

Massage Therapy for the Musical Set

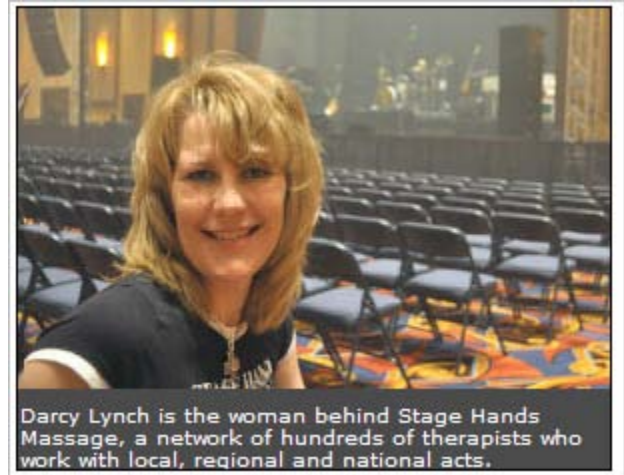


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Special to the Journal

Darcy Lynch is the woman behind Stage Hands Massage, a network of hundreds of therapists who work with local, regional and national acts.

Inside the bowels of Twin River Casino in Lincoln, well beyond the din of slot machines and the alluring dream of riches they offer, there is a grittier environment of concrete floors, exposed cables and muted walls.

It is here — backstage at a Meat Loaf concert — that Darcy Lynch and Lori Tackmann found themselves on a Saturday afternoon in January.



In this less-than-glamorous-setting the pair scrambled to find a temporary work space after discovering their typical one had been claimed by the singer’s wardrobe department.

Standing in a hallway opposite a makeshift dining room and adjacent to a small craft services area where fried chicken, lasagna and tomato soup sat in separate stainless-steel food warmers, Lynch was not fazed by the situation. “This is not unusual,” she said. “We sometimes end up in bathrooms, electrical closets or hallways.”

On this day they would lay claim to a 12-by-12-foot office that was already furnished with a desk and small bookcase. Inside the already crowded space Tackmann would add a massage table, over which a heated pad and sheets were placed, as several crew members passed by, unloading temporary barricades from tour trucks into the casino’s Event Center.

Directly outside the room, she assembled a therapeutic massage chair replete with blue pads.

Their Work is Hands On

Lynch then placed a sign-up sheet on the right hand side of the room’s entrance. On the opposite side she hung a white banner featuring her company’s insignia: Stage Hands Massage Therapy.

“I took my daughter’s tie-dye tape,” Lynch laughed as she secured the sign to the wall. “She’s going to be upset I took it.” Her daughter, Hannah, will probably not be upset for long as she is the primary reason Lynch was here in the first place.

In 2000, when Lynch was working as a TV producer, she had a career change-of-heart. At the time Hannah was four years old and as Lynch recalled, “I was doing a shoot in Antigua for the Discovery Channel and I was leaving my hotel room when my daughter looked up to me and said, ‘All you do is go, go, go,’ and she was crying.”

That one moment was enough to force Lynch to find a job that kept her close to home, allowing her to juggle the demands of a career while raising a family with her husband, Air Force Brig. Gen. Marcus Jannitto.



Initially, Lynch took a stab at corporate America, working in information technology, but found it too stifling so she pursued a career in a more relaxing field. "I had been an aerobics instructor so I decided to get into massage therapy and concentrate on health and wellness," she said.

Over a three-year period, she attended the Community College of Rhode Island, attaining her associate's degree in 2006.

But even before that point she was already perfecting her craft and building a client base thanks to her friendship with George Hawkins Jr., a bass player who was performing with John Fogerty at the time.

That was her foray into the music industry, providing her with a link to the past — her father, Ron Lynch, was a member of the Cascades, the one-hit wonder behind the hit "Rhythm of the Rain."

