

2015 Medical Arts Interaction with Sir Andrés Schiff: Reflections by Participants



Photos by Annick Odom

The Medical Arts Program was fortunate to have a series of events surrounding concerts by the distinguished pianist Sir Andrés Schiff, including a pre-concert lecture by U-M Musicology Professor Steven Whiting; Schiff's performance of some late sonatas by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert; a trip to meet Schiff backstage; and a private lunch with Schiff. Thoughts and reactions by the students follow.

Medical students found that the lecture played an “important role by allowing [them] to better understand the performance.” About the performance that followed, medical students and interns shared joy at this “rare moment to foray into the world of thought and expression, removed from the minutiae of basic science.” They were excited for the “chance to relax and take a break from the medical world.” Further, one participant found the music a good reminder that “human experience is vastly more expansive than growth, subsistence, pain, and death.”



Another student found that “some of the pieces communicated emotions of a day in the life of a developing physician: ups and downs and intense moments and respites.”

Another medical student said that “the soundscapes of clinical spaces are many and all-consuming. Being able to appreciate the sonic entanglements of mechanical and organic noises - whether beeping machines, telephone rings, hallway conversations, and heart sounds - is a critical component of the medical experience. This performance encouraged us to listen in a nuanced way to a collection of sonatas, all of which emerged from a specific time and place in history. Listening practices constitute the

patient-physician interaction.” Students loved “hearing the four composers together” as it helped them “contrast their styles and learn about each in the process.” In addition, they found that “having the music performed back to back to back removed extraneous distractions, and truly allowed [them] to enter into the experience.” One found the opening bars of Beethoven Op. 109 “so beautiful and delicate that I wanted to cry.”



Hearing the down-to-earth Schiff speak about his work at the lunch was inspirational, and medical students who had never met a musical

virtuoso at his level were amazed at his sincerity and humility as he spoke about his work. They found that “his use of his influence to affect change in underserved communities [...] should be a stronger message in [their] education as well.” Participants shared that they felt “we share in performance and medicine a power dynamic with those we serve, and the fact itself that we are serving.” They also “appreciated the discussion of what it meant to be a professional.”

Medical students and interns spoke after the lunch about connecting with Schiff being “a mind-opening experience that broadened [his] appreciation for life and reminded [him] that everyone, regardless of field, deals with daily struggles.”



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