

Exploring the Impulse for Sound and Song

Presented by Jean McClelland at the 2009 Annual General Meeting
of the American Society for the Alexander Technique
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(Reviewed by Alexander Teacher, Ellen Bierhorst, in *AmSAT News*)

Our group of 10 ranged from Alexander teachers who are professional singers to associate members with no musical background. Our interests covered the gamut as well: “I want fresh ideas for my chorus” to “I was always told I could not sing,” and we all got what we wanted and more. In the end we gave a rousing rendition of “Roll Jordan Roll,” and left inspired.

Jean led us through two hours of preparatory experiences, starting with lying down and finding the right moment to move the straight leg up into flexion. She calls this “Entering the witness/creative state of mind.” Then we worked with breathing. Quoting Jessica Wolf, Jean reminded us that “the inhalation is a reflex; the exhalation is everything.” We explored allowing the in-breath to happen, as though we were bobbing on an ocean lifted by the swell. Jean said there is a moment of surrender to the impulse to breathe; waiting for this impulse to overtake one is “pure gold.” “We exist in the space before the inhalation.”

Finally we vocalized, at first just an “s” sound, then a sounded “z,” projecting the sound using our hands to draw it out. In the final hour we began singing. Jean guided us to respond to the music instead of trying to do something. We were going up, feeling joyful and energized. By the time we had completed the preparatory process, we had reached a fine level of sensitivity to our own expression and to Jean’s musical leadership. I was reminded of the electrifying experience of working with world-class choral directors over many hours of rehearsal, and yet we were just an assorted group come together for only three hours. Bravo, Jean!

- Ellen Bierhorst