourself, as you consistently make the same correctable mistakes. This is actually giving up against the hyper-critical voice inside that is never satisfied. This is the inner critic out of control. This means you are being controlled by such a strong fear of making mistakes that you don't even attempt to solve technique weaknesses.

I DO favor positive perfectionism over negative, if you want to choose between them. Here's why.

IF YOU ARE NEVER AFRAID OF YOURSELF ON THE DOUBLE BASS, THEN MINDFUL GENTLE PRECISION IS AN EFFORTLESS GIVEN, IF YOU HAVE LOVINGLY CREATED A TECHNIQUE THAT MAKES ALL OF THE WORTHWHILE BASS LITERATURE EASILY OPEN TO YOUR INTERPRETATION, AND YOU TRUST YOUR HANDS TO PLAY THE RIGHT NOTES.

LOVE IS NEVER BEING AFRAID OF YOURSELF ON THE DOUBLE BASS, BUT MASTERY BASED ON NEGATIVE PERFECTIONISM CAN STILL FEEL PRETTY DARN GOOD! CHOOSE ONE OR THE OTHER AND TAKE LOVING CONTROL OF YOUR BASS PLAYING.

Double Bass - To Muddle or Not to Muddle

A great double bass technique is a combination of two things.

FIRST, TEACH YOUR WHOLE BODY TO PLAY THE DOUBLE BASS WITH EASEFUL UPRIGHT BALANCE AND WITH GREAT TECHNIQUE. GREAT TECHNIQUE IS DOING WHAT WORKS WITH MINIMAL MUSCULAR WORK AND TENSION, SO THAT THERE IS NO WEAR AND TEAR TO THE BODY.

SECOND, YOU DON'T RESIST WHAT WORKS.

It is the latter that is a unique view of what is double bass technique. The main negative result of resisting what works, is that when you go to an Alexander Technique teacher, you will slow down the process of improving your posture and technique on the bass. And the result of this on your double bass playing is that you will inhibit becoming a better bass player.

When I say what I've just said, it is obvious, but what is not obvious to the double bass player are the underlying thoughts, beliefs, and feelings that define what you believe about your bass playing and how you feel about the bass.

The reason they're not obvious is they have been with you most of your life. Here is a definition of the unconscious. THE UNCONSCIOUS IS HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT YOURSELF AND YOUR DOUBLE BASS PLAYING, AND YOU'VE NEVER EVER THOUGHT ONE WAY OR THE OTHER ABOUT IT.

There are two ways to become a fine double bass player. THE FIRST IS A TO MUDDLE THROUGH, AND THE SECOND IS TO A CHOOSE WHAT YOU WANT TO BELIEVE, DO, RELEASE, THINK, AND FEEL AS YOU PRACTICE OR PERFORM.

IT IS AMAZING HOW WELL WE CAN DO THINGS, LIKE PLAY A DOUBLE BASS, WITHOUT FOCUS, CLARITY, OR CONSCIOUSNESS. Let me explain?

You can learn to play the double bass incredibly well if you start with some innate talent, have a bass teacher show you some basic principles of technique, put in a heck of a lot of practice time, and have a sense of what sounds good. Remember, I'm assuming you have innate musicality, so what sounds good to you will probably be musical.

I know this article feels like I'm all over the place, but I'm working out what I want to say as I write this. I'm stating a problem and I want to solve it by the end of this article. Here's the problem.

DO YOU HAVE TO KNOW YOURSELF TO BE A GREAT DOUBLE BASS PLAYER? From what I've seen of some really fine players, NO! If the right steps are taken and enough work put in, you may become a fine bass player. But this is not guaranteed, if you don't know yourself. Why?

BECAUSE IF YOU DON'T LET GO OF BELIEFS, THOUGHTS, AND FEELINGS THAT COULD POTENTIALLY SABOTAGE YOUR PLAYING, THEN YOU MAY SABOTAGE YOUR PLAYING.

It is an amazing gift to yourself to really bring to consciousness what you think, feel, and believe about the double bass, and what you physically do when you play. As a GIFT TO YOURSELF, sit down and write and write and write, thinking about the bass, how you feel when you play, and how you feel about your playing.

