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MAGAZINE

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THE WORLD
IS OPRAH?**
Find out on
the back cover!

HEALTH HEROES

Shows of Compassion

Many artists can't afford healthcare. Thanks to these two guys, thousands have been treated for free.

On a bright Friday afternoon last October in Kingston, New York, Mayor Steve Noble waved to cheering onlookers from a silver and black Mustang convertible. Behind him, dancers in '40s-style sundresses swiveled their hips to the sounds of a six-piece brass marching band. The parade that followed was a folksy array of locals sporting whimsical costumes and rattling and thumping percussion instruments—the kickoff to the ninth annual O+ Festival, a three-day event during which artists from Kingston, New York City, and beyond gather to paint murals and play everything from bluegrass to hip-hop in music venues, alleyways, and parks around the small city.

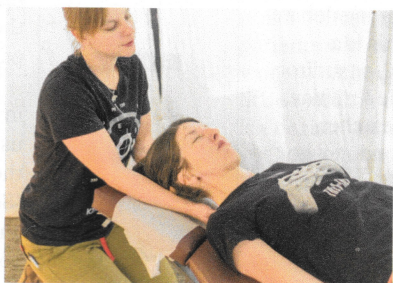
The roughly 300 participants aren't paid in cash, but they do get something just as valuable: access to the artists' clinic inside a hall of the historic Old Dutch Church. In private spaces divided by red drapes and PVC pipes, every artist is invited to meet with a doctor and a nurse to discuss their healthcare needs and then determine what other free services they'll receive that weekend—a therapy session, a chiropractic adjustment, maybe a massage. Meanwhile, in the church kitchen, chefs serve organic meals to artists and practitioners alike. "Not only are you going to see a doctor, but there's a good chance you'll have a bowl of soup or a salad with one," says Joe Concra, a painter and the festival's executive director.

The spark for O+ (a reference to the most common blood type, O-positive) was ignited when Kingston dentist Thomas Cingel met Concra at a house party in 2010. Cingel had recently



attended a music festival in nearby Big Indian, where he had a wacky thought: He could help musicians *and* get great bands to play in his sleepy hometown if they'd agree to be paid in...teeth cleanings? The concept of trading gigs for health services struck a chord with Concra, who knew firsthand that artists tend to be underinsured. He started calling local doctors and musicians, and five months later, with support from the community, the first O+ Festival came to life.

Concra and the O+ team have since facilitated festivals from Poughkeepsie to Chicago to San Francisco, and Cingel still provides dentistry for the Kingston event, which now also features yoga classes and a community health expo.



Clockwise from left: Concra (left) and Cingel in front of a mural painted by O+ artist Kimberly Kae; reggae band the Big Takeover plays the Kingston festival in 2017; chiropractor Christa Whiteman treats Kae in the artists' clinic.

On the Saturday morning of the 2018 festival, Laura Hajek, half of the Brooklyn electronica duo A Place Both Wonderful and Strange, sat in Cingel's dental chair. For a year, two of her wisdom teeth had been painfully pressing on a nerve, but she couldn't cover the cost of extraction. "I cried when I heard I could get it done for free," Hajek says. The next afternoon, she and her bandmate, Russ Marshalek, played their festival set as scheduled. "I still had gauze in my mouth," she says. "It was surreal."

Storefronts that were empty during the first event now house thriving music venues and restaurants; the 36 murals painted on buildings around town have elevated its aesthetic, helping attract tourists and new residents.

"We're seeing bigger bands warming up here for national tours or squeezing a Kingston show between New York City and Montreal," says Cingel. "It could be convenience. Or maybe it's a musician's way of saying thank you to our community for taking care of fellow artists. I'd like to think the latter."

—MARY PAULINE LOWRY

We've helped people who had no idea they were eligible for Medicaid get enrolled at the artists' clinic. That is an amazing thing.

—SHANNON DONNELL, O+ NURSE