

HEALTH



EXERCISING

FROM A NEW SCORE

For musicians, working out has often been a foreign concept. Now programs help them stay fit while not hurting their artistry.

By Melissa Dribben
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Like many classically trained musicians who have been honing their talents since kindergarten, Andrew Bogard never made physical fitness a priority. “The emphasis in our education puts us in a small four-walled practice room for a majority of the time,” Bogard said. A gifted singer, he took his body for

granted. With a little help from Haagen-Dazs dulce de leche, by the time he turned 20 he had developed a respectable gut.

Since opera singers command a large presence on stage, he didn’t mind, even believing that the heft around his belly probably helped project his voice.

But in 2009, he and his undergraduate roommates at the Juilliard School challenged each other to a pull-up

contest.

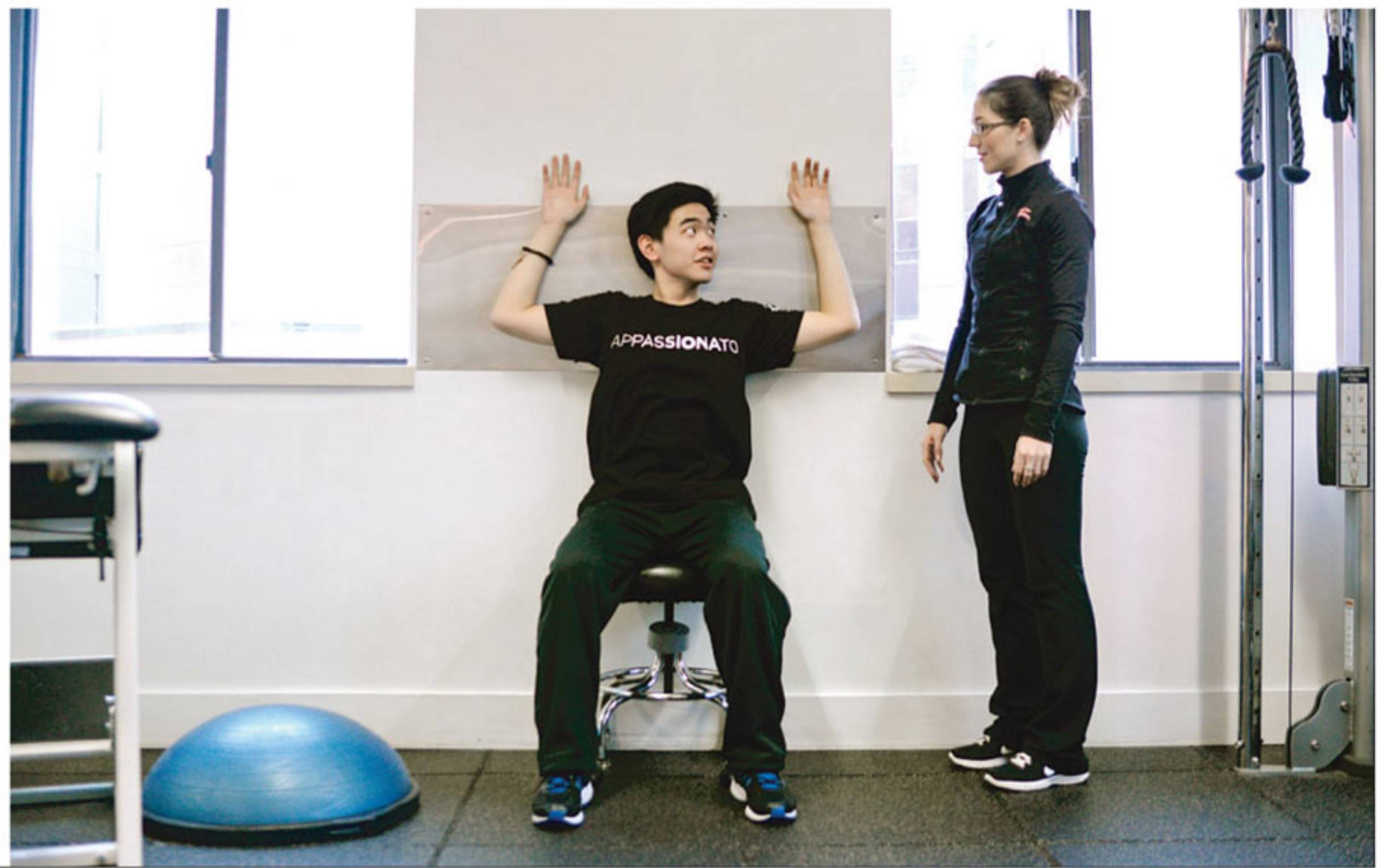
Bogard could barely hoist himself six times. He joined a local YMCA, changed his diet, and lost 20 pounds. He felt physically fit. But to his horror, he discovered that the bulkier muscles in his neck and the strain of lifting weights had damaged his voice.

