

# Comprehensive review analyzes vocal-cord restoration in 18 Grammy Award-winning singers

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A retrospective review of laser microsurgery performed in 18 Grammy Award-winning performers treated by surgeons at the Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) Division of Laryngeal Surgery has revealed insights into the treatment and management of vocal-cord disease in elite performers. Detailed photo-documentation is provided which demonstrates a range of microsurgical techniques that were created at MGH. This unique first-of-its kind investigation was published in a special supplement to the March 2019 issue of the *Annals of Otology, Rhinology, and Laryngology*, entitled *Innovations in Laryngeal Surgery*.

The analysis reviewed the care of elite singers—a group that won a total of 80 Grammy Awards from more than 240 nominations—who suffered from vocal-cord damage, 90 percent of whose injuries resulted from vocal trauma and overuse. The review highlights the effectiveness of surgical interventions including the use of a KTP or "green light" laser, which has been shown to dramatically improve vocal function in such patients.

"During the past 20 years of treating vocal-cord damage in singers, we've been able to make great strides not only in preserving patients' voices but also in restoring these elite singers to the highest levels of their profession," says Steven M. Zeitels, MD, director of the MGH Center for Laryngeal Surgery and Voice Rehabilitation and Eugene B. Casey Professor of Laryngeal Surgery at Harvard Medical School, the author of

the report. "The strategies we have identified in treating these individuals have also improved our ability to treat patients who, while not professional singers, sustain vocal-cord injury through other means and professions—such as teaching, the law, broadcasting and others that require prolonged speaking."

The report also details the emotional and psychosocial factors which must be considered when treating these problems. "In the mid-1990s, many singers were reluctant to undergo surgical treatment for fear of making their condition worse," says Zeitels. "Now with the demonstration of repeatable success treating these patients, many choose to tell their story publicly and encourage others to see a physician when their vocal function is strained or interrupted."

Zeitels notes that any patient—performer or nonperformer—can suffer from the same types of vocal-cord problems, even vocal-cord cancer. He points out that even as amateur or recreational athletes can benefit from the lessons gleaned from the orthopedic treatment of professional athletes, so too can nonsinging individuals who experience prolonged deteriorating vocal function benefit from what has been learned treating elite singers.

"The bottom line is that if you feel that your voice is underperforming, hoarse and/or strained for over a month, you should seek out a specialist for careful examination of your vocal-cord vibration," he says. "Whether it's vocal trauma, cancer or other conditions, successful treatments are available."

**More information:** Steven M. Zeitels, The Art and Craft of Phonomicrosurgery in Grammy Award–Winning Elite Performers, *Annals of Otology, Rhinology & Laryngology* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/0003489418810697](https://doi.org/10.1177/0003489418810697)

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