

# art, heart & soul (& MIND AND BODY)

An “in the wings” look at keeping Broadway performers healthy and the team behind it all.

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Behind the scenes of any production is a cast of writers, producers, composers, choreographers, and directors. And behind the bodies of these “arts athletes” is a highly dedicated team of medical professionals who have a two-fold goal: **keep the artists healthy for now and for the span of their career...** often challenging to do together! Quite simply, if an artist isn't healthy, the equation breaks down and their performance suffers, stressing the importance of the team keeping them healthy.

Artists used to have to search out their own care, which has been challenging through the years due to the cost of health care coverage, finding true experienced performing arts treatment specialists and the many facets needed for overall health. Now, there are options for artists at different points in their careers.

First, as an artist matures, challenges may arise such as decreased flexibility or mobility, muscle imbalances, postural asymmetries, or arthritis. Tissue healing and recovery for the more mature artist may be longer only adding to surmounting stress.

Just to stay in the game, or on the stage, the therapy team focuses on these categories:

- > Postural alignment
- > Vocal health
- > Mobility and balance
- > Aerobic endurance
- > Strength and endurance
- > Respiratory health
- > Stress management/sleep
- > Pre-performance warm ups
- > Post-Performance cool down and recovery
- > Performance or show-specific training
- > Education on self-treatments.

The goal is simple, injury prevention and management. We want to help prepare the artist(s) for the upcoming demands of a production. We encourage an artist to perform in the most “efficient state,” utilizing the least amount of energy to perform a given task.

## be proactive

### CHALLENGES:

- 1 > Up to eight shows a week! One would think that it's only two to three hours on stage, but it's repetitively stressful on the body as well as mind.
- 2 > Touring shows: respiratory health, allergies and varied cold viruses in different regions.
- 3 > Some shows travel with their own PTs that are placed for the duration of tour and some have a different organized PT in each city. Which means re-assessments, getting to know history, bodies, show challenges and more.
- 4 > Time! In a perfect world, each performer, musician, choreographer and more would get daily or at least alternating daily work. Because of rehearsal schedules, performance times and availability of resources, that may not happen.

### REMEDIES:

- 1 > Releasing a tight diaphragm so a dancer in a musical can reach her entire range
- 2 > Managing strained shoulder muscles in a lead dancer that performs in a dry theater and has a chronic cough
- 3 > Posture challenges for a company member who is doing a period piece with heavy costumes and corsets
- 4 > Strengthening muscles that are NOT in use in a specifically choreographed piece so that the artist is balanced for their career after the show closes
- 5 > Convincing the performers that even if a show ends at 11:15pm, they need to stay with the PT to stretch, do breathing exercises, heat/ice and have manual muscle work before going home
- 6 > Dry needling or fascially releasing a trigger point in the calf backstage, at a moment's notice, at the same time as a costume quick change, from a slight strain five minutes previous.

### ON SITE AND BACKSTAGE

As the on-site medical team for companies of dancers or casts for shows, PT's are responsible for their overall health, which includes an array of responsibility across the board. Some of these include:

- > Encourage better nutrition if needed.
- > Talk to wardrobe about changing shoes if chronic foot pain is an issue.
- > Watch the shows, repeatedly, to observe body mechanics.
- > Analyze specific tracks in performances for repetitive or acute injury risk.
- > Work on muscles to ensure optimal performance.
- > Strengthen muscles for better posture.
- > Suggest humidifiers.
- > Run Pilates classes.

### THE TEAM

In each city, a team is set up. A referral preferred list is made, including and not limited to PTs, physicians, massage therapists, chiropractors, dentists, the local dance studios for maintenance classes, yoga teachers, ENT's, workout gyms and additional special needs for each show! The communication is constant. Daily notes, messages to other providers, keeping company and stage management in the loop are all part of the process.

*NeuroTour*, owned and directed by Carolyn Lawson, has been a game-changer in the arts. Starting years ago with concierge dancer/artist services, and moving to on-site care and show medical management was just the beginning. Through analysis, the highest quality treatment, specific staff training and preparation and continued standards that near perfection, they have evolved the industry. Proactive management, trained clinicians, onsite care evolved even to reports on the “cost savings” of well-oiled medical management.

Gina Pongetti Angeletti, Physical therapist and Partner/Chicago clinic co-owner, has been providing PT and prevention for shows for over 10 years. Gena Thurston, Chicago clinic manager and PT, sees artists in the clinic setting as well as on-site, including *Hamilton*, *Mary Poppins*, *Book of Mormon*, *Annie*, *Aladdin*, *Motown*, *Shrek* and many more. They take their experience in treating the arts and knowledge of productions with a goal of immediate rehab with a long-term health goal in mind.

With constant schedule changes, increase and decrease in time demands, swings and understudy maintenance, and other tour challenges, balancing the bigger picture while providing unique care for each individual is the test. “An ankle sprain is not just an ankle sprain,” states Angeletti. Before it triggers a series of events, from increased time in the clinic, to re-evaluation of predisposing movement factors in the show. It triggers conversations with company and stage management. It involves predictions to when a return to stage is plausible. It calls in the swings. It is hours of hands on therapy, conditioning to return to stage and more.”

Of course, managing over 10 tours at a time, 5-10 long-standing shows, dance companies and planning for the next season takes a team - a team of elite practitioners with an extensive menu of skills and expert management. This team may not be receiving a standing ovation each night, but their artists wouldn't be there without them. Says Lawson, “Our goal is always injury prevention and management. Keep performers happy, healthy, and on-stage.”



dance fitness