Fit to perform?
Musicians’ health, wellbeing and performance

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Royal College of Music | Imperial College London

Overview

- The Paganini Paradox
- Musical Impact
- Healthy Conservatoires
- Next steps?
Founded in 1882
300 staff
800 students
Professionals 60-75%
Students 70-85%

Debilitating anxiety
15-25%
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a Conservatoires UK project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council
Guiding questions

- What is the incidence and extent of injuries and ill-health among musicians studying and working in Britain?
- What are the physical and mental demands of music making and training?
- What physical, psychological, environmental and musical factors interact with and determine musicians’ health and wellbeing?
- What can we learn from existing international educational and professional approaches to promoting musicians’ health?

Timeline

1. FIT TO PERFORM
   A survey of musicians’ physical and mental fitness

2. MAKING MUSIC
   A study of the physical demands of practice and performance

3. BETTER PRACTICE
   Promoting health in music education and the profession

Year 1 2013/14
Year 2 2014/15
Year 3 2015/16
Year 4 2016/17 …2018
The team

- 90-min mental and physical **fitness assessments** for 600+
- 3-hour **vocal health screenings** for 150+
- 4-hour **biomechanical assessments** for 20+
- 1-hour **physiological assessments** for 30+
- 20 hours of **in-depth interviews** with over 30+

➤ New, evidence-based approaches for promoting and enhancing the health and wellbeing of musicians.
Stage 1
Consent
Preliminary screening

Stage 2
Musical factors
Lifestyle factors
Psychological factors
Health/wellbeing
PR pain/injury

Stage 3
Anthropometrics
Strength/flexibility
Aerobic fitness

Stage 4
Debrief
Participant pack

N=483

59% women
41% men

Age
M=21.9 yrs

UG | PG
66.6% UG
33.4% PG

42% British
58% from 30 countries
94.6% Classical
5.4% Other

Genre
5.4% Other
Perceptions, attitudes and behaviours

- General health 🧐
Perceptions, attitudes and behaviours

- General health
- Wellbeing
- Health-promoting behaviours

Overall
Health responsibility
Physical activity
Nutrition
Spiritual growth
Interpersonal relations
Stress management
Perceptions, attitudes and behaviours

- General health
- Wellbeing
- Health-promoting behaviours
- Fatigue

Perceptions, attitudes and behaviours

- General health
- Wellbeing
- Health-promoting behaviours
- Fatigue
- Sleep
Perceptions, attitudes and behaviours

- General health
- Wellbeing
- Health-promoting behaviours
- Fatigue
- Sleep
- Perfectionism

- Striving for perfection
- Negative reactions to imperfection

Perceptions, attitudes and behaviours

- General health
- Wellbeing
- Health-promoting behaviours
- Fatigue
- Sleep
- Perfectionism
- Coping strategies

- Positive reinterpretation
- Planning
- Activing coping
- Use of instrumental social support
- Suppression of competing activities
- Focus on and venting of emotions
Fit to Perform: An Investigation of Higher Education Music Students’ Perceptions, Attitudes, and Behaviors toward Health

Liliana S. Arriaga1,2, David Wesley4, Rosie Perkins3,5, Louisa Atkins1, Emma Redding1, Jane Ginsborg3 and Aaron Williamson1,2

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Making music at the highest international standards can be rewarding, but it is also challenging, with research highlighting precarious ways in which practising and performing can affect performers’ health and wellbeing. Several studies indicate that music students’ perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors toward health and healthy living are less than optimal, especially considering the multiple physical

Perceived Enablers and Barriers to Optimal Health among Music Students: A Qualitative Study in the Music Conservatoire Setting

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Student health and wellbeing within higher education has been documented as poor in relation to the general population. This is a particular problem among students at music conservatoires, who are studying within a unique educational context that is known to generate both physical and psychological challenges. This article examines how conservatoires students experience health and wellbeing within their institutional context, using a framework from health promotion to focus attention on perceived
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Healthy Conservatoires

Aim to create environments that promote and enhance the health and wellbeing of performing artists, enabling them to achieve their full potential and to build healthy, sustainable careers.

A healthy conservatoire ...

- openly embraces health and wellbeing, embedding the topic into all aspects of its culture
- works towards rounded health and wellbeing support which addresses a wide variety of factors affecting musicians
- positively frames health and wellbeing, focusing on health promotion
Areas of wellbeing

- Environmental
- Spiritual
- Social
- Physical
- Occupational
- Intellectual
- Emotional
- Financial

Network

A healthy conservatoire

- Resources and services
- The curriculum and personal development
- Policies
- Relationship with community and profession
- Environment
- Research

Healthy Conservatoires Network
Other external partners (e.g. BAPAM, MU, ABO)

after Holt (2015)
Functions

- to provide a forum for discussion
- to share best practice
- to facilitate (demand) innovation

Key characteristics

- It uses a settings-based approach.
- It focusses on promoting health.
- It is informed by the demands of performing.
- It engages directly with evidence-based research.
Key characteristics (cont)

- It is NOT health and safety.
- It is NOT a clinical service.

Healthy Conservatoires

- @HConservatoires
- Healthy Conservatoires
- www.HealthyConservatoires.org (coming soon)
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a new partnership in Performance Science
Performance science and society
Performance and productivity
Innovation and entrepreneurship
Health and wellbeing

GRAND CHALLENGES IN PERFORMANCE SCIENCE
Performers’ health & wellbeing
The arts, health & wellbeing
Capturing performance
Experiential learning
Conclusions

- Our research indicates that musicians have higher levels of wellbeing and lower fatigue than comparable samples outside of music.
- However, they also reveal potentially harmful perceptions, attitudes and behaviours towards health.
- Specifically, engagement in health responsibility and stress management was low, which along with high perfectionistic strivings, limited use of coping strategies, poor sleep quality, and low self-rated health, paints a troubling picture both for musicians and for those who support their training.

Conclusions (cont)

- The findings point to the need for more (and more effective) health education and promotion initiatives within music education.
- This cannot be the pursuit of individuals alone and requires an active role of communities and institutions.
- This can be achieved (in part) by developing understanding of health literacy levels of musicians, by promoting the necessary opportunities for individual and organisational change, and by sustaining a culture that promotes self-agency and behavioural engagement in health matters.
Conclusions (cont)

- By doing so, we intend to position health and wellbeing as a driver, rather than the consequence of, music making and performance success.

Merci. Questions?