

MY STORY: WHY I TEACH THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE

My 30 year career as a dancer and a choreographer has the typical wild arc of an independent artist. I was not inspired by the commercial dance world. Even as a bright eyed 9 year old beginning dancer, I was more interested in live performance that transformed rather than just entertaining the audience. I wanted to walk out of a performance changed forever, seeing the world in a new way. So – I had high standards for myself and for performance. I trained in many traditional techniques, including ballet, but none of them led me to that place that I had seen on stage. I spent the requisite 15 years studying, but eventually had to shed them like a snake sheds its skin. Technique, if made an end in itself, can become a prison. That’s what happened to me. I was stuck in a prison of style that never connected to my heart and mind. After all that work, I was still struggling to find that connection from the inside to the outside. The misfit manifested in numerous injuries and issues, which I thought were just part of being a “professional.” Over time, I have suffered from the following maladies and injuries:

Anorexia

Depression and beyond low self esteem

Sprained ankles and knees

Tendinitis in wrists, hands, and elbows

Ganglion cyst removed from wrist

Bursitis in shoulders

Loss of cartilage in one hip joint

I was very lucky to encounter the Alexander Technique in a repertory class with Eva Karczag at Sarah Lawrence College. I found amazing and instant relief from pain, and a space in my body, mind, and heart, that I had not even known was missing. Since that time, the Alexander Technique is the one practice that I have maintained throughout my career, the one that has provided the most support and clarity to my work, and the only one I have dedicated myself to teaching. I had a wonderful career performing regularly with various choreographers in theaters small and large here in NYC, and toured the US with choreographer Ann Carlson, before turning to my own choreography and touring in Europe and the US for another 10 years or so.

I’ve healed and learned from each one of those injuries. Each one was a blessing in disguise. Because of the Alexander Technique, I found out I did not have to be so miserable, and since I was willing to do the work, I might as well work well and in harmony with my actually physical structure, and my deepest wishes and desires, instead of trying to fit into a mold that was not serving me. The revelation was that once I became willing to let go of what was not working, I found that I could discover and use many different “techniques” that I had previously rejected because each one had a truth and a purpose. It was ME that had been distorting my body. My work has become a very subtle and continually shifting process of finding the

deeper truth in each movement style and technique. And to be honest, if the essence of the technique does not respect the design of the human body, I choose the body over the technique.

Not one of the injuries I sustained has been career threatening, but each one forced me to become aware of and change habits of thinking and being that were literally destroying me. The fact that I had a part to play in my own injuries was overwhelming at first, but I came to see that self-responsibility is the essence of “technique” and the daily practice that any artist must develop. It seemed so crazy that something I thought should be hard (dance “technique”) could be so easy. If I had only wanted freedom from physical pain - which is awesome, don’t get me wrong! - I’d have stopped studying after the injuries healed. However, I wanted more!

The Alexander Technique helped me gain a more accurate body image, a more balanced sense of life and work, and a more energized dynamic way of using my very loose and flexible body without strain. Practicing the technique in my dancing led me to realize that I was not interested in empty virtuosity. I found a way to claim my place as a performer and choreographer of presence, transformation, independence and distinction.

For me, wellness and happiness require constant growth, development and challenge. I am ready to rest as a performer, and am now dedicated to teaching the technique to the next generation of artists. I can’t wait to see what they will discover and how they will transform our culture and our view of the world in which we live. I still have high expectations. I don’t want the next generation to waste precious time and energy working too hard on techniques and practices that don’t support them or the work they need to do. More and more colleges, universities, and conservatories are integrating the Alexander principles into their programs, and the training processes are becoming more effective and integrative for young performers. I’m honored to be a part of that process.