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Letters to the Editors

Recovery as a shared responsibility: One book, many perspectives

Matthias Bertsch[1,2]

[1] University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna (mdw), [2] Austrian Society for Performing Arts Health & Music Psychology

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One book, many disciplines. This was my first impression when I opened the volume, and it remained with me throughout. The editors - Eckart Altenmüller (music physiology and musicians' medicine, Hannover), Michael Kellmann (sport psychology, Bochum), Jürgen Beckmann (sport psychology, Technical University of Munich), and Gene M. Moyle (dance, sport and exercise psychology, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane) - have brought together authors from music physiology, sport psychology, dance science, phoniatrics, circus medicine, and the creative arts therapies, many of whom have worked in these fields for decades. The result is an important new synthesis. As the preface states, the book highlights "for the first time the relationship between recovery, fatigue, working conditions, and societal pressures in performing artists" (p. xvii).

The book's unifying definition, adopted from sport science and taken up in many chapters, is Kallus's understanding of recovery as "an inter- and intraindividual multilevel (e.g., psychological, physiological, social) process in time for the re-establishment of personal resources and their full functional capacity" (p. 5). Recovery is thus not equated with mere regeneration; it is understood as a preventive resource that strengthens resilience against future stress. The introductory chapter illustrates this with the scissors model of stress and recovery.

Eighteen chapters are organized in four parts: conceptual foundations (Part I); recovery and well-being of musicians, dancers, singers, and circus artists (Part II); recovery inside organizations – a symphony orchestra, a ballet company, and Cirque du Soleil (Part III); and the performing arts as a resource for recovery in society (Part IV). Rather than summarizing chapter by chapter, I therefore discuss the book through six questions of particular relevance to the PAMA community.

HOW CAN THE KNOWLEDGE BE BROUGHT INTO PRACTICE?

The preface sets an explicitly applied agenda: the book "strives to formulate recovery routines and aims at sensitising employers, industry professionals, and educators to improve working conditions and prevent performers from engaging in dysfunctional self-exploitation" (p. xviii). The closing chapter by Altenmüller and Moyle translates this into a program: early recovery education, institutional knowledge cultures, season and tour planning that budgets recovery time for every employee, "client-tailored" recovery plans, and trained "recovery experts" (p. 305). Jeffries and Coutts provide the most technical bridge from sport to stage. They explain the fitness–fatigue model, caution against the acute-to-chronic workload ratio, and recommend starting with simple, low-cost tools such as session RPE and single-item fatigue and recovery scales. Practical examples range from shorter orchestral rehearsal blocks with more breaks to periodization and tapering plans for dance and circus training.

WHAT SHOULD PERFORMERS LEARN DURING THEIR TRAINING?

Several chapters converge on one answer: recovery literacy must start early. The editors argue that "recovery science should be included in performing arts physiology lectures and activities" (p. 10) and remind readers that flow is deceptive – effort is no longer felt, but "the body still needs sufficient time for recovery" (p. 8). Schuppert and Altenmüller offer the most concrete curricular blueprint: a compulsory introductory course on music physiology and musicians' health spanning one to two semesters, complemented by electives, body-oriented methods, psychologically focused courses, and individual counseling. They describe how most music universities in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland have introduced such courses over the past three decades, alongside certificate courses in Germany and Austria and new master's programs in Zurich and Freiburg, and they state frankly that psychological support still leaves "a notable gap" (p. 109). Their "Musicians' Triad of Well-being" (p. 105) usefully links workplace, organization, and self-care. Richter adds a model curriculum for singers and pragmatic voice-hygiene rules, and Blevins, Erskine, and Hopper propose mindfulness as a foundational recovery skill.

WHAT SHOULD TREATING PHYSICIANS, THERAPISTS, AND COACHES KNOW?

For clinicians, the book is rich in discipline-specific detail: workload, scheduling, sleep, and energy availability in dance; psychological risk factors for dance injury, twelve

psychological interventions for return to performance, and the distinction between "good pain or performance pain" and pain that signals injury (p. 126). Richter's "3-minute/4-day rule" for functional voice overload (p. 142) is exactly the kind of clear, operational protocol that colleagues will appreciate.

Yet the most important message for health professionals is contextual: For performers, health is not only a personal matter; their livelihood depends on it. The preface's observation that "many performers fear taking time off for recovery, be it due to financial reasons or perceived negative impacts upon creative processes" (p. xvii) is not left as an anecdote; the book substantiates it. Freelancers "are often under pressure to take every gig" (p. 25). These fears are therefore not irrational. A recommendation to rest that ignores this context will often remain a recommendation on paper.

WHAT SHOULD EXPERTS KNOW BEYOND THEIR OWN FIELD?