I'm inviting you to bring to consciousness what you tell yourself about the double bass and your playing. You may be shocked at some of the things you believe and say to yourself over and over in your thoughts about your ability at the instrument. This shapes your feelings about the instrument!

Lately, it has really been on my mind how well double bass players can play with so little knowledge of themselves, how little they know about what they believe about their talent and technique. This has been in the back of my mind the last few years, since I read the Harry Potter books by J. K. Rowling. Throughout the whole series of seven books it is clear that Harry has amazing abilities, that he ultimately uses these powers to defeat Voldemort, but he is REMARKABLY UNCONSCIOUS throughout the whole series. He simply stumbles through doing what needs to be done to save his world from evil.

He does practice hard to get control over his abilities, but he never seems to have any sense of what runs him or why or how he does what he does. This is really demonstrated when Professor Snape attempts to teach Harry control over his thoughts, so that Voldemort can't read Harry's mind. Harry never really learns how to control his thoughts but muddles through and wins in the end.

Ultimately the Harry Potter series is about the belief that love always triumphs over evil.

As a double bass player, your love of the bass does NOT always triumph over poor technique and harsh thoughts, beliefs, and feelings that are not true about yourself and the bass. These

are unloving thoughts, and even with your love of the double bass and its repertoire, these unconscious beliefs may not let you succeed.

KNOWING THYSELF IS THE EXTRAORDINARY SELF-LOVE OF BEING CONSCIOUS OF WHAT YOU BELIEVE ABOUT THE DOUBLE BASS AND YOUR ABILITY, UNITED WITH PRACTICING GENTLY AND MINDFULLY.

Double Bass - Unconsciously Recreating What You Didn't Get

The title of this article is rather unusual, but I feel it is very important to write about. Another way to say what the title says is, "You may be recreating the limiting double bass technique you have, rather than creating the loving technique you want."

In other words, you may be fooling yourself into believing you are pursuing the double bass technique you want, when in truth you keep recreating the limiting bass technique you already have. Why would you do that?

It is an extraordinary thing that human beings do when they don't get what is loving as a child. Instead of giving themselves what they didn't get, now that they know it would be loving, they keep recreating what happened.

Here is a very personal example:

When I was a child things were so incredibly painful in my family, that I wanted to run away. As a child, of course there was no way to run away, so I buried these feelings and became part of the problem to survive. It was a harsh, competitive, and critical family, and to survive I became as harsh, competitive, and critical as the rest of them. (It was these characteristics that I used to turn myself into a competent classical guitarist.)

All of these years later, I now have finally realized why I pursued better and better guitar teachers, why I have moved so much, and why *The Lost Horizon* by James Hilton is one of my favorite books.

The Lost Horizon is about Shangri-La, which is a small monastery and village in the Himalayas that is an amazingly peaceful and loving place, free from the insanity and violence of the world.

Clearly, this is the little boy I was who wanted this place of peace more than anything, since I was living in such a tough, unforgiving, frightened, and frightening family, a family that expressed all of their unhappiness out loud and at me.

So, I have moved and moved and moved looking for Shangri-La, but I never let where I was be Shangri-La! Eventually every place I lived I found fault with, the people who lived there I found fault with, and ran away.

What I just described, and just realized for the first time in my life, is that wherever I went, I turned it into my painful birth home, rather than Shangri-La. (Realizing this is finally freeing me of this unconscious cycle of me recreating what was.)

So, are you recreating the limiting double bass technique that you were taught, even though you want more than anything a technique that makes the bass an effortless joy to play, even as you are being offered the bass technique that will free you at the instrument?

If not, you may be doing what I had done in my family. If as a young beginner you weren't getting what you needed from your music teacher, you may be recreating a limiting double bass technique. At some unconscious level, you may have known you weren't getting what you needed from your bass teacher, but like me and my guitar teachers, you suppressed your doubts, so you could continue to accept what your music teacher was teaching you.

Here is another huge piece of my story. Because I wanted to be a great concert guitarist, I kept pursuing better and better guitar teachers, and what is so weird, is my best guitar teacher was an Alexander Technique teacher who taught me how to create my own great guitar technique.

My other "best guitar teacher" was the book *New Pathways to Piano technique* by Luigi Bonpensiere. From this book I learned to play the guitar fearlessly, lovingly, and incredibly accurately. (I have a chapter about this book in my double bass ebook and how to apply it to your playing.)

