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A New Avenue for Musicians' Outreach: Music and Wellness

by

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EDITOR'S DIGEST

A New Avenue for Musicians' Outreach: Music and Wellness

In this issue of *Harmony*, we have traversed from consideration of the macrocosm of an entire industry, through the enlightened processes of two individual orchestra organizations, to consideration of small groups within organizations. We now arrive at the microcosm of organization development work initiated by a single individual.

Author Penny Anderson Brill is a Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (PSO) musician and a breast cancer survivor. Those facts form the genesis of her explorations of music and wellness as an organizational activity. She explains that her work began with research at Duquesne University.

Brill then details four areas of activity which the orchestra has undertaken under the rubric of music and wellness. In addition to the organization's own work, as she explains, the PSO has become strongly identified with the Susan G. Komen Pittsburgh Race for the Cure.

She assesses the organization's work and describes the doors it has opened to the PSO. Her concluding thoughts resonate strongly about the organizational role that a "tutti string player" can undertake. In her words, "When musicians have projects to which they can truly commit themselves, they move beyond the idea of a timed service-exchange-program to taking whatever time is needed to complete a task well."

Powerful words. Might your orchestra also harbor a Penny Brill? We encourage you to consider the possibility.

A New Avenue for Musicians' Outreach: Music and Wellness

I am a violist in the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. In July 1999, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Because music has always been a central part of my life, I found that playing and listening to music helped me to stay clearheaded during the decision making that followed the diagnosis. I also used music to reach a state of relaxation and calm before surgery. I also listened to music during surgery, using headphones. (My medical team reported that I required significantly less anesthesia than they would have expected, that the amount of pain medication I required was also reduced, and that my recovery time was significantly accelerated.)

Because of my own positive experiences, I wanted to learn more about music and wellness, and to determine if there were ways in which I could promote the use of music as a tool to help people with coping and healing.

Research and Beginnings

My research began at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. Duquesne has offered a music therapy program for nearly 25 years. The head of that program was very supportive, suggesting books and articles for me to read, and putting me in touch with well-known members of the music therapy community. Based on what I learned about music and wellness, I decided that I wanted to introduce music in two contexts: music therapy in some of Pittsburgh's mainstream hospitals (as opposed to geriatric or psychiatric hospitals), and music as a stress-management tool for the general population. It also occurred to me that explorations in music and wellness might be a valuable outreach activity for the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (PSO).

With the help of a music therapist, another PSO violist and I in June 2000 developed a program for ovarian cancer patients at Magee-Womens Hospital. A social worker led a support group in which our music was used to help patients learn visualization and relaxation techniques. We also played for patients in

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their rooms and for patients and their families in the chemotherapy and oncology waiting rooms.

At about the same time, Dr. Bruce Rabin, whose spouse is a member of the PSO board, was named chair of the Healthy Lifestyle Program at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC), which owns 19 hospitals in the Pittsburgh area. I became aware that he was actively seeking ways to reduce the stress and anxiety of hospital patients, as well as ways of maintaining wellness and optimum health in the general population. To me, this appeared as an opportunity for the music therapy community, the UPMC, and the PSO to collaborate on music and wellness projects.

A Music and Wellness Program Comes to the PSO

For a number of years, the Pittsburgh Symphony has used Hoshin in our planning. [Ed. Note: The PSO's work with Hoshin is detailed in the October 1998 issue of *Harmony*.] Hoshin involves working in teams composed of members from all constituencies, with everyone on an equal footing and creative solutions welcome from any member of the group. Having worked closely with staff, volunteers, and board members as part of several Hoshin teams, I felt free to approach anyone in our organization or community to share ideas or brainstorm. And so we began conversations to determine if there might be financial support available to develop programs directed toward music and wellness. We spent more than a year cultivating relationships in the community and meeting people who had expertise in various areas.

In addition to putting everyone on an equal footing, Hoshin also encourages the accelerated implementation of new ideas. Although we decided that music and wellness would not be a Hoshin task force for the PSO, our knowledge of the techniques turned out to have been great preparation for the project. As we moved forward, the coalition of music therapists, representatives from the PSO, and hospital staff members felt very much like the same kind of relationship. As an example of accelerated implementation, for a recent project, we developed a pilot and had funding and personnel in place, all in a matter of hours. That was an exciting return on the investment we had made in relationship-building.

Currently, our music and wellness program is developing in four areas, with strong financial support from the community:

- ◆ On-site, we offer preconcert presentations on the use of music for stress management and as a tool for maintaining overall wellness. On some occasions, the presentations are made by a music therapist and a musician. On others, the presentation is made by a musician alone. During the 2001-2002 season, we held five preconcert presentations. The UPMC underwrote some of our pilot presentations, above and beyond their ongoing generous support of the PSO. Before a Jessye Norman concert, knowing that we would have a significant number of people from the medical community in attendance, we did a preconcert

presentation that included discussion of current research on music and wellness.

As a musician, I like the preconcert presentations because they are live music experiences which are tied directly into the concerts that participants are about to hear. Our presentations give the audience new ways of listening to and interacting with the pieces they hear, and add value to the concert.

- ◆ Off-site, musicians currently make visits to selected health care facilities, in tandem with music therapists. And I would note that music and wellness presentations can be adapted to suit any target audience. Depending on the audience we wish to attract, we can do wellness presentations for seniors, young professionals, and health-care providers. In the spring of 2003, we will take a program even farther off-site. During a PSO tour stop in London, Mellon Bank is sponsoring our music and wellness presentations at a children's hospital.