“My teachers said, ‘Do you want to be a body builder or an opera singer?’” See **MUSICIANS** on G4

Andrew Bogard, above, a voice student at the Curtis Institute of Music, works out at Zarett Rehab & Fitness as part of a fitness-for-musicians course that Curtis offers. Below left, pianist Daniel Hsu and vocal student Ashley Robillard perform. Below right, Hsu works out with kinesiologist Alyssa Spangler.



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TOM GRALISH / Staff Photographer

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Fit as a fiddle, a viola, a bassoon, an oboe ...

MUSICIANS from G1
Bogard recalled. So he quit working out after a year.

Now 26 and nearing completion of a master’s degree at the Curtis Institute of Music, Bogard is in the best shape of his life, and his voice is clearer and stronger than ever. He credits a relatively new course offered by the conservatory, “Fitness and Conditioning for Musicians.”

Students who enroll in the noncredit elective attend exercise sessions at Zarett Rehab & Fitness, where they receive physical therapy and work out under the supervision of trainers attuned to musicians’ special needs.

“Rather than going to a gym at midnight on their own, they receive much more supervision and care and attention,” said Thomas Bandar, assistant dean of student affairs at Curtis.

Midway through a recent workout, Bogard strapped himself into a 25-pound weight vest, slipped cloth booties over his sneakers, and skated side to side across a slippery mat designed to strengthen abdominal and leg muscles and improve coordination. Later, he climbed onto an apparatus that helped him build his back muscles.

“I want you to feel it here,” said Joseph Zarett, tapping Bogard between the shoulder blades. Zarett, who owns the facility on South 19th Street and supervises training, said he had used his experience and knowledge as a physical

therapist to customize the program for each student.

He chooses exercises, he said, that improve students’ posture and core strength, while — depending on the instrument they play — protecting their hands, wrists, forearms, and necks.

“When I was going to the gym on my own, I didn’t know what I was doing,” Bogard said, wiping sweat from his forehead. “The pressure from tightening the sternocleidomastoids” — long muscles on the side of the neck — “was destroying the quality of my voice. These guys teach you how to do it correctly.”

To Bandar, “musicians really are like athletes.” Rather than cardiovascular strength, they develop Olympian-level fine motor skills, he said. And just like gymnasts or marathon runners, they often suffer injuries from overuse.

But the differences between the competitive worlds are vast.

While athletes generally treat their bodies like Maserati engines, musicians tend to treat theirs like baggage through their pain alone. Athletes are closely attended by physical therapists and other health professionals, but musicians typically power through their pain alone.

“Athletes are told, ‘This is what you need to eat, do these exercises,’” said Bronwen Ackermann, a physiotherapist at the University of Sydney School of Medical Sciences in Australia. “Musicians get told, ‘Just go practice



Violist Ren Martin-Doike (left) and cellist Arlen Hlusko perform at Curtis’ Field Concert Hall. The exercise professionals at Zarett Rehab & Fitness “really work a lot on posture and preventive measures you can take to strengthen the right muscles,” Martin-Doike says. PETE CHECCHIA

and practice some more.’”

Instrumentalists in particular have felt ashamed of their injuries, viewing them as a failure of technique, said Ackermann, a leading researcher in prevention and treatment of injuries in professional musicians.

When she began working in the 1990s with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, she said, “music was Darwinian. If you could make it through your trials and tribulations, then good on you.”

Gradually, that mind-set is changing. “We are finally getting musicians to realize they need to take care of their bodies,” said Clay Miller, former president of the Performing Arts Medicine Association. Miller said that only within the last two years have national guidelines for

music teachers included a section on protecting students’ physical well-being.

His association, founded in 1989, provides seminars and workshops for health professionals who care for musicians. It has just 300 members. Even with increased demand from the relatively small population of serious musicians, it is hard to make a living providing such specialized care, Miller said: “What you’re looking at is very new.”

Change at Curtis came about a decade ago, when the school’s leaders were planning to expand the Rittenhouse Square campus and decided not to include a gym. Part of the reason was concern that students could be vulnerable to injury when left to work out on their own.

The conservatory, which has about 170 students, instead began

offering the fitness and conditioning course through a partnership with Zarett.

Since 2010, when the program began, 30 or so students each semester have signed up to attend personal training sessions two or three times a week.

For the first few years, the program was funded with support from H.F. “Gerry” Lenfest, who chaired the school’s board from 2006 to 2014 and had been treated at Zarett’s facility, which has developed a loyal following among the city’s elite. (Lenfest is the publisher and owner of The Inquirer.)

Although results of the musicians’ workouts are hard to measure objectively, students who have taken the course say they not only feel better physically and suffer fewer injuries, but are practicing more efficiently.

Ren Martin-Doike, a violist, had done sports in high school and was relatively fit. During her first year at Curtis, however, she developed tendonitis in her elbow.

Having never belonged to a gym, she was wary of the course at Zarett’s.

“I learned a lot,” Martin-Doike said. “They really work a lot on posture and preventive measures you can take to strengthen the right muscles.”

The training changed her body mechanics while playing her instrument, and also the way she sits at her desk. “I don’t get hurt now,” she said. “I’m really vigilant and really aware.”

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