What did I do after I had finally found in my early twenties the holy grail of guitar playing in an Alexander Technique teacher and the Bonpensiere book? I quit! Why?

I quit for the same reason that I had been moving from place to place all of my life. I couldn't handle the effortless and loving technique that I had finally found, because I had pursued a freeing guitar technique as ruthlessly as I had moved from city to city, and because I was unconsciously stuck not letting myself have that I hadn't gotten.

LET YOURSELF FIND WHAT TRULY WORKS ON THE DOUBLE BASS, LET YOURSELF APPLY WHAT TRULY WORKS ON THE BASS, AND LET YOURSELF HAVE SHANGRI-LA ON THE BASS.

Double Bass - Recording Yourself with Help

THERE ARE THREE REASONS TO RECORD YOURSELF PLAYING THE DOUBLE BASS.

THE FIRST IS TO GET FEEDBACK ON YOUR PLAYING, THE SECOND IS TO CREATE A RECORD OF YOUR PLAYING, AND THE THIRD IS TO RECORD YOURSELF PERFORMING FEARLESSLY.

It is the recording yourself performing fearlessly that probably surprised you as you read it. Let me address all three.

The first, recording yourself is truly an objective way to step back literally from your double bass playing, and hear if you are playing what you think you're playing.

Whenever I recorded myself playing the guitar, it was amazing how many things I became aware of that I corrected right away. These changes included consistency of tone quality, evenness of tempo, how expressively I was playing, and learned wrong notes.

If you use high quality recording equipment, you can hear what the listener hears coming out of the double bass. As you're playing, you're being enveloped in the sound of the instrument, and you may think your sound is richer than it really is.

When I first heard myself recorded on the guitar, I had not realized that I was rushing in many passages of the piece. Rarely, does the double bass player recording him or herself slow down without knowing it during a recording. Usually the stress of the recording causes the bass player to rush the tempo to hold the performance together.

I have never heard a double bass player be TOO expressive in his or her playing, by over-utilizing piano/forte, crescendo/decrescendo, rubato, or color changes. When you record yourself, you will probably realize you aren't as dynamic as you think you are, and begin to really go for it, in terms of expressiveness.

The second, creating a record of your best double bass playing and then revisiting it months later, can really demonstrate your evolution on the instrument.

Whether you demand and/or trust you will get better and better on the double bass, by recording yourself, you will see where your playing is heading. I do suggest you allow for surprises as you set performance goals. Be flexible enough to adjust your goals, so that wonderful unplanned things in your playing can happen.

The third is recording yourself fearlessly. What does this mean?

RECORDING YOURSELF FEARLESSLY THROUGH THE WHOLE SESSION MEANS, THAT IF YOU HAVE LEARNED TO PLAY THE DOUBLE BASS TRUSTING YOURSELF TO EXPRESS WHAT YOU WANT AND TO PLAY WITH ACCURACY, THAT WHEN YOU RECORD YOU DON'T STOP PLAYING WITH THIS TRUST.

A few years ago I sat in on a pianist recording herself to create a recording to sell. I gave her continuous feedback as she recorded herself.

I ASKED HER NOT TO PLAY CAREFULLY AT ALL. I ASKED HER TO REMEMBER TO TRUST HER HANDS TO PLAY ACCURATELY. I ASKED HER TO BE TOO EXPRESSIVE. I ASKED HER TO PLAY THE MUSIC AS A GIFT TO HERSELF AND ME. I ASKED HER TO REMEMBER THE ONLY PURPOSE OF PLAYING THE PIANO IS TO SHOW HOW BEAUTIFUL THE MUSIC IS.

We did the above from the very beginning of the recording session and throughout the session. This meant that from the very moment she began recording, she inhibited recording fearfully and safely.

I believe the object of any recording, one only for yourself or to be distributed, is to offer the recording as a gift to the listener. I really want the double bass player to truly minimize feeling “it could have been better”, after the recording is made.

Usually, when the performer listens to his or her recording months later, the double bass player realizes it was not as bad as he or she thought. What if the bass player likes what was recorded right away? This means the performer will probably REALLY like what he or she hears months later.

