

Artists' Lifestyles Require Healthy Focus

Dancers and singers enlist the help of specialists and trainers to safeguard their voices and bodies.

By ERIN WYNIA
Senior Writer

When Limp Bizkit hits the road on tour, the band promises fans a loud, thrashing, grinding, pounding good time.

For themselves, however, they prefer to keep their shows as quiet as possible.

Prolonged exposure to sound levels that their concerts can reach - 105 decibels and up - will damage band members' hearing, leading to hearing loss, ringing in the ears and deafness.

And when professional musicians lose their hearing, it's a sure way to end their careers.

So bands like Limp Bizkit turn to audiological professionals like Helena Solodar for help.

Solodar, a hearing specialist with Audiological Consults of Atlanta, works with rockers such as Limp Bizkit, Metallica and Madonna to outfit them with hearing protection devices.

"Metallica was the first band to promote hearing loss protection," Solodar said.

"Some bands stick cigarette butts and cotton balls in their ears, and it may seem like they're doing something, but

it accomplishes nothing."

In the past 10 years, Solodar said, the range of options for musicians has increased dramatically.

Gone are the days of stuffing tissues into the ears to drown out a loud amp.

Now, musicians like Limp Bizkit buy custom-molded earplugs made especially to lower sound levels but not sacrifice sound quality.

While those earplugs cost \$140 a pair, other devices run as high as \$850 a pair, Solodar said.

Or, she said, some stars opt for headset monitors (like the ones Madonna wore on her Blonde Ambition tour) that will block all sound out except what comes through the headset's channels.

The devices not only protect hearing, but voices, too.

When singers cannot hear themselves over speakers' feedback, Solodar said, they'll sing louder, straining their vocal cords.

But because the headset monitors provide a clear channel for vocals, singers can relax and sing in comfortable ranges.

Solodar said she often received calls from clients as they came to Atlanta for concerts.

She then goes to the concert site to

conduct sound checks for the bands, placing miniature microphones in their ears to ensure that noise levels do not pose a danger of hearing loss.

"While they're playing, we can actually evaluate how much sound is being delivered to their ear," she said.

Exposure to noises above 85-90 decibels will start to cause hearing loss, she said.

If ears are musicians' tools, than bodies are dancers' and actors' lifelines.

To keep their bodies and senses in working order, dancers and actors must take preemptive measures off-stage to avoid injuries during a stage performance.

For actors, guarding their voices and bodies takes on special significance as a show opening approaches.

Adam Gertz, Studio 1 producer, said he made cast members stretch their bodies and

vocal cords before every show.

"It's to be in tune with your instrument, which is your body - it's the tool actors use onstage to do their job," he said.

Unfortunately, he said, staying healthy also means no loud cheering in the Smith Center, no smoking and no excessive alcohol drinking.

Not taking care of their vocal chords beforehand leads to voice loss.

Dancers, too, must take extra care of their bodies to keep practicing their art.

John Lavender, dance athletic trainer at the N.C. School of the Arts, said the best way for dancers to prevent injuries and muscle strains was to warm up properly and strengthen their muscles.

"If they don't take care of their bodies, they don't have a lot to fall back on," Lavender said.

Taking care of their bodies means that dancers eat properly, lift weights and do other stretching to strengthen little-used muscles.

Areas that receive the most stress during exercise, like the foot, ankle, knees and hips, risk injury.

Therefore, strengthening the muscles around these areas helps support them and can extend a dancer's career by as much as 10 years.

Proper nutrition will also extend a career, preventing the osteoporosis often suffered by dancers who starve themselves to maintain the thin image of professional ballet artists.

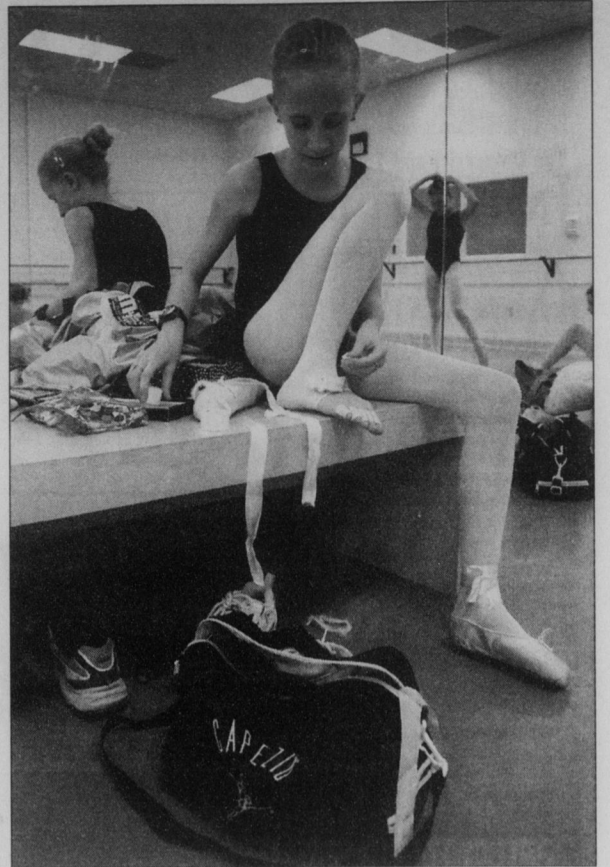
Despite their precautions, sometimes dancers still get injuries, most commonly foot, ankle and hip tendinitis, bone chips, and lower back strains, Lavender said.

"These things get to be problems because the core stabilization of the body is very weak in most dancers, and they have to utilize other muscles to compensate," he said.

To ensure that an injury does not prematurely end a dancer's career, Lavender continued, they must seek proper rehabilitation.

Even visual artists must take care of their bodies, particularly guarding their eyesight.

"As a photographer, I feel like my eyes are my most important tool," said



Christine Sailer tapes up her toes as a vital form of protection before she dances. Sailer takes classes at the Ballet School of Chapel Hill.

DTH/KATHERINE EAKER

Laena Wilder, a photography teaching assistant at the University.

She wears thick plastic goggles when working with developing chemicals to avoid injury if a chemical should splash into her eyes. Still, many photographers

do not take such a precaution, she said. "I don't want to risk permanently damaging my eyes."

The Arts & Entertainment Editor can be reached at artsdesk@unc.edu.

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