Music (and Musicians) Everywhere

In addition to the therapeutic benefits music provides, music also brings joy to the maker. (Perhaps that’s why music is “played”?) Just ask a few of the MSKCC employees who consider their time well spent when they join with colleagues from MSKCC and other area medical institutions to play and sing with the Music and Medicine Orchestra and Chorus.

The Music and Medicine Initiative was founded in 2009 by Dr. David Shapiro and Dr. Richard Kogan of Weill Cornell Medical College, who noticed that a large number of medical school applicants were also serious musicians. The Music and Medicine Initiative was initially created to give students a musical outlet during their medical training. Eventually, the founders decided to open it up to the Tri-Institutional community in an effort to allow health care professionals at other institutions to continue their musical lives and, in doing so, enrich their personal and professional lives.

The Music and Medicine Orchestra and Chorus, featuring more than 90 musicians and singers, including several from MSKCC, performed Mozart’s Requiem in October 2012 at St. Bartholomew’s Church in Manhattan. This concert, the group’s first, was a fundraiser for the Weill Cornell Community Clinic, a student-run free clinic. The next concert will take place on May 22 at 7:00 PM in Caspary Auditorium at Rockefeller University.

Maureen Flaherty, Administrative Secretary in Pathology, and Dr. Kim Kramer, Associate Attending in Pediatrics, both sang soprano with the chorus last October and plan to participate in the May concert as well. “Being in the chorus was a fabulous experience,” said Dr. Kramer. “My ten-year-old daughter sang in the soprano section, too. It was so much fun!”

Ms. Flaherty agreed. “It is a joy to sing with this group,” she enthused. “And knowing that the proceeds [from the October concert] were going to a free clinic made it even more rewarding.”

In addition to the October concert, she joined the chorus last December in caroling throughout Weill Cornell. “Singing in the pediatric ward made my Christmas,” she added.

Nicola Buchanan, Program Associate in the Office of Diversity and the Office of Faculty Development, sings alto in the chorus, having discovered her voice after years of reluctant study of piano and flute. She learned about Music and Medicine in January 2012, when Dr. Laura Liberman, Director of the Office of Faculty Development, hosted the department’s annual concert for faculty. The concert featured Dr. Kogan, who is a clinical professor of psychiatry at Weill Cornell and a classically trained pianist. Dr. Kogan is also artistic director of Music and Medicine—and, to burnish his musical credentials even more, a former Harvard roommate of famed cellist Yo-Yo Ma.

“I learned at the concert that they [Music and Medicine] were inviting people from the Tri-Institutional community to join the Mozart concert that was coming up in October, and I jumped at the chance,” said Ms. Buchanan. “We started rehearsing, once a week, in July,” she recalled. “At first, it sounded pretty rough, but it came together in the end and the concert was just beautiful. I really loved it!”

Grace Tang, PhD. Radiation Physicist II, first heard about Music and Medicine when the call for musicians went out prior to the October concert. She remembers being amazed at the sight of so many talented musicians and singers from multiple institutions, including MSKCC, gathered for the auditions. “It’s very exciting for the musicians at MSKCC to have the opportunity to join together and play such fantastic music for a good cause,” she said.

Music has always been a part of Dr. Tang’s life. A classically trained pianist since the age of six, she now plays the viola for the Music and Medicine Orchestra. “I picked up the viola in my early teens when my brother started playing the violin,” Dr. Tang recalled. “I played with several city and county youth orchestras in the UK, where I’m from, as well as the University of London Symphony Orchestra.”

Dr. Tang will soon join the New York Repertory Orchestra under the direction of David Leibowitz, who conducted Music and Medicine at the concert in October.

Joining Dr. Tang in the Music and Medicine strings section is Caraline Craig, Research Study Assistant II in the MSKCC Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences. Ms. Craig plays viola, an instrument she has studied since the age of eight and, like her colleagues, is looking forward to participating in the Music and Medicine concert in May. “When the opportunity to play with the Music and

Staff members interested in scheduling a music therapy session for their patients can call 646-888-0888. Call 212-639-5978 for information about group music sessions in the Abby Rockefeller Mauzé Patient Recreation Pavilion.
Medicine Orchestra came up, I was thrilled! I picked up my violin and started practicing right away,” said Ms. Craig. “Performing at St. Bart’s with a room full of musicians of such extraordinary talent and enthusiasm was an honor.”

