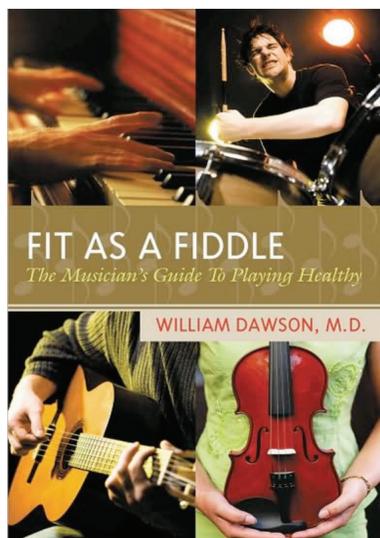


Book Review



Fit As A Fiddle: The Musician's Guide to Playing Healthy.

By William J. Dawson. Published by Rowman & Littlefield Education (Lanham, MD), in partnership with MENC The National Association for Music Education. Nov 2007, 158 pp. \$50.00 (hardcover), \$19.95 (softcover). ISBN 978-1-57886683-0.

Fit as a Fiddle is a valuable resource and welcome addition to the literature for musicians, music teachers, parents of young musicians, and all those interested in the topic of music medicine. Dr. Dawson is well known in the performing arts medicine world for his longstanding commitment and dedication to the field as a regular contributor to this journal, as past president of the Performing Arts Medical Association, and perhaps most importantly, as a physician who has treated hundreds of musicians. His perspective is unique, as a physician *and* musician, and his philosophy of treatment is notably medically precise and broadminded. He offers an effective medical, and, in the best use of the term, holistic approach to what can and does work to help the musician along the road to recovery, as well as for the maintenance of health and healthy playing for the

millions of professional, amateur, and student musicians in this country (and across the globe).

Fit As A Fiddle is an overview of musician injuries, treatments, and prevention guidelines. The book is succinct, consisting of 11 chapters. It presents a comprehensive look at the most common types of musculoskeletal injuries and diseases that afflict musicians, young and old, focusing on the upper extremities and the head and neck, which, as Dr. Dawson points out, represent the major areas of involvement for the musician. The book includes a series of articles previously published by him in *The Double Reed* and *The Journal of The International Double Reed Society*.

Dr Dawson begins with a brief explanation of how and why injuries occur, reminds us of the demanding requirements of music making, discusses playing with pain and gives a basic medical explanation for what happens anatomically in injury. He draws on experience and data from the more than 1,400 musicians he has treated. In his experience, more than 50% of upper extremity and hand injuries are related to incidents of trauma, and that figure increases to 75% in young musicians, who tend to be more active in sports. Dr. Dawson outlines five categories of injury or disease—1) Overuse, 2) Tendinitis/Tenosynovitis, 3) Nerve Compression, 4) Injuries (traumatic), and 5) Arthritis—and emphasizes the necessity for accurate diagnoses and a precise plan of care.

The author then discusses anatomical structure and function, with excellent and, for the lay reader, easily comprehended descriptions of the musculoskeletal system and its components. Chapter 3, entitled “Teacher and Student,” provides another excellent presentation on the importance of proper technique, posture, and positioning and the crucial role the teacher plays in the development of a young

musician's technique. This chapter is of great import to music teachers, who should know the responsibility they carry in shaping the young musician into a healthy player versus one subject to stress and discomfort, or worse, from poor habits unchecked early on. Dr. Dawson cites the use of excessive muscle tension and improper postural changes as the two most common technical problems of the music student and musician and emphasizes the role of the music teacher in noticing and identifying potential problems.

Dr. Dawson then addresses the topic of overuse, describing the causes, signs and symptoms, and distinguishing between overuse, misuse, and abuse. He suggests treatment techniques, a variety of the known and most effective used today. In this chapter, as well as throughout the book, Dr. Dawson recommends techniques and guidelines to help reduce stress in practice and performance, to decrease the chances and causes of overuse syndromes.

One of the assets of *Fit As A Fiddle* is that Dr. Dawson addresses a spectrum of problems from the young musician through to the aging one. He explains the common conditions of tendinitis, carpal tunnel, and other nerve entrapment syndromes, and in the chapter including arthritis, he discusses other problems of the aging musician, such as hearing and eyesight loss and dental and embouchure changes. With regular medical evaluation, proper knowledge and support, he assures the aging musician of a lengthy career, beyond the average retirement age. As we all know, musicians can continue productive careers into their 80s.

The book includes illustrations, photographs, and drawings, but perhaps the second edition would be enhanced with a greater variety of better quality visuals. Janet Horvath's book *Playing Less Hurt* is filled with diagrams, lists, illustrations, and drawings that help to emphasize, clarify, and illustrate the

points she is presenting. For example, at the end of the book Dr. Dawson gives a number of exercises for the reader, and diagrams or pictographs would greatly augment this section—even *with* diagrams, patients will come up with their own ‘creative’ versions, careful instruction notwithstanding!

The last three chapters delve into “Treatment Alternatives,” “Rehabilitation,” and “Keeping Your Equipment In Shape.” In the chapter on treatment alternatives, in which he gives a generous nod to alternative forms such as movement awareness techniques, yoga, and acupuncture, Dr. Dawson’s wisdom and experience continue to shine. He embraces what musicians themselves have known for a long time, that the best approach is one that includes the whole person, not just a body part, and that there are many dimensions to staying healthy. Because physical therapy is an important treatment avenue for musicians, and includes a wide spectrum of modalities, I would suggest that Dr. Dawson expand on his description of physical (and occupational) therapy,

which can include joint, soft tissue, and neural mobilization techniques, targeted exercise for correct muscle balance and activation, as well as strengthening and stretching, modalities such as electric stimulation, ultrasound, and iontophoresis, kinesiotaping, bracing and splinting, as well as movement re-education, posture education, and cervical and lumbar stabilization. In the chapter on “Keeping Your Equipment In Shape,” Dr. Dawson recommends an inclusive approach to health that covers diet, exercise, injury prevention through self-responsible body awareness, postural correction, strength and flexibility. To this I would add the Pilates method of exercise, which has come rapidly into the mainstream of the fitness world and which, *under the guidance of a skilled physical therapist or rehab-trained instructor*, is a wonderfully effective approach to physical rehabilitation.

As Dr. Dawson notes, “Health Professionals do not agree on a single effective remedy” and indeed “Different people respond differently to any one type of treatment.” These are wise

words to which any health professional who has worked with patients of any population can attest. In that vein, Dr. Dawson recommends that individuals take a greater personal responsibility and initiative in learning about their own health, treatment options and prevention regimes. This book is an aid to that goal. He gives good advice when he tells us that our bodies do try to heal themselves and that treatments should “employ, enhance and optimize these natural powers whenever possible.” Dr. Dawson’s book is well referenced, suggests further reading, offers web resources, and includes a useful index and glossary of terms. *Fit As A Fiddle* is a medically based, information-packed, and wonderfully wise offering from a physician who has witnessed and helped the recovery and return to performance of countless musicians over the course of many years.

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