Since then Lynch has quietly amassed an empire, of the good kind, that includes a network of 450 massage therapists worldwide. The majority are based in the United States, working under the umbrella of Stage Hands Massage, which offers its services to local, regional and national acts.

The current tours she handles cover a variety of musical genres, from the hip-hop styles of Usher to the classic rock of Roger Waters. Foreigner, Roger Plant, Hinder and Saving Abel are among the other tours she is overseeing.

The list of local venues she works include The Met, Lupos and the House of Blues in Boston.

Backstage she has one philosophy: "We want to add to the show, not be the show." It is one reason she is as much a part of the tour as the electricians, sound engineer and talent. And to them she and her staff are as important, perhaps more so, because it sustains their livelihood.

Bob Powers, the production manager for the Meat Loaf tour, said when he is on the road, "I get a massage any chance I can." In this physically demanding industry, he said, it may mean the difference between a 20-year career and a 35-year one.

"It is a great amenity to have," Kelley Crone Johnson, the tour's production coordinator, said just minutes after receiving a massage from Tackmann.

For those who spend 8 to 10 months a year on the road like Lesley Mortimer Wallace, who handles wardrobe for the Meat Loaf tour, a massage is not only an amenity, it is a necessity.

"We are on our feet all day and really extending our bodies," she said. "Our schedules can be brutal and you don't have a life."

While some swear by acupuncture and others chiropractic medicine, Wallace prefers massage as a way to keep her body and mind fresh. "It is like medicine," she said.

This industry is a natural fit for those in Lynch's profession despite the stereotypes of unhealthy living that pervades it.

"With musicians, they sleep on tour buses and emotionally it takes a lot out of them because they are always performing in front of audiences and they have repetitive use injuries whether they play guitar or drums," she said.

"This treats injury, relaxing them before shows. And if they have a bad back or neck it keeps them healthy."

Although there will always be those in the industry who prefer to abuse their bodies — whether it is through sex, drugs or alcohol — Lynch noted that health has become increasingly more important backstage.



“Usher, Foreigner, Roger Waters all have juice bars, chiropractors and doctors that give them Vitamin B shots,” she said.

“Now massage has become a part of this health regime they are incorporating into their lifestyles.”

Massage therapies vary

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Within the world of massage therapy there is a menu of options, from deep tissue to Reiki, that may be beneficial to one client, but not another.

So how does one differentiate between these methods?

Darcy Lynch, who has been a practicing masseuse since 2005, said these are all questions any competent practitioner should be able to answer for their clients.

With both Stage Hands Massage and her private practice, Waves of Healing Wellness Boutique in Riverside, she offers an array of choices to benefit the range of ages, weight and genders she meets on a daily basis.

She tailors her sessions to meet those needs. Those adverse to touch, she said, tend to be candidates for Reiki. She often incorporates Thai massage for those who prefer being clothed.

Her favorite? Ashiatsu Oriental Bar Therapy.

For those unfamiliar with it, the technique requires an overhead set of bars the masseuse holds onto for balance and support as they use their feet to massage a patient.

Larger clients, she said, are prime candidates for the therapy. “It offers the deepest of deep massages, but it is relaxing,” Lynch said. “It feels like a giant hand massaging your whole body.”

This is different from deep tissue massage, she said, which can be quite painful. “Ashiatsu isn’t painful, but it takes your breath away,” Lynch said.

Lynch added Ashiatsu to her repertoire in 2007, something that differentiates her from most other masseuses in the area.

She offers it both in her private practice and when possible backstage at concerts, as long as the venue has the proper height requirements to accommodate the bars.

She said the benefits of Ashiatsu extend beyond the client. “It is great for us because it keeps us in good shape,” she said. “We need to be light. People don’t want a 300-pound massage therapist on their back.”

While she is a strong proponent of Ashiatsu, she stressed it is not for everyone. Those who are pregnant, have osteoporosis, high blood pressure and other heart conditions should not have it.