There are two ways to record yourself. The first is to only record for the purpose of making corrections to your playing, and the second is to create a recording to distribute.

In either case it would be a great gift to yourself to have an Alexander Technique teacher sit in on a session or two. Why?

BECAUSE THERE IS NOTHING MORE LOVING THAN TO HAVE A SUPPORTIVE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE TEACHER SIT IN ON A RECORDING SESSION TO HELP YOU BE GOOD TO YOURSELF THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE SESSION.

One other point, it is actually cheaper to pay an Alexander Technique teacher for his or her time, in addition to the cost of making the recording to sell. When the pianist I helped make the cd was finished recording, she said it was the best recording, easiest recording, and the cheapest recording she had ever made, because it took half the usual time it takes her to make a recording she'd accept.

I want to finish on a concept central to the Alexander Technique.

IF YOU CAN LEARN TO RECORD YOURSELF FEARLESSLY, IMAGINE HOW FEARLESSLY YOU'LL PLAY THE DOUBLE BASS WHEN YOU'RE MAKING A CD. PLAYING FEARLESSLY WITH GREAT TRUST, TECHNIQUE, AND POSTURE, MEANS IF YOU TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF FIRST, WHAT COMES OUT THE BASS WILL BE INCREDIBLE, GUARANTEED!

Double Bass - To Ignore and to Release What Isn't Working

On the surface it seems that it is better to let go of the elements of your double bass technique that aren't working, rather than to ignore the inefficient parts of your technique. But this isn't so obvious. Here is a dictionary definition of ignore.

YOU REFUSE TO TAKE NOTICE OR ACKNOWLEDGE; DISREGARD INTENTIONALLY.

Did you notice the last word in the definition – INTENTIONALLY?!?! To me intentionally means doing something consciously, so even by this definition, “ignore” has the potential to be a truly conscious choice with a positive outcome.

There is a saying, “Whatever you focus on the most in your thoughts is what you create.” The opposite of this saying opens the door for you to simultaneously let go of what isn’t working on the double bass by actively releasing these problem habits and to ignore them.

There is a precedent set in the Alexander Technique for taking a word that usually has a negative connotation and giving it a positive spin. That word in the Alexander Technique is ORDERS. F. M. Alexander coined the word “orders” as what you told the body to do to prevent or release a poor postural habit. Orders are usually nonverbalized thoughts repeated as necessary.

Here’s an example of an ORDER that you could give your body before or as you play the double bass. “My neck is free and spine is lengthening.” This is an order of release, thought before you play and at times as you play, given so that you play without tensing up and hunkering down.

By what I believe is the generally accepted definition, IGNORING something in your bass technique is suppressing thinking about what isn’t working.

By definition in the Alexander Technique, RELEASING what isn’t working in your double bass technique is to bring to consciousness what isn’t working and to choose to stop doing these inefficient additions to your technique.

Here’s the overlap that places ignoring in a positive light. IF YOU IGNORE POOR DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE HABITS THAT AREN’T WORKING, THEN YOU AREN’T OBSESSING ON THEM. IN THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE, TO RELEASE OR INHIBIT A BASS TECHNIQUE HABIT IS TO ACCEPT THAT YOU HAVE THE POWER TO STOP DOING WHAT ISN’T WORKING.

By the usual definition of ignoring something in your double bass technique that is holding you back, you unconsciously believe you DON’T have the power to change what isn’t working, so you ignore it, so you can continue to practice and perform.

If you bring poor technique habits to consciousness and still deeply believe/feel you CAN’T change them, this is a very tough place to be. What do I mean?

If you tell yourself you CAN’T change the elements of your bass technique that don’t work, you are probably unwilling to look at this belief, because it feels too painful to think.

So, if you simultaneously identify what isn’t working in your double bass technique, let go of believing these elements are unfixable, and proceed to “ignore” what isn’t working, then you are NOT fixating on what has blocked great playing until now.

When you FIXATE on what is not working in your bass technique, then you must GATHER EVIDENCE that you are INCAPABLE of doing what you want on the double bass. THIS IS AN EXTRAORDINARY ACT OF GIVING AWAY YOUR POWER! So, you GATHER EVIDENCE to prove you are right.

