

2015 Interaction with Takács Quartet and Composer Timo Andres: Reflections by Participants

Most of this year's Medical Arts Program events have included pre-show interactions with artists or content experts in the field. In this case however, we had participants meet with the quartet and composer after the performance for an hour long Q&A. This allowed participants to share their experience of the pieces they had heard that night. Participants also asked questions covering a broad range of topics: the musicians' teamwork, overcoming obstacles, continuing training, similarities and differences in the work of doctors and musicians, the creative process, and working with an audience compared to working with a patient. One participant said of the experience that they "came into the session skeptical about the direct connections between music and medicine, and came away with many parallels between the musical and medical worlds."

As students who are training hard to be the best in their fields, many connected to the idea of working hard in order to gain the skills needed for later. Elaborating on this thought, one



medical student said, "They drew some good parallels between the need to practice the mundane in order to achieve a performance in the future. Also, the course they described of playing everything early in their career before reaching the point now where they can pick and choose is very similar to the path in medicine." Others felt a new understanding "about the need to acquire fundamentals before moving on to practicing the type of art you ultimately wish to do." On this topic, one partaker said, "There's obviously a lot of training and preparation that goes into both fields, and the feeling of going up in front of an audience to do one's best musical performance shares some similarities with having to perform and 'be on' or at the top of one's game as a physician treating patients." Yet another resonated deeply with Andres' points about "deciding what to do with the criticism/feedback you receive, rather than accepting it all."

In addition to discussions about hard work at the beginning of a career resulting in strong fundamental skills and future freedom, there was a good discussion of the role of mentors and other ways to "navigate a field of perpetual way-finding and the efforts made to ever-improve." Another participant learned that just like doctors, musicians do not always degree on the best course of action when rehearsing. They "found the insight into how [musicians] deal with dissenting opinions about how the music should be presented very interesting."

Other participants found the most striking connection to be that between patients and audience members. One such response is this: "I think that music and medicine have more in common at the level of the recipient than that of the provider: both patients and audience-members, broadly speaking, wish to feel better and hope that what they find in a performance or treatment is such an improvement. This brings some psychological similarity to the two professions." For example,



that same participant was “captivated by the ways in which [musicians and doctors] communicate both verbally and non-verbally to deliver a message to an audience.”

Contemporary music can be challenging for some listeners, and it was challenging for some of the students. Participants found it surprising and at times physically uncomfortable, but the opportunity to engage proved valuable. One commented, “Because it was so different from what I was used to hearing, my initial reaction was one of confusion and distaste. As I continued to listen, however, I discovered that the underlying structure of the piece was quite complex and beautiful.”



In addition to the evening being an eye-opening and unexpected opportunity for participants to grasp the enormous effort that goes into being classical musicians and composers, and to consider parallels between musicians and doctors, participants shared that they “liked attending the performance with fellow medical students and residents.” One participant shared that they found in the impressive performance a “great sense of calmness and relief” after a busy and stressful week as a medical student. They enjoyed “taking the time to immerse themselves in the music.” One participant left with the understanding that their role as a doctor, in addition to becoming a “more human clinician through connection with creative arts,” was “to try to improve patients’ health so they can engage in the world more fully and experience musical works like the ones we just heard.

The Medical Arts Program is an initiative of the U-M Medical School.

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