Dr. Alan Engelberg, Associate Attending Physician, Employee Health and Wellness Services, plays trombone in the orchestra. Dr. Engelberg grew up in Chicago, steeped in the traditions of jazz, and comes from a musical family—his brother is a trumpeter and a bandleader. “I knew I couldn’t be as good as him, so I went into medicine,” he said, his tongue-in-cheek reply when asked if he had ever considered a career as a musician, like his brother.

Dr. Engelberg never traveled far from his love of music, always finding places to rehearse and groups to play with since entering the medical field. While he was a student at Mt. Sinai School of Medicine, he belonged to the Doctor’s Orchestra of New York, rehearsing at the old Stuyvesant High School, as well as the Bronx Symphony Orchestra, and performed at various spots around New York City. Today, he plays with The Big Band Sound Jazz Orchestra, a 20-piece jazz orchestra based in Poughkeepsie, as well as Music and Medicine. When asked if there was some connection between musicians and medical practitioners that might explain the supposedly high number of musicians among health care professionals, he replied simply, “Music is fun.” Sometimes the obvious answer is the right one. ◆

Are you a musician or singer interested in performing with the Music and Medicine Orchestra and Chorus? You can learn more and join the mailing list by visiting www.weill.cornell.edu/music. And don’t miss Music and Medicine’s upcoming concert on May 22 at 7:00 PM in Caspary Auditorium at Rockefeller University.

DID YOU KNOW...

Congress has increased the monthly pre-tax commuter benefit limits for transit and parking expenses for 2013? The new limit is $245 per month for public transit, up from $125 per month in 2012! The parking limit also increased, from $240 in 2012 to $245 in 2013.

What does this mean for you? If you take a subway, bus, or commuter train (like Metro-North or Long Island Railroad) to work, you can set aside up to $245 pre-tax every month to cover your commuting expenses. And the same goes for parking expenses: If you pay to park your car as part of your commute, you can set aside the same amount, pre-tax, to cover the costs of parking. If your commute to work includes parking and transit expenses, you can take advantage of both options.

The Commuter Spending Account (CSA) Program provides several features, including:

- Easy online enrollment
- The ability to receive convenient home delivery of your monthly transit pass or voucher (MetroCard or train ticket)
- A prepaid Commuter Check Card that offers flexibility with eligible transit purchases
- Direct payment to your parking facility
- The ability to manage your account online
- A great way to save on your taxes by lowering your taxable income

Here’s an example: Jane’s annual eligible pay is $50,000 and she contributes $2,940 a year to a CSA—the maximum currently allowed. As a result, her taxable income goes down to $47,060, which saves her $960 in taxes*. *This is a sample tax savings based on 2013 rates for a single taxpayer with no dependents. Actual savings will vary based on your individual tax situation. Please consult a tax professional for more information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jane’s Savings Example</th>
<th>With CSA</th>
<th>Without CSA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annual Pay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-tax contribution to Commuter Spending Account (CSA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taxable income</td>
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<td>After-tax dollars spent on eligible expenses</td>
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<td>Real spendable income</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tax savings with a CSA</td>
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A few other points to keep in mind:

- Pre-tax transit and/or parking deductions are taken from the first paycheck of each month. You may want to plan ahead initially to prepare for that monthly deduction.
- Like other spending accounts, there is a “use it or lose it” rule under the IRS—while you can carry your CSA balances over from year to year, there are no refunds for unused balances if you lose your eligibility for the program (by retiring, or otherwise separating from MSKCC).

ADP is the vendor that manages the CSA for MSKCC employees. You can enroll in the CSA program at any time by going to myspendingaccount.adp.com. Or, log on to CONNECT/Self Service/Benefits/Commuter Spending Account, and click on the ADP website link.

Questions about Commuter Spending Accounts? Please call ADP at 800-301-7558 or HR Services at 646-227-3456.