Interdisciplinarity is a recurring theme throughout the volume. Some of the most stimulating passages arise where one discipline brings in a lens that performing arts medicine rarely uses: Ackermann and Steiner link perceived organizational justice to emotional exhaustion and pain in orchestral musicians, and McCrary and Davies bring epidemiology and the Bradford Hill criteria into the arts-and-health debate. For specialists, the message is clear: a physiotherapist, a phoniatrician, an organizational psychologist, and a music therapist may be looking at the same exhausted performer – and none of them sees the whole picture alone. Networks between disciplines, professional societies, and institutions are therefore not an add-on but a prerequisite for good care.

WHAT SHOULD ORGANIZATIONS KNOW AND IMPLEMENT?

Part III is the book's most distinctive contribution. In his chapter on orchestras, Altenmüller describes the German orchestral landscape and, using the NDR Radio Philharmonic as an example, the concrete levers that employers hold: realistic scheduling, prevention programs, access to specialized care, an open communication culture, and stepwise reintegration after illness. Two observations stand out: musicians experience "a lack of self-determination in many respects" as more stressful than the number of performances (p. 181), and recovery measures prescribed by management may undermine their own effectiveness. Wirdnam, McDonnell, Azoury, and Mayes present The Australian Ballet with the candor that the title "What works and what doesn't" promises: a graduated return-to-work policy introduced in 1994 to counter stress fractures and a large multidisciplinary health team, but also a wellness app that was not adopted because daily use became a burden. Ackermann and Steiner add an economic argument: a health and well-being policy at the Liverpool Philharmonic reportedly required "only 1.2% of the total orchestra wage bill" (p. 33). Organizational responsibility, in short, is not limited to offering services; it includes schedules, leadership, and culture.

HOW CAN THE PERFORMING ARTS SUPPORT RECOVERY IN SOCIETY?

Part IV reverses the perspective: the performing arts are not only a source of strain but a resource for recovery in society. Moisseinen and Särkämö review the evidence on music, healthy brain aging, stroke, and dementia; Jeffrey, Guss-West, and Leventhal reframe recovery in degenerative conditions as adaptation rather than return; Mowers and Wood present the manualized CoActive Therapeutic Theatre model; and McCrary and Davies show how dose–response evidence was translated into the Australian Good Arts, Good Mental Health campaign. Stegemann and Silverman contribute a neurobiological relaxation model, a helpful distinction between music medicine, music therapy, and other music-based interventions, and the reminder that self-directed music listening can also become maladaptive. They refer to Cochrane evidence in oncology, to the WHO synthesis of more than 3,000 studies, and to the international ProMiMiC project, which includes a radiation oncology department at an Austrian university hospital.

This is where, in my view, a key message lies. Music therapy, when delivered by qualified professionals, is an established clinical intervention and, in some countries, a regulated health profession. In Austria, it has been regulated as an independent health profession by its own federal law since 2009. The authors themselves call music therapy "a relatively diminutive profession" (p. 249). Given the available evidence, the question is how the discipline can be strengthened internationally – through professional regulation, training standards, and integration into health care.

OPEN QUESTIONS

The book is commendably frank about the state of the field. Jeffries and Coutts note that "there are no universal criterion measures of training load, fitness, and fatigue applicable to all performers across the broad range of artistic disciplines" (p. 43) and that the feasibility of such monitoring in performers still has to be established; monitoring therefore requires contextual adaptation and expert interpretation; one-size-fits-all solutions remain premature. McCrary and Davies concede that "a key unfulfilled criterion … remains consistency" (p. 294), which makes their extrapolation of potential global mortality and cost effects an invitation to research rather than a result. The editors themselves conclude that recovery science in the performing arts "is still nascent" (p. 304) and that no evaluated recovery-literacy program exists to date.

My own reservation concerns the individual. Many of the proposed strategies demand a great deal from individuals whose everyday lives rarely allow time to be planned optimally. Canceling a gig because recovery is not yet com-

plete requires economic security, social support, and psychological resolve. Recovery is so complex and individual that general patterns are hard to derive, and the book's welcome emphasis on individual tailoring sits in some tension with the need for simple, scalable rules that organizations, unions, and funding bodies can adopt.

CONCLUSION

This book is a valuable resource for researchers, clinicians, organizations, educators, and performers alike. It closes an important gap by bringing recovery science, much of it developed in sport, into dialogue with performing arts medicine and practice while taking artistic and organizational specificities seriously. Its frankness about the current evidence gaps makes it a research agenda as much as a practical handbook. I hope it receives the attention it deserves.

Matthias Bertsch
University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna (mdw)
President – Austrian Society for Performing Arts Health & Music Psychology
bertsch@mdw.ac.at

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