Our ability to develop and implement programs is, of course, dependent upon our ability to attract funding. As I write this article at the very beginning of the 2002-2003 season, we have just learned that two major Pittsburgh-area foundations, the Vira I. Heinz Endowment and the Pittsburgh Foundation, have agreed to provide support to establish staff positions in music therapy within the UPMC health system. UPMC has also dedicated the proceeds of an upcoming fundraiser to the Healthy Lifestyle Program, and that money will also go toward the establishment of the staff positions. Having music therapists in place at the hospitals will greatly enhance our collaborative efforts. And, as the season begins, more than 15 PSO musicians have expressed an interest in participating in music and wellness activities.

- ◆ We are also working with a McKeesport, Pennsylvania, community health task force. We helped with the design of a pilot program for young people in a low-income housing project which we hope to tie in with the PSO's ongoing outreach program in McKeesport.
- ◆ The PSO's resident conductor, Lucas Richman, and I, with the help of the music therapy community, are working on a CD (or series of CDs) to provide users with musical tools for coping with each phase of diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer. We are also developing a CD for heart patients and one for use in stress management.

Race for the Cure

Although it is not a project of the PSO itself, there is an additional event with which PSO members have become very involved as part of music and wellness. In May 2001, I, as a breast cancer survivor, participated for the first time in the Susan G. Komen Foundation Pittsburgh Race for the Cure (along with 35,000 others). The day begins with a survivor tribute, and I was keenly aware that

there was no music. I thought the tribute would be much more focused and effective if the survivors were to sing their own song.

Because I had already established a working relationship with the race director, I was able to discuss this idea with her. She agreed. I then asked Lucas Richman to write a survivor's song. He immediately agreed and donated his services. At the 2002 Race for the Cure, which was held on Mother's Day, a survivor choir, backed by brass, keyboard, and drum-set players from the PSO, premiered "We Share a Bond" to an audience of 38,000.

The music drew everyone together and was a valuable part of the day. For the players, it was a very moving experience. The musicians were not in their customary roles and were volunteering their time. Just as all other participants, by their presence and support, they were reaching out to help somebody else. And, of course, our participation was an outstanding public relations opportunity for the PSO. "We Share a Bond" will be the anchor of the CD we are developing for breast cancer patients.

Assessing Our Work

One of the things that was unusual about the beginnings of the PSO's involvement

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with music and wellness was the fact that it was musician-initiated. I had the opportunity to be a leader and facilitator for music and wellness, with a steadily increasing number of people willing to help move the project forward. Unlike in my role as a "tutti string player," my ideas and my individual playing were heard in circumstances totally under my control. I could innovate and create, and share the workload with many others, which has been very satisfying.

Our projects have also involved entirely new ways of musicians' relating to our staff and our community. A member of the grant-writing staff worked with me as I prepared a presentation to the board. The group sales staff met with staff from the UPMC to secure the funding to quickly make a music and wellness pilot project a reality. Staff members from many of the area's largest

philanthropic organizations have come to know musicians in a context far removed from the concert stage.

In pursuing music and wellness, we have learned to listen to the needs of our audience and interact in ways quite different from our roles in traditional concerts. We musicians have had to learn many more styles of playing, to play more by ear, and to transpose or improvise as needed. These skills will also help us do a better job in our outreach to schools.

Working with the music therapy community has enhanced our ability to create programs for difficult populations, and we have become more comfortable

with interactive presentations. We already see improvement in the content and nature of our outreach programs, and could now easily include improvisation and interaction training in the PSO's own musician orientation programs.

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Teaming up with the medical community has opened new avenues of funding for the PSO. Foundations that encourage collaborative efforts are particularly interested in what we are doing. And because our projects have received significant media coverage, we can approach funders with copies of published articles, workshop brochures, and copies of television news coverage. Funders can discern what we do quickly, and they have more confidence in our proposals.

The backing of the medical community has also given our preconcert presentations credibility and legitimacy, and has allowed us to develop new collaborations very quickly. For example, UPMC's support of our preconcert programs garnered an invitation to collaborate with the Jewish Health Care Foundation's "Working Hearts" program to promote healthy hearts through lifestyle changes.

Our collaborations have also proven to be a way to provide support to our staff. We have had the same experience as many other orchestras this year: staff cuts have created heavy loads for those who remain. By pooling our resources with others, we can do more than we could alone. For example, UPMC may be able to arrange media coverage of a music and wellness workshop that the PSO could not, or the PSO staff could get the cameras to a rehearsal of the song "We Share a Bond" that the Race for the Cure could not.

For the Community and Ourselves

PSO outreach activities, be they in early childhood education or music and wellness, are based on a simple premise: if we show people how to use music in meaningful ways in their daily lives, and they come to understand what a powerful and effective tool music can be, we add value to what we do in the concert hall. We are viewed as an important resource in the community. Music and wellness programs have provided opportunities to reach out to entirely new groups of people in entirely new ways.

Our activities are also important for individual musicians. When musicians have projects to which they can truly commit themselves, they move beyond the idea of a timed service-exchange program to the idea of taking whatever time is needed to complete a task well. We have the satisfaction of seeing that we personally made a difference. We have opportunities for enormous professional growth and development, and therefore, much greater job satisfaction. Some

PSO musicians who have never felt comfortable serving on committees have been very willing and capable participants in music and wellness projects.

By participating in programs such as the ones we have developed through our music and wellness program, we, as musicians, empower people, we are relevant, we satisfy important needs of our audience, we generate a great deal of good will, and we remind each other of the power of music in our daily lives. I encourage orchestra organization participants across the country to consider ways in which they might undertake similar initiatives.

Penny Anderson Brill is a violist with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and a member of the orchestra's board of directors. She has served as chair of the orchestra committee, as well as treasurer of the International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians (ICSOM). She holds a B.A. from Smith College and a M.M. from the Juilliard School.