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Interview by
Jeremy Shulkin

Dr. Charlie Kautz doesn't exactly work with your average chiropractic clientele. The 29-year old Milwaukee-area chiropractor has spent his three years since graduating from Logan University working with musicians—famous ones too, from Jim James of indie rockers My Morning Jacket, jam band-ers Umphrey's McGee, retro-soul crooner Leon Bridges and members of both Taylor Swift's and Billy Idol's bands. By day, "Dr. Charlie" as he's known to clients, works from a Pewaukee office during the week, then arrives at local venues and festivals before curtain under the business name Epic Performance, LLC.



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The Wis DC: How did you end up treating musicians?

Dr. Charlie Kautz: About halfway through school I decided that I wanted to make musicians and music my focus. It was always my passion. I played music and was always the guy who was friends with all the guys in the band. I knew I always wanted to be a chiropractor but at the same time I was always into music and the industry and intrigued by the business side of music. About halfway through [school] I had a crazy lightbulb moment and knew that this was what I wanted to do. So the seed was planted before I graduated. And after I graduated I just really started doing it. I started off small and really worked locally. I would talk to local venues and figure out ways to have me come on site, and I made friends with local bands. It was all pro-bono to start just to introduce a lot of these people to chiropractic. All the relationships started with the bands themselves. A lot of the venues have go-to guys when someone requests body work so a lot of times they'll contact me. I work a lot in the jam band scene and the EDM scene - the electronic music scene - and I've been working a lot in the indie rock scene lately.



Dr. Charlie Kautz & soul crooner Leon Bridges

What's it like working with professional musicians?

They are exactly like everyone else, except they're really good at playing music. And that's how you have to treat them. **People get star struck** and they can pick up immediately when somebody's a little bit star struck. **You've just got to treat them like any individual you'd meet on the street,** because they are. I think that has a big role in being able to work on any sort of VIP patient. **continued on the next page**

When were you first exposed to chiropractic?

I went to the medical doctor for a running injury. He spent about five minutes with me and prescribed me muscle relaxers and told me I had to stay off my feet for a few weeks which would've ended my season. I had about a million questions but he walked out the door before I could ask any of them. So it was a pretty disheartening experience. Then my cousin had just graduated from Logan University at the time and told me to go see one of his friends who he had graduated with who was practicing in my home town. I didn't know why I was going to go see a chiropractor for shin splints but you know, **I would've done anything at that point.** Long story short, I was back running in two weeks and ended up finishing 13th in the state.

continued Any chiropractor or musician will tell you that a very important aspect of health care is bedside manner, allowing a patient to feel very comfortable with you. It's an intimate experience. **I think the key to working and being able to heal anyone is making sure they're as comfortable as possible.** I just try to be part of the team. That's been a key to my success thus far, I think. It's not like you can just magically say "I want to work with musicians." **There's a lot of relationship building that goes into it and a lot of persistence.** It's been easy for me because I'm so passionate about it, it's what I'm into, it's what I love. It's been really rewarding and cool to work on all my favorite bands and not just to provide my service and help them out, but also to become friends with them and **establish a relationship with them where they trust me and come to me for advice and questions.**

I know you can't really talk specifics, but in a general sense, what are some of the injuries you're seeing and the treatments you provide?

A lot of my protocols with musicians is on the upper extremities. If I have a guitarist and he uses a pick for the majority of the performance then I'll do a lot of work on the pollicis muscles, which is a muscle in your thumb. I'll also do work on the forearm tendon, use **Active Release [Therapy] and other soft tissue modalities on the specific muscles and make sure all the joints are bending** the way they need to and that they're biomechanically functioning the way they should. When I have a bassist or even a guitarist their left arm is their fret arm, so it's in a flexed position for a long period of time. Drummers, their big concern is medial epicondylitis, which is golfer's elbow, I call it "drummer's elbow." So I'll work the specific muscle groups associated with that. **A lot of these guys I'm working with I only see one or two nights. I'm really trying to have an educational experience with these guys and create relationships.** If something weird is going on or they're coming down with something, I'll get a random phone call just so I can steer them in the right direction. It's **incorporating a combination of soft tissue treatments, chiropractic work, functional rehab exercises.** I use rock tape, which is a kinestheology sports tape. A lot of bands I work with call it the "magic tape."



Dr. Kautz adjusts a member of the band Umphrey's McGee



[they] call it the "magic tape"

-Dr. Kautz on his patients' love of RockTape

Why is it that this seems to be a unique niche in chiropractic care?

There's not many people out there doing this because you need to have a working knowledge of musicians and the types of injuries they're experiencing but also have to be able to communicate and be on their level and be familiar with how the music industry works. It's almost like a different language. And I'm familiar with it so it's really easy for me to communicate with tour managers and artists. It's a really different and unique thing, and people would have questions because they were intrigued by what it was that I had to offer. Nobody had really heard of a chiropractor who was working on musicians. **I worked with John Densmore, drummer for the Doors, early in my career.** I met him at a book signing. I went to a book signing because my cousin was a huge Doors fan. I was one of the last guys in line and I was watching everyone freeze up when they were going to talk to him and I'm the opposite of that, I've got a very high energy, strong personality and I kind of hit it off with him when I went up there. He asked me what I did and I said I was a chiropractor who worked with bands and musicians and he immediately asked if I'd be okay working with him. I said of course and we coordinated it. He said that **the Doors, back in their touring career, would bring chiropractors to the venue about twice a week to treat the band before they played.** That was one of those moments where I was, like, **one of the biggest bands in rock history is doing what I had an idea to do—and way back when chiropractic was seen as voodoo in most peoples' eyes, and they really found benefits.** So that was a really cool experience for me to have early in my career, probably a motivating factor.