

# Osteopathy in the arts

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**Osteopathy has often been referred to as a blend of science and art. Our training is based on sound anatomical and physiological knowledge, while we have the freedom to be creative with treatment to ensure an individualised outcome for our patients. The comparison with the performing arts is clearly evident, with performers spending many years in focussed technical training to produce performances that are a unique and individual expressive experience every time. As a performer myself, I was always drawn to osteopathy and ultimately decided to train as an osteopath with a direct view to providing specialist treatment for performers.**

While sports medicine is universally recognised, performing arts medicine (PAM) remains relatively unknown. The British Association for Performing Arts Medicine (BAPAM) in the UK and the Performing Arts Medicine Association (PAMA) in the US have both worked tirelessly in this field for over 30 years but there is still much work to do for PAM to get the level of recognition and accessibility that it warrants.

So why is PAM such a well-kept secret? I think the answer is a social and cultural one. When watching a sports match, we accept that if a player is injured, the whole event will stop, a therapist will rush on and tend to them in full view of the crowd and, if necessary, stretcher them off. When watching a ballet and a dancer becomes injured, every means necessary will be taken to hide the event – you would not expect the music to stop and the dancer to receive treatment in full view of everyone! Among performers themselves, it is often deemed unacceptable to be injured, not least for those working on a freelance basis where time off represents money lost. Even within a major dance company or orchestra where free treatment is readily available, management knowing you are injured may mean the loss of a long-coveted role in an upcoming production. Therefore, 'injury-hiding' is widespread among this population and symptoms are often endured until they become unbearable.

PAM practitioners require specialist knowledge of the techniques involved in

playing particular musical instruments, issues of hypermobility and the extreme physical postures required for dance, vocal anatomy and physiology for voice and professionals etc., as well as the environmental factors faced by performers. This enables them to address the underlying causes behind symptoms and find a solution to prevent recurrences, another strong parallel to osteopathic principles.

To this end, in 2011 we created the world's first formal PAM qualification at University College London, an MSc programme providing specialist training for medics and health practitioners involved in the care of performing artists. I was invited to compile and lead the musculoskeletal module and lecture alongside a team of internationally-renowned PAM specialists, and I'm delighted to say that we have two osteopaths among our students!

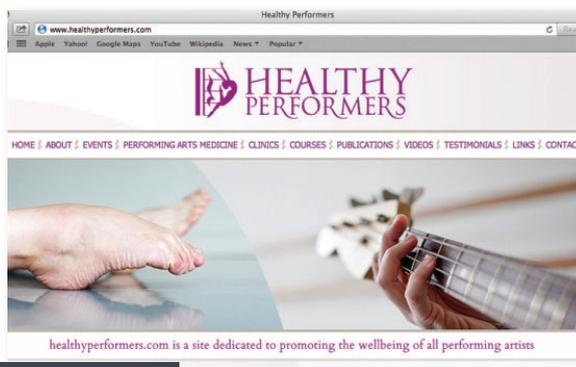
Without this in-depth technical knowledge, osteopaths can still go a long way when treating performers just by looking at the symptoms creatively and holistically. To be creative requires a degree of sensitivity which may also be reflected in performers' tolerance to pain, resulting in amplified responses to relatively small triggers. These

symptoms may become worse in times of high stress, often in parallel with performance schedules. Incorporating treatment for these autonomic responses is often a key factor in resolving any musculoskeletal symptoms, something that osteopaths are trained to recognise and address.

The negative attitude towards injury is gradually softening among performers, particularly the younger students, and there is an increased awareness of the benefits of seeking treatment due to better health education and perhaps a general cultural trend towards well-being.

So I encourage all of you to embrace your creative side and welcome more performers into your clinics so we can keep these talented people out on the stage where they belong.

**For more information, go to [www.healthyperformers.com](http://www.healthyperformers.com) or contact Jennie Morton on 07771 993565 or at: [info@healthyperformers.com](mailto:info@healthyperformers.com)**



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