

He gets aching musicians back in tune

By **ETHAN ROTHSTEIN**
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Not many physical therapists are credited with single-handedly saving the careers of world-renowned musicians.

Not many physical therapists are like David Shulman

“Without him, I could have given up my career,” said Mari Matsumoto, a first violin with the **Baltimore Symphony Orchestra**. “Mentally he encouraged me, too. He was really a savior.”

Shulman, 61, of **Shulman & Associates** in Towson, takes a radically different approach — not rest or exercise — to treating musicians

Shulman, who also treats musicians at the **Peabody Conservatory**, uses a multitude of methods to stop the pain. He massages, uses what he calls “trigger points,” and ultrasound, electric stimuli and moist heat.

“A warm muscle is a happy muscle,” he said. “Musicians are world-class athletes, just on a specific level. It’s the same thing.”

Shulman grew up along the Hudson River in Newburgh, N.Y., where he said he earned all-state honors for playing the clarinet. It’s this background, in addition to his physical therapy training (he has a bachelor’s degree in physiology from Cornell University and graduated from the **University Of Maryland School of Medicine’s** Department of Physical Therapy in 1978), he said, that gave him the idea to use many strategies to help ailing musicians.

Shulman was also a professional



MAXIMILIAN FRANZ

Physical therapist David Shulman monitors the progress of Baltimore Symphony Orchestra trombonist John Vance, who had lip surgery in June 2007, and has been working with Shulman since April.

clarinet and saxophone player, so he understands the rigors of playing an instrument that other physical therapists may not, he said.

“[Musicians’] muscles are shortened and cold” due to overuse, said Shulman. “It’s called ischemic irritation. The nerves are getting compressed by the muscles because it’s going into spasm, which causes pain, which makes the muscle tighten down.”

According to Shulman, musicians, particularly string players, pianists and percussionists, can suffer from wrist or shoulder ten-

dinitis, carpal tunnel and spastic dystonia, in which muscles contract uncontrollably. He said about 70 percent of musicians’ are injured but can be rehabilitated back to play again.

Musicians, unlike athletes, can’t go on the disabled list. They must practice hours each day, and “can’t just call up and say ‘Sorry,’ and cancel a performance,” according to Shulman. The constant use means small aches and pains turn into big injuries.

Matsumoto, the BSO violinist, had rotator cuff surgery. She originally had gone to a different physical therapist.

“I went to a so-called physical therapist in the neighborhood,” the Columbia resident said. “He was more of a sports physical therapist. I got worse. The pulling and pushing was too hard for me to do, but I didn’t know it initially.”

Bruce Moore, fourth French horn in the BSO, and Matsumoto’s husband, said, “If it weren’t for David, I wouldn’t be playing horn today.”

Shulman does not treat only musicians. He’s also a physical therapist for the **Milton J. Dance Head and Neck Cancer Rehabilitation Center** at the

Greater Baltimore Medical Center. With the help of his father, a dentist, he invented the Dynasplint Trismus System, which helps those who can no longer open their mouths.

Shulman said that after radiation, muscles in the jaw get “overly tight and fibrous.”

“You can talk, but you can’t eat,” said Shulman. “You can’t brush your teeth, and it’s difficult for doctors to inspect. I said, ‘We’ve got to do better than tongue depressors.’ It’s a sort of a ‘mouth jack.’”

Despite his innovation and his growing reputation for saving musicians’ careers, his patients say it’s his hands-on approach, patience and dedication that help Shulman stand out.

Matsumoto said it took her about a year with Shulman to recover from her shoulder injury, but neither of them gave up. Now she’s back in playing shape.

Moore rehabbed with Shulman after he “pulverized” his jaw in an accident and had back surgery. He and Matsumoto recommend Shulman to all of their ailing colleagues, Moore said.

“He’s a real mensch,” he said.



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David Shulman performs physical therapy on Marcy Hankin, who works in his office but is also a pianist with shoulder problems.