By definition, GATHERING EVIDENCE that you have severe limitations on the bass is also unconscious behavior, like ignoring can be. Think about it: Isn't it bizarre how many things we humans do that seem so rational and thoughtful, that are so unconscious, because we are so afraid to admit we AREN'T as limited as we may believe we are.

I'M ASKING YOU TO EMPOWER YOURSELF AS A DOUBLE BASS PLAYER BY LETTING GO OF WHAT ISN'T WORKING IN YOUR BASS TECHNIQUE, GIVE YOURSELF THE FREEDOM TO IGNORE WHAT YOU'RE LETTING GO OF, AND GET ON WITH THE JOY OF PLAYING WITH GREAT EASE.

Double Bass - Repertoire of Technique

I'd like to use the word REPERTOIRE in a very different sense here, to have it be those applied physical habits that define your technique and posture, conscious and unconscious, when you play the double bass.

I also want to treat your posture on the double bass and your bass technique as one and the same, inseparable in creating fine bass playing.

If I were to ask you to sit down and write a book on double bass technique, what would you say? My experience as an Alexander Technique teacher is that if I ask a bass player to tell me what makes and defines his or her double bass technique, the bass player CAN give me specifics.

An aside here: If I ask the double bass player or dancer to describe the mechanics of walking or sitting down in a chair, they have no clue. This means performers have acquired some very specific rules about what makes for great technique in their art form, but have no idea as to how they move or inhabit space on a daily basis.

One of the best gifts you can give to yourself as a double bass player is to sit down and write out in detail what you live by as you play the bass. I'M CALLING THIS YOUR "DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE REPERTOIRE".

You can never be too specific about the rules you live by on the bass. This is probably a brand new concept for you, because over your playing lifetime, you may have moved from double bass teacher to bass teacher, attempting to find a new teacher, each surpassing the previous teacher, to help you move closer and closer to an amazing bass technique. And you probably have never listed what you came to define as your rules of fine double bass playing, and checked to see if these rules worked.

The only way to test if this has been so, is for you write the double bass technique method you would write if a publisher asked you to write such a book.

Here's what I think you'll find. You will find that if you analyze, observe, and put into words everything you do in your body from head to toe as you play the bass, you will find how much you do as you play that you LEFT UP TO YOUR BODY.

Let me say that again. THE ODDS ARE THAT MUCH OF WHAT YOU DO ON THE DOUBLE BASS WITH YOUR WHOLE BODY AND HANDS TO MAKE MUSIC HAS BEEN LEFT UP TO THE BODY TO FIGURE OUT, WHICH IS A PRETTY HAPHAZARD WAY OF GOING ABOUT BECOMING A FINE BASS PLAYER. There are a couple of reasons for this.

First, posturally, when you started as a young double bass player, the bass teacher said sit or stand up straight, and that was it for the body. Think about it. SIT OR STAND UP STRAIGHT IS AS CLEAR AS IF THE TEACHER HAD SAID SLOUCH. There truly are no specifics as to what "sit or stand up straight" means. "Sit or stand up straight" is NOT a definition of good posture!

Second, your specific double bass technique, how you used your hands and arms, was demonstrated/explained in terms of position, when playing the bass requires the hands and arms to be in constant motion.

It is only through observing and listing all you do with your whole body as you play the bass, that you will discover your REPERTOIRE OF DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE.

Once done, this list will give you the ability to keep what works, let go of what doesn't work, and search for technique and postural solutions to what has been setting limits on your talent.

If you do what I just described with an Alexander Technique teacher, the Alexander teacher will give you a whole new vocabulary that will dramatically help you to define what it is you do on the double bass, and what you would possibly like to change.

After I went to an Alexander Technique teacher to solve a carpal tunnel problem on the classical guitar, it wasn't long before I was inspired to put into words what makes for great guitar technique and posture. This is because I finally had a clear vocabulary for what it was I did when I played the guitar, and how to go about changing what wasn't clear to me, or to simply let go of wasn't working.

IT IS ALWAYS A GOOD TIME TO BECOME YOUR OWN MASTER TEACHER AND PERFORMER.

