

Finding the Lightness in Movement How does a fluidly, with little thought about the “how” to find balance. It is that earliest ease of have forgotten – and that Robert Bedford seeks musicians. “I was always fascinated by the babies and of well-coordinated people in exhibited by outstanding performers,” says who has taught piano performance at West years. He is one of several performing artists as an Alexander Technique Teacher. That Bedford is trained to help musicians reach a reach peak performance and help others moving, by “letting awareness come to the level explained. Alexander’s research in the field of documented in his 1932 book *The Use of the Alexander Technique*. His work focuses on



through a better understanding of how the head/neck/torso relationship functions optimally in adults, as it does when we are very young,” says Bedford. “As a young professor of piano during the 1960s and ’70s, my early teaching reflected my conservatory training, which was basically an effort to free stiffness in the wrists and arms of my students.” That eventually brought Bedford into contact with the Alexander Technique. Alexander’s work focuses on improving coordination through highly efficient movements of the whole body. It is not strength training, though it does improve strength; it is not stretching per se, though it does increase one’s awareness of lengthening and opening the body. “The Alexander Technique restores natural coordination, reawakens a person’s natural kinesthetic sense, and activates the involuntary anti-gravity response [balance],” says Bedford. Which brings us back to the image of a baby discovering how his limbs can support and propel him? According to Bedford, “natural hydraulics” is the systemic system that allows us to bring ourselves from sitting to standing and back again – movements seen at their purest in the first acts of a toddler seeking to stand on two feet. Using the Alexander Technique, Bedford can bring to students an understanding of how to “integrate to coordinate” all parts of the body so that such movements become more natural, more efficient, with less stress on joints, and fewer strained muscles. For example, in the process from sitting to standing, Bedford guides the student’s head, neck and torso to focus the student’s attention to a particular area of the body – and where it is in space – to encourage lightness, as he asks the student to match the energy he’s using. The resulting sensation is a more effortless method of standing and sitting. Bedford notes that anyone can benefit from the Alexander technique – not just musicians. Each person has a different experience of movement, and each person who uses the Alexander Technique will come to a different but significant result. A musician may find her hands are lighter on the keyboard and she no longer tires as easily after hours of practice. An office worker may find that his neck pain and carpal tunnel syndrome are diminished after several sessions with an Alexander teacher. A mother may find a new and effortless way to lift her baby. Bedford enjoys the sense of discovery students have during their sessions and says there is often a lot of laughter. “I created my own particular style of teaching the Alexander Technique to musicians as well as to the general public. I teach it differently to each student, always adhering to basic principles, although each student will ultimately develop his or her own unique process. Some Alexander Technique [music] students tell of almost overnight freeing up of the whole playing mechanism. Others express skepticism at first but are willing to experiment often, seeing the Technique as gentle and non-threatening. “Bedford will discuss his techniques for pianists – both musicians and their teachers – at the Pennsylvania Music Teachers Association conference on campus Nov. 9 through 11. He has released a DVD for teachers and students featuring Alexander Technique routines applied to both practice and performance. For more information, visit www.bedford-alexander-prof.com. Review Dr. Bedford’s WCU Faculty Profile. Robert Bedford, critically acclaimed pianist and professor of piano at West Chester since 1966, has appeared widely in solo recitals throughout the United States. A Juilliard graduate, he was a gold medalist in the International Recording Competition for Pianists. Many of his former students are members of university faculties throughout the country.

baby move? Naturally and involved and an innate desire movement that most adults to restore, specifically in movements of animals and general, as well as movements Bedford, a Juilliard graduate Chester for more than 40 worldwide who is also certified combination of skills means new technical level, even discover a new, lighter way of of sensation” as FM. Alexander human technology is Self, which explains the “improving coordination

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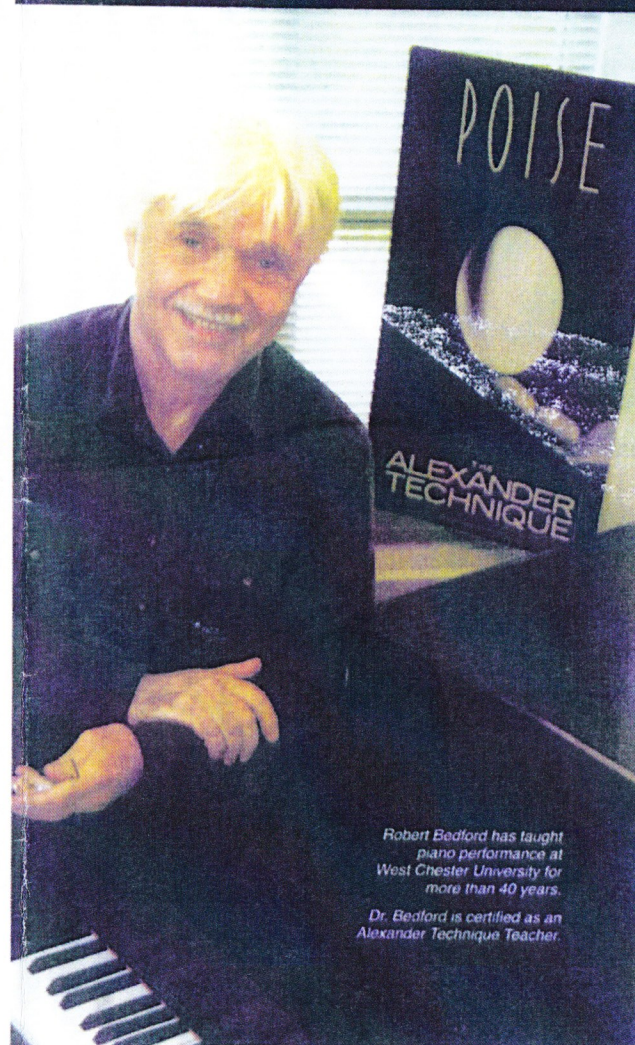
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Teaching and Performing with the Alexander Technique



Robert Bedford has taught piano performance at West Chester University for more than 40 years.

Dr. Bedford is certified as an Alexander Technique Teacher.

The Alexander Technique focuses on improving coordination through efficient movement of the body, bringing practitioners an awareness of the quality and subtlety of individual movements. It restores most natural coordination, reawakens a person's natural kinesthetic sense, and activates the involuntary anti-gravity response.

Each person has a different experience of movement, and each person who uses the Alexander Technique will come to a different result. A musician may find her hands are lighter on the keyboard and she no longer tires as easily after hours of practice. An office worker may find that his neck pain and carpal tunnel syndrome are diminished after several sessions. A mother may find a new and effortless way to lift her baby.

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