

## When the Music Hurts

### Peer Support and Prevention for Musicians' Health in Europe

Professional musicians are frequently exposed to significant physical and mental pressure. The combination of multiple responsibilities and often inadequate working conditions leads many musicians to experience health issues at some point in their careers. These problems can be psychological, such as sleep disorders, anxiety, depression, or substance use. At the same time, the risk of physical injuries is substantial, due to insufficient rest, repetitive movements, and limited attention to ergonomics.

In a recent study conducted by a consortium of Belgian academic institutions (LUCA School of Arts, HIVA-KU Leuven) and occupational health services (IDEWE), commissioned by the European Commission, we examined current strategies across Europe aimed at improving musicians' health and wellbeing. This presentation will share the main findings of the study:

What are the key health and wellbeing risks professional musicians face?

Where do these risks and problems originate?

What can be done to prevent the risks or mitigate negative consequences?

Following the presentation, participants are invited to join a workshop that focuses on barriers to seeking care. Research shows that there is often a long delay before musicians take the step to professional support. One promising intervention, especially in high-performance environments, is peer-to-peer support. In this interactive session, we will explore how peer-to-peer support can be implemented in different contexts and how it may help in the early recognition and acknowledgement of risks and vulnerabilities.

### **Interest in musicians' health:**

In 2022, Foubert collaborated on a study commissioned by the European Commission (DG EAC), conducted by LUCA School of Arts, HIVA-KU Leuven, and IDEWE (a Belgian organization for occupational health and safety), which examined the health and wellbeing of professional musicians and music creators in the EU, providing valuable insights for policy and practice. She is the co-founder of TUNE-UP, a newly established research consortium that brings together national and international academic research groups, the music industry, arts education and sector organizations to drive collective action for a healthier and more sustainable music profession.

As a music therapist, researcher, and violinist, her work focuses on the intersection between performance, mental health, and the development of innovative therapeutic approaches.

She advocates for research that frames mental health issues - such as performance anxiety - not merely as individual issues, but as part of a complex system of interactions between personal factors and broader structural challenges related to performance values in the classical Western music industry.

Her work integrates psychodynamic concepts such as playfulness, the present moment, and vitality, offering musicians strategies for emotional self-regulation and stress management. Through her research, she is challenging traditional values in performance practices, approaching performance as a health-promoting and prosocial process.

#### Affiliations:

Katrien Foubert is professor at the Faculty of Medicine, KU Leuven, Belgium, and in the Bachelor/Master program in Music Therapy at LUCA School of Arts. She is also Head of Research at the Department of Music & Drama, KU Leuven. As music therapist, she works at the University Psychiatric Centre KU Leuven, in a unit for patients with personality disorder and autism spectrum disorder. Her work is widely cited, and she is a sought-after guest lecturer across Europe. Additionally, she holds a guest professorship at the Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand.