Dancer Wellness
M. Virginia Wilmerding and Donna H. Krasnow, editors
Published by Human Kinetics, Oct 2016

Dancer Wellness is a comprehensive text for dancers and dance educators to better understand health and wellness in the context of their craft. Though not intended for this purpose, this resource may also be a beneficial tool in allowing allied healthcare professionals to repackage knowledge that was obtained in a traditional (sports) medicine context to the otherwise unchartered world of dance medicine and science. As a former dancer turned sports medicine practitioner and researcher, I appreciate what this text has done to bridge the gap by transferring knowledge and skills across disciplines.

The informative and easily digestible content demystifies superstitions by presenting evidence-based knowledge about dancer wellness. The graphics are equally reflective of the spirit of dancers, making them more relatable to the readers. The authors were also deliberate in using scientific language and introducing key terminology that may be unfamiliar to readers of varying levels of dance experience.

The holistic approach of the layout acknowledges the six dimensions of wellness to provide a smooth transition between the four main sections. Each chapter is equipped with clearly stated learning objectives and key terms at the beginning and then concludes with an application activity and set of review questions. This instructional sandwich helps readers to be prepared for the content with an opportunity to recapitulate by reflecting on practical application.

Starting at a very young age, many dancers become accustomed to their surroundings and apparel as necessities but often do not consider the role they play in safety. After the first chapter, the audience is motivated to reevaluate their studios, clothing, and footwear to ensure safe practices are considered. Dance-specific training and techniques are described using anatomical and biomechanical terms, which are applied in a later chapter of the book when addressing orthopaedic injuries. This chapter transitions well to the benefits of cross-training and conditioning strategies that are indispensable to support the strength and control required in dance.

The second section of the book is written to generate conversation on improving mental health among dancers. The authors have presented a healthy model for introspection with a natural progression from a conceptual framework to a plan of action. The foundational concepts of the somatosensory system illustrate the connection between a physical art and the cognitive implications. The text speaks to a cyclic balance that ultimately affects physical balance, body awareness, and imagery. This chapter is followed by two others on psychological wellness and the importance of adequate rest and recovery. This coverage of coping dimensions and strategies will lead to greater awareness with healthier methods in regulating mental wellness. The section concludes with a step-by-step list of action items to encourage a lifestyle change for improved mental health.

The chapters in the third section are presented by experts specifically with the dancer-athlete in mind. Dancers are exposed to unique demands and stressors that may have different physical manifestations compared to other physically active individuals. The section begins by providing an overview of nutritional considerations and the risks of nutritional deficits including a dire section on “maintaining a healthy weight.” As a dancer, I did not have a sense of how to do this on my own, and yet, as a practitioner, this is commonly asked by dancers. In addition, the next chapter provides a brief overview of common orthopaedic ailments and suggestions for prevention, early recognition, self-treatments, and recognizing when referral to a medical professional may be warranted. This section draws ties to earlier mentions of risk for physical injury from unsafe surroundings or deficits in mental health.

Lastly, the fourth section discusses the use of comprehensive screening programs to assess dancer wellness in an effort to identify each dancer’s composition and boundaries. In doing so, many chronic mental and physical health concerns may be mitigated through early identification and intervention. The practice of injury surveillance for epidemiologic inquiry is also explained to inform best practices across dance medicine and science. The latter part of this section provides a plan to further implement the recommendations throughout this book into obtainable goals toward optimal wellness.

The editors have done a profound job in recognizing the intersections between various facets of dance medicine and science to produce a conscientiously designed contribution that unravels the many complexities of dancer wellness.

ESTHER C. NOLTON, MED, LAT, ATC
George Mason University
Fairfax, Virginia
echo@gmu.edu

Managing Stage Fright:
A Guide for Musicians and Music Teachers
By Julie Jaffee Nagel
Published by Oxford Univ. Press, Nov 2017

Julie Jaffee Nagel’s new book, Managing Stage Fright: A Guide for Musicians and Music Teachers, is a welcome addition to our understanding of performance anxiety which remains a major problem for musicians at all levels of proficiency. But what is unique about this book is how it illuminates the student/teacher relationship and the role that music teachers can play in helping students manage their symptoms.

Beyond this central focus, the book has enough of a generalist message to offer something for everyone—from the musi-
Enjoyed and opportunities for growth, never punish for late 80s, Nagel has always advocated for a broader conceptualization of performance anxiety that takes into account the whole person, not just the performer. Nagel views performance anxiety as reflecting deeper emotional conflicts that can manifest in a variety of ways depending on the interplay between the personality and life experiences of the musician. She urges that symptoms be viewed as “signals” for underlying conflicts that the musician must understand and then manage. Nagel’s work foreshadowed the performance anxiety subtypes that Kenny (2011) eventually identified in her research with Australian orchestra players. With this book, Nagel fully fleshes out her approach to training musicians that is long overdue in music schools.

The early chapters review core knowledge about performance anxiety that teachers and musicians who are less familiar with the topic will find informative, perhaps even revelatory. Nagel is so clear in explaining concepts and creating rubrics that organize our thinking about performance anxiety. All of this deepens our understanding of the complexity of performance anxiety and how it manifests as symptoms across several categories of functioning. The ideas presented challenge the notion that “stage fright” is exclusively a situational (or state) anxiety response that happens only before and during a performance.

The strength of the book, as mentioned, is how it informs music teachers on the psychological and relational nuances that occur in their work with students. Nagel addresses such topics as shame, the diversity of symptoms, the role of conflicts in symptom formation, ego defenses, transference, counter-transference, as well as learning and developmental theories. Importantly, she cautions music teachers to be aware that transferece reactions from students, similar to what occurs in a psychotherapeutic relationship, will be common, due to the investment that the student has in the teacher’s role, authority, and knowledge. These interpersonal needs parallel aspects of the parent/child relationship. Considering that many students are separating from their families for the first time, the music teacher becomes a natural successor to the parent figure, whether the student is consciously aware of that or not.

Nagel encourages music teachers to expand the domain of their work into personal areas of functioning to help them unblock impediments to optimal performance. The guidelines for teachers listed at the end of every chapter are direct and purposeful: be a good listener, normalize performance anxiety, make it safe for students to talk about their feelings, support a culture of acceptance and openness in their schools, challenge perfectionism, reframe performance as something to be enjoyed and opportunities for growth, never punish for making mistakes, respect personal boundaries, privacy, and the power dynamics of the student/teacher relationship. In general, she urges teachers to customize teaching methods to what works best for the student. Simply put, Nagel advocates for a more student-centered pedagogy that reins in the more extreme examples of authority that some music teacher have employed in the past.

Despite the many strengths of this book, there are a few areas where the content needs to be upgraded. In the chapters on treatment strategies and anxiety management, Nagel relies on the same autogenic and CBT techniques that have been around for years. While these standard techniques are helpful (many of them imported from sport psychology), they are more basic and less likely to address all of the underlying sources of performance anxiety. The outcome research on the effectiveness of these techniques when tested in live performance conditions is mixed, and relapse rates in the months following treatment are high. Nagel doesn’t acknowledge these limitations.

She also tends to overlook the genetic and physiological underpinnings of anxiety by omitting discussion of how trait anxiety, anxiety sensitivity, behavioral inhibition, and introversion shape the student’s anxiety profile. Within psychology, conceptualizations of clinical conditions that are too narrow have often led to inadequate treatments. This possibility must be considered when evaluating the spottiness of our past therapeutic efforts in treating performance anxiety. This may be part of the reason why so many musicians have turned to beta-blocker medications, which are immediately effective in reducing the physiological activation where other techniques have fallen short.

Exposure therapy also gets no mention despite being a core treatment model and shown to be particularly effective in reducing symptoms for all anxiety disorders, not just performance anxiety. Instead, Nagel, the psychoanalyst, relies on insight and understanding of conflicts to help students alleviate their symptoms. While insight is always a goal of mental health interventions, it is only one step in the behavioral change process. Changing cognitive and behavioral habits takes a more robust treatment model. Exposure therapy and other behaviorally informed interventions used in combination with some of the new brain-based techniques, such as eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), meditation, cardio exercise, or neurofeedback, may be necessary to treat the physiological underpinnings of performance anxiety.

Finally, I have one minor peeve concerning Nagel’s use of the name “stage fright” rather than the more clinically accurate term “performance anxiety.” While stage fright is still commonly used in the field, it represents a holdover from the past that signifies the secrecy and shame that performance anxiety evoked for many musicians. Since this is something that we practitioners—Nagel included—want to get away from, it is surprising that she uses the term so frequently. How we name sensitive emotional issues plays a role in how those issues are faced, discussed, and responded to, especially in the conservatory culture.

**Patrick Gannon, PhD**
**Peak Performance Systems**
**San Francisco, CA**

drpatrickgannon@gmail.com

https://doi.org/10.21091/mppa.2018.1011
© 2018 Science & Medicine, Inc.