

A Notable Anniversary: Aspen X

Readers encountering the above title may well murmur, "Oh, no! Not another anniversary harangue!" I acknowledge my weakness for using these occasions to assess, to criticize, and whenever appropriate to celebrate. In youth it is both easy and relatively painless to look back, to examine the path that one has taken and at the same time to set the future course. When I was a child, "half birthdays" were celebrated in my family in just such a fashion, although at my current age I would happily forgo even the annual ones. However, in the likelihood that performing arts medicine will be immortal, there should be no hesitation to cogitate its future.

Ten years ago this summer I approached Gordon Hardy, then Dean and President of the Aspen Music School and Festival, proposing that a conference be held the next summer in Aspen that would bring together physicians and musicians to discuss medical problems of musicians. No different from most others in medicine and music, I don't think Gordon had given much thought to the medical hazards of practice and performance of music. However, as a man with a singular commitment to the education and welfare of music students, he readily agreed to host the conference. And "the rest is history."

This first conference in 1983 attracted 60 believers—physicians, other health practitioners, artists, and teachers—to 4 days of meetings. The time was divided among presentation of clinical and scientific papers, concerts, and seminars with musicians. The high points were a talk by Gary Graffman—himself a world-famous music casualty—and the first of the annual, do-it-yourself, orchestral sight-reading sessions (regrettably this orchestral ses-

sion has been deleted from Aspen X). The 1983 conference was enthusiastically received and concluded with a number of offers to join forces in future efforts. Thus was born the alliance between the Aspen Music School and Festival (now headed by another supportive and visionary man, Robert Harth) and the Cleveland Clinic. There also is where Richard Lederman, M.D., Ph.D. and I joined together in what has been from my point of view, a notably successful working relationship.

The Performing Arts Medical Association (PAMA) was founded in Aspen in 1989 and the annual general meeting of the PAMA membership now takes place during the weekend of the meeting. The role of PAMA in planning and executing the Aspen meeting represents important growth for PAMA, and it is planned that as this fledgling organization matures it will gradually assume full responsibility for the conference.

There have been many changes since 1983 when the first conference was held at Paepcke Auditorium, located conveniently just behind the Music Tent. By necessity rather than choice, we have bounced around to several locations, including a 1-year stint at Snowmass, which proved both geographically and spiritually too distant from the musical action. This summer will be the third successive meeting held in the elegant and stimulating setting of the Wheeler Opera House, thanks to Robert Harth's efforts and to the willingness of the school's Opera Department to deal with the inconveniences inherent in this arrangement. One of the initial motivations for holding the meeting in Aspen continues to be a critical ingredient for the success of these meetings, that is, the interaction both scheduled and spontaneous between conference

attendees and Aspen artists (now including dancers as well as musicians, which provides unequalled opportunities for dialogue and learning.

The inclusion of dancers in the conference has been a natural occurrence, given the increasing presence of Dance Aspen. This has broadened the audience at the conference but has highlighted the common ground, as well as areas of difference, in the medical problems of musicians and dancers.

Other changes in the composition of the audience over the past decade are its doubling in size; however, it continues to be a very heterogeneous group. As a reflection of the growing activity in performing arts medicine, the participants have become more sophisticated, which is obvious during question-and-answer periods. The majority in the audience still consists of physicians, but they represent a potpourri of specialists including orthopedic surgeons, neurologists, psychiatrists, physiatrists, general practitioners, and internists, and "others." The audience as a whole comes from all parts of the United States, as well as from Canada, Australia, Great Britain, Korea, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Israel, and other countries far and wide.

This 10th Anniversary review would be incomplete if we failed to acknowledge another salutary reflection of the growth of performing arts medicine and of the Aspen Symposium: the tremendous increase in professional meetings on related subjects that are now being held, which target many different audiences. It is reasonable (and I hope not presumptuous) to assume that the success and endurance of the pioneer Aspen meeting has been an influential factor in this heightened interest and

in the overall development of performing arts medicine.

By far the most important change that has taken place in the Aspen meeting is in the quality and quantity of the papers presented—those by invited faculty and especially those selected from submitted abstracts. The competition in this last category has grown notably stiffer year by year. An innovation introduced by PAMA in 1991 to stimulate interest in the field among physicians in training is the Annual Young Investigator's Award. A central part of the prize, for which funds are provided, is an invitation to Aspen to present the winning paper.

In planning the themes and topics of these 10 meetings, certain subjects have been addressed and readdressed in response to audience demand, prominent among which have been performance anxiety and overuse syndromes. There is continued and grow-

ing interest in discussions of treatment methods and for hands-on demonstrations. Other topics have come and gone with one exposure, being judged too esoteric, unfocused, or just plain boring. Some of the efforts to expand the horizon of the conference have "bombed," whereas others (e.g., in 1991 Dr. Langendorf's learned review of absolute pitch, and the percussion demonstration by Jennifer Judkins) have proved, sometimes unpredictably, highly successful. In addition to attempting to satisfy the audience with its oft-mentioned varied backgrounds, planning of the conference is constrained by ever-increasing budgetary limitations. A great deal of thought and some anguish have gone into putting together the first 10 Aspen Symposia, with quality always the primary goal. As the planning comes to involve more people and points of view, one hopes the quality of the meetings will

improve as will their appeal to even larger audiences.

I would like to close by noting what I believe to be a very special feature of the Aspen meetings. Starting with their inception in 1983, there has been an associated pervasive degree of enthusiasm and collegial spirit among