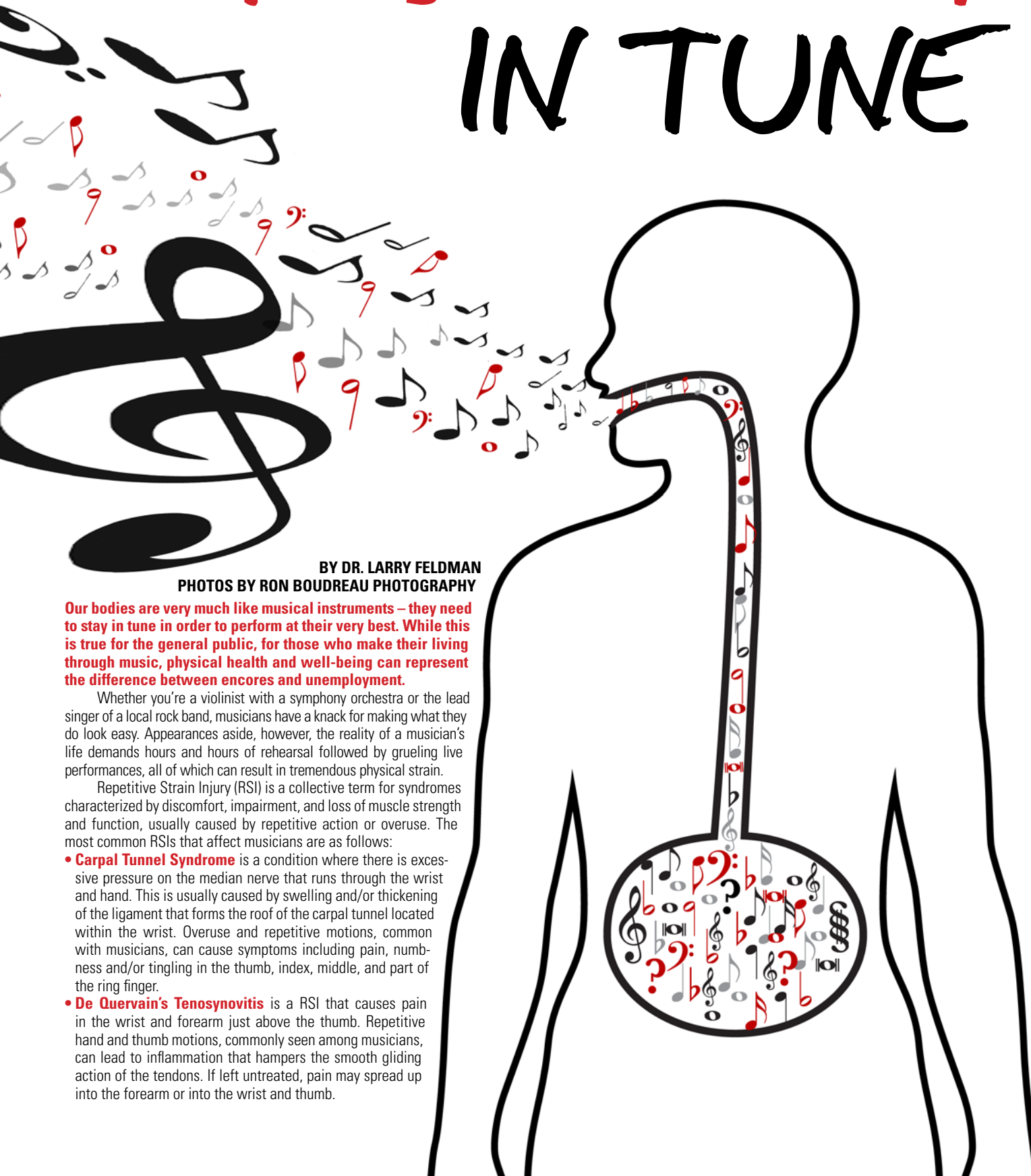


Keeping Your Body IN TUNE



BY DR. LARRY FELDMAN

PHOTOS BY RON BOUDREAU PHOTOGRAPHY

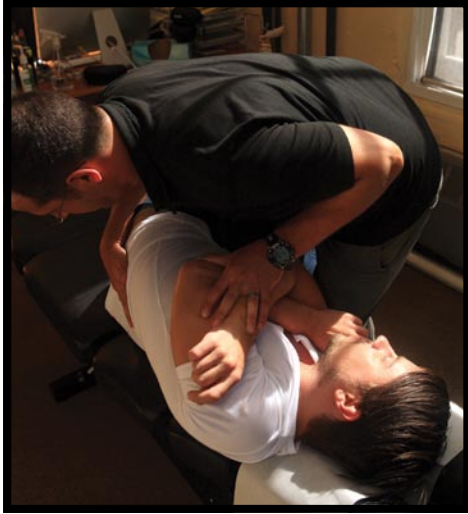
Our bodies are very much like musical instruments – they need to stay in tune in order to perform at their very best. While this is true for the general public, for those who make their living through music, physical health and well-being can represent the difference between encores and unemployment.

Whether you're a violinist with a symphony orchestra or the lead singer of a local rock band, musicians have a knack for making what they do look easy. Appearances aside, however, the reality of a musician's life demands hours and hours of rehearsal followed by grueling live performances, all of which can result in tremendous physical strain.

Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) is a collective term for syndromes characterized by discomfort, impairment, and loss of muscle strength and function, usually caused by repetitive action or overuse. The most common RSIs that affect musicians are as follows:

- **Carpal Tunnel Syndrome** is a condition where there is excessive pressure on the median nerve that runs through the wrist and hand. This is usually caused by swelling and/or thickening of the ligament that forms the roof of the carpal tunnel located within the wrist. Overuse and repetitive motions, common with musicians, can cause symptoms including pain, numbness and/or tingling in the thumb, index, middle, and part of the ring finger.
- **De Quervain's Tenosynovitis** is a RSI that causes pain in the wrist and forearm just above the thumb. Repetitive hand and thumb motions, commonly seen among musicians, can lead to inflammation that hampers the smooth gliding action of the tendons. If left untreated, pain may spread up into the forearm or into the wrist and thumb.

• **Trigger Finger** is when there is inflammation of the tendon(s) that flex or bend the finger(s). The tendons pass through a series of pulleys that hold the tendons close to the finger. Reduction or compression of the space inside the tendon sheath can cause the tendon to get stuck as it goes through the pulley. Inflammation or trauma may cause the tendon sheath to get caught as the finger moves from a flexed position into extension. Common symptoms include clicking or locking of the finger(s) when attempting to straighten them from a flexed position. In severe cases, the finger needs to be passively straightened. Trigger finger is commonly seen in piano, trumpet, and guitar players.



Susceptible to these repetitive strain injuries, musicians tend to also suffer from neck and back pain that is triggered by faulty posture and repeated movements. Such aches and pains can compromise overall health, hinder efficient performances, and restrict normal movement. While these problems may be common among musicians, they can be prevented.

So what can musicians do to keep themselves "in tune"? Regular "maintenance" treatment can help prevent these conditions from manifesting. Just like athletes who avoid injury through a strict training program involving treatments such as chiropractic, massage therapy, and acupuncture in addition to stretches and exercise, musicians should also avail themselves of similar preventative care. Don't wait for an injury. Taking proactive steps now will pay off in the future.



Chiropractic care, massage therapy, and acupuncture are excellent ways of treating repetitive strain injuries (RSIs) and preventing them from occurring in the first place. Those who play an instrument can greatly benefit from all of these treatments. Not only will they address the injuries, but they will also help musicians avoid the risk of further injury.

Injuries to musicians can be devastating, especially if they cannot find a cure for what is ailing them. Now there is new hope. One of the latest and most innovative forms of treatment in Canada is Class IV Laser Therapy. It is the most advanced laser therapy available and works by flooding the affected tissues with photons, energizing the damaged cells and increasing circulation to the painful area. This produces a cascade of healing responses in your body, reducing inflammation and thereby reducing or even eliminating both the pain and injury.

Dr. Glenn Copeland, team podiatrist of the Toronto Blue Jays and clinical director of the

Rehab and Wellbeing Centre at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto, was responsible for bringing the Class IV Laser to Canada. After seeing incredible results with the players on the Toronto Blue Jays and other professional sports teams such as the Boston Celtics, Dr. Copeland brought the Class IV Laser to the Mount Sinai Rehab Centre. The results have been outstanding. There has been a 90 per cent success rate for patients with a wide variety of injuries ranging from neck and back pain to RSIs. Musicians with debilitating injuries can now be healed more quickly than ever.

There is no question that musicians are a special group of professionals that develop many occupation-specific injuries. Unfortunately, some musicians assume that their painful condition is normal and find ways to mask the effects of their developing injuries. This is partly due to a performance culture in which there is a long standing philosophy that the "show must go on" and partly due to a common concern among professional musicians of being labeled as a musician with an injury.

Fortunately, there are ways to prevent debilitating injuries. Taking pro-active steps now, before injury occurs, will ensure not only the health of your body but of your long lasting career as a professional musician. ■

TIPS FOR STAYING IN TUNE

- **Stay Informed.** Take time to read up on the various injuries that affect musicians and the treatments that can help to prevent them from occurring.
- **Analyze Your Technique.** Check out how you are holding your instrument. Small adjustments to your technique can go a long way in preventing future injuries. Professionals such as chiropractors can be instrumental in helping provide the proper feedback.
- **Take Frequent Breaks.** During practice sessions, make sure that you take enough breaks to do stretching exercises. Try taking shorter breaks between songs and longer breaks every hour. Constant tension and repetitive stress does not allow the body to work properly. Remember that marathon rehearsals will actually decrease performance. Two shorter rehearsals in a day rather than one long, intense session will be much more beneficial in the long run.
- **Ergonomics.** Ergonomic positioning is all the rage in today's computer-oriented office setting. All musicians face similar postural strain. Particular attention should be paid to the proper positioning of your body with respect to your instrument.
- **Listen To Your Body.** This is extremely important. Injuries can often be prevented if you pay attention to what your body is telling you. Pain is actually a signal that is produced by your body warning you to stop what you are doing.
- **Posture.** Proper posture can help prevent injuries. Many of us are not aware of how poor our posture is. How you carry yourself while practicing or simply standing, sitting, or even sleeping can have a huge impact on the way you function. Proper posture means your bones are aligned in such a way that there is minimal stress or tension. This proper alignment allows your muscles, joints, and ligaments to work smoothly. Faulty postures put strain on your joints and may compromise your overall health. This will inevitably lead to an inability to perform efficiently or move properly. Chiropractic, massage therapy, therapeutic exercises, yoga, and pilates are all excellent ways of helping you to achieve the optimum posture and will ultimately help you perform at your best.
- **Get Help.** Seeking professional advice and treatment from a qualified healthcare practitioner can significantly prolong a musician's career. Chiropractic care, massage therapy, acupuncture, and laser therapy are ideal approaches to treating injuries and preventing them from recurring in the future.



Dr. Larry Feldman is a chiropractor and founder of Toronto's Performance Health Centre, specializing in the care of musicians. Visit www.tphc.ca for more information.