

## Surviving Music Festival Season

If you are like me, you look forward to summer because of all the music festivals around the country. It is exciting to drive off to far flung places and set up elaborate camp-homes. You find amazing jams and play all night, then catch a few hours of sleep. You get up, drink gallons of coffee, then do it again. But, there are costs to the festival lifestyle. You may worry about the neck or back pain rearing its ugly head, the soreness creeping into your wrists and shoulders, or the general stiffness and fatigue that take over. Every musician needs to know that it is possible to take care of yourself - to make choices that minimize pain and discomfort. It is up to you to ensure that you survive festival season! Here are some Alexander technique-inspired tips to keep in mind while traveling, camping, and jamming:

- **Stay upright and alert while you drive.** Make your seat as vertical as you can and put a towel or pillow behind your back so you can sit upright without much effort. Hold the wheel as if you are shaking someone's hand – not gripped, but not heavy. Use cruise control and sit with your feet symmetrical and on the floor, if you can. Keep your mind alert, neck free, and head poised on a lengthening spine.
- **Be an engaged passenger.** If you really need to sleep, use a pillow and find a lengthened neck and back position (with your seatbelt on). Otherwise, try to avoid zoning out and collapsing into awkward positions. Sit upright and watch the view in front of you, listen to music, or think about something that makes you happy.
- **Set up camp intelligently.** Park so you won't have to haul your gear far. Plan what to unload and where to put it so you don't move your gear multiple times. If an object is packed deep in your vehicle, slide it close to you before lifting it. When you lift heavy objects, slowly transition to hold their weight close to you before you lift; move your hips and knees freely without tensing or bending your neck and back.
- **Haul your instruments with care.** Bring travel cases for instruments. Make gear as light as possible and carry instruments on your back or close to your body. Don't tense your neck, back, or arms to carry heavy cases.
- **Choose your sitting position wisely.** When you play, use a flat-bottomed chair. Sit upright, on the front of the chair, with your feet flat on the ground. Claim the full space you need to play and move your chair so you don't have to scrunch up or modify your playing posture to avoid bumping the person next to you.
- **Sit with poise, not posture.** Cancel your idea of what good posture involves. Do not try to find a certain position and hold it. Instead, choose ease over effort in your back and arms. Try to be dynamic, as if there is a stream of activity or energy flowing freely through you, aiming you up at all times. Always allow your head to be poised freely on the top of your spine and your back to lengthen and widen. If you feel stiff, just think of being free.
- **Use breaks to do less, not more.** During long drives and endless jams, take short and long breaks *before* you start feeling tired or achy. Put your feet on the ground, sit or stand up tall, without tightening your back or neck. You can lift your arms overhead to give your back space to lengthen up to its full height, making sure you don't collapse your back when you bring your arms back down. Avoid thoughtless stretching; instead, give your arms and hands time to do nothing; be still inside yourself and think of expanding without effort or movement.
- **Give your back a break.** When you can, find a flat spot to lie down with your head supported and your knees bent so your feet are on the ground. Think of quieting all the tension and encourage your neck to be free, your head to aim out from your spine, your back to lengthen and widen, your knees to aim up, and your arms to lengthen to your fingers. Keep your eyes open, your mind alert and encourage yourself be both more alive and more rested.
- **Never sacrifice yourself for the music.** Prioritize how you use your head, neck, and back above all else. If you pay closer attention to how you use yourself, you can keep fatigue and discomfort at bay and play with greater control, for longer periods of time. And you can make your festival experiences even more enjoyable!

*--Molly Johnson is a singer, banjo player, and guitar player who just moved to Austin from Missouri. Molly teaches the Alexander technique: a method of self-care that reduces tension and chronic pain and enhances performance for musicians, dancers, actors, and athletes and during daily activities by re-defining posture and movement coordination. If you found these tips helpful and would like to learn how to get rid of the habits that interfere with you sitting with poise and performing with ease, you can learn about the Alexander technique at [www.integratedmotionstudio.com](http://www.integratedmotionstudio.com).*