Double Bass - The Joy of Making Technique Changes

In the Alexander Technique there is a primary concept called CONSCIOUS CONTROL. Defined it means when you ask a muscle to do something, whether release or move, it does so with ease

and grace. This is about regaining control over all of your voluntary musculature, so that you can stop hurting and/or do any activity with ease and coordination

I'd like to look at CONSCIOUS CONTROL and expand its definition to encompass your ability to have the power to step back, see what isn't working on the double bass, and realize repairing your technique need not be overwhelming.

If you have been reading my articles, it must be clear to you that I really believe any double bass player can make the changes necessary to be a wonderful bass player, and not have to spend a lifetime struggling against an inability to do what you want on the bass.

I realize as I write this, that there are times I have verbalized this to a double bass client, and the bass player looked at me as if I were crazy, was expecting too much, or was pressuring the bass player to change what isn't working in his or her technique, or all of the above.

So, let me address this head on. THERE IS A GIGANTIC DIFFERENCE BETWEEN EXPECTING/DEMANDING A DOUBLE BASS PLAYER BECOME AS GOOD AS THEY CAN BECOME, AND BETWEEN INSPIRING A BASS PLAYER TO FIND A WAY TO MAKE THE INSTRUMENT A JOY TO PLAY.

Having said this, it only works when you inspire the double bass player to make changes, and you can offer the bass player very clear specific changes that work. If anyone can do this extraordinarily well, it is the Alexander Technique teacher.

In a nutshell, the Alexander Technique teacher is able to do this unbelievably well, because the Alexander teacher has the postural and physical skills knowledge and the vocabulary to show the double bass player how to let go of what isn't working and discover what works.

Let me return to this idea of inspiring the double bass player to make changes. Probably by the time the bass player has spent years playing with a specific technique, the bass player has made changes to his or her technique more than once, and really dreads having to do this again.

There is a reason for this dread. IF WHAT YOU'VE BEEN DOING HASN'T MADE THE DOUBLE BASS AS EASY TO PLAY AS YOU'VE ASPIRED TO BY NOW, WHY SHOULD IT EVER WORK?

Let me state the question more clearly. IS THERE A COMPLETE DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE OUT THERE UNIQUE TO YOU, THAT WILL LET YOU DO WHAT YOU WANT ON THE BASS WITH GREAT EASE?

The answer is yes, but you have to be open to making the changes, looking at the bass very differently. Let me make a generalization here.

By the time a double bass player, after years of a technique that hasn't given the performer the freedom to play with ease and joy, even opens the door to adjusting his or her technique, it is usually not something looked forward to by the player.

In other words the bass player doesn't want to go through that again! Is there a way to create an emotional shift in the double bass player, so that he or she runs to the bass to change how they play? YES!

IF YOU ARE WILLING TO ACCEPT THAT CHANGES MADE YOUR TECHNIQUE AT THIS LATE DATE CAN BE A PLEASURE TO EXPERIENCE, THEN YOU'RE MOST OF THE WAY THERE. What do I mean?

When you're young and the double bass teacher teaches you a specific technique, you just do it for the cause of mastery of the instrument. This means you may or may not be kind to yourself as you master a specific technique, but once mastered, you quickly forget how tough you may have been on yourself.

Now, you're probably very aware of the potential discomfort in learning a new bass technique or making changes to an existing one, so you balk at "starting over".

Let me reframe "starting over". It ISN'T starting over if you make changes to your technique you have never done, you have the faith that it will work, you know at the end of the process you will be able to do what you want on the double bass, and you are ready to replace mastery with joy.

If, when you were first learning bass technique, or making changes to an existing technique, mastery of the bass was the goal, then learning a new technique was something you wanted over as quickly as possible.

IF YOU NOW CHOOSE TO REPLACE MASTERY WITH JOY, THEN IT CAN BE A JOY AND PLEASUREABLE TO REVAMP YOUR DOUBLE BASS TECHNIQUE.

Anonymous. *A Course in Miracles*.

Bonpensiere, Luigi. *New Pathways to Piano Technique*.

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BIOGRAPHY

Ethan Kind trained as an Alexander Technique teacher at the American Center for the Alexander Technique in New York. He is also a former concert guitarist and has been an athlete all of his life. Mr. Kind's writing (as Charles Stein and Ethan Kind) has been published in the United States, Great Britain and Australia. He lives in Albuquerque, NM and can be reached at www.ethankind.com.