THE HEALTHY ORCHESTRA

Benoît Machuel - International Federation of Musicians
Increasing consensus about the relevance of health & safety policies

- Spreading consensus about the need for adequate prevention
- Consensus also needed about assessment of risks and efficient measures to be taken (risks may be sector- / instrument-specific)
- Risks include
  - Excessive acoustic pressure (peaks) :: hearing loss / hyperacusia
  - Inappropriate posture :: musculoskeletal disorders
  - Excessive workload :: repetitive motion injuries
  - Psychological stress, anxiety, emotional pressure :: burnout
  - Frequent traveling | odd working hours :: exhaustion = additional risk factor
European Social Dialogue → OIRA online risk assessment tool
http://www.oiraproxject.eu/available-tools

Uniform measures may be inadequate: different instruments may require different approaches.

Feedback is essential to assess the relevance and efficiency of the measures applied.

Behaviors should be questioned at different levels. Example: individual protections are not the best-fitted response to noise exposure → cooperation with other professionals (conductors, instrument makers).
Playing an instrument professionally is comparable to high level sport competition in terms of physical impact.

From the musician’s perspective, pain is still too often perceived as a positive sign: “I must suffer if I want to make progress”.

The enormous amount of work that a musician produces as a student or at the beginning of his/her career may have a delayed but heavy physical impact that adds to natural aging issues.

Lifelong learning, re-training, permanent access to adequate, specialized medical advice or assistance are essential to awareness, prevention and early treatment.

Need to address age-related issues.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Accuracy</th>
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<tr>
<td>Repetition of macro-movements</td>
<td>Repetition of micro-movements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Macro motor control</td>
<td>Micro motor control</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emphasis on large movement</td>
<td>Emphasis on short movement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Great physical activity</td>
<td>Predominant use of hand and upper limb</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sedentary lifestyle</td>
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ATHLETES VS MUSICIANS
A BRIEF COMPARISON (2)

Tendency to avoid vicious positions
Search for good body position
Short time of professional activity
Adapted care by specialized health professionals
Good body consciousness
Special clothes and accessories

Frequent vicious positions
Little concern about body posture
Long time of professional activity
Lack of specialized training of health professionals
Low body consciousness

…
SPECIFIC RISKS REQUIRE SPECIFIC APPROACHES

- Excessive acoustic pressure (peaks) :: hearing loss
  - Demand from the public
  - Conductor’s request
  - Unbalanced programme or repertoire
  - Acoustic performance of the venue
  - Inadequate placement of musicians on stage
  - Pressure on / from instrument makers. Competition based on sound power.

- Inappropriate posture :: musculoskeletal disorders
  - Inadequate choice of chairs
  - Excessive workload induces exhaustion and wrong postures
  - Need for adapted treatment and re-training

- Excessive workload :: repetitive motion injuries
  - Warm-up and progressive work intensity are essential
  - Need to balance the programme at concert and season level
  - Simultaneous programmes of medium to high intensity increase risk
Psychological stress, anxiety, emotional pressure :: burnout

✓ The musician’s activity is emotion-dependent
✓ Constant confrontation to the public but also conductors and colleagues
✓ Health-related performance issues may have a huge emotional impact

Frequent traveling | odd working hours :: additional risk factor

✓ Long traveling hours (and jet lag) reduce muscle performance and increase the risk of overstrain
✓ Late working hours impact family life and increase the risk of exhaustion
✓ Regular breaks are essential to the prevention of tendinites and other musculoskeletal troubles
Develop and renew risk prevention policies in consultation with musicians, so as to increase awareness and improve efficiency.

Facilitate access to information on professional ailments, contacts with specialists and access to adequate treatments.

Re-think the organisation of work to balance working time and personal practice + private / family life.

Associate musicians to decision making to ensure their full involvement in a collective project.

Invest in prevention and constant dialogue as privileged means to enhance efficiency at work and artistic success.
RECOGNITION OF PROFESSIONAL AILMENTS
A DESIRABLE STEP FORWARD

• The recognition of the musicians’ professional ailments would transform a financial risk into a reasonable, mutualized cost

• The prevalence of focal dystonia in the musicians’ population and its impact on playing makes it a natural priority

• Long and difficult process, which would highly benefit from joint efforts by musicians’ trade unions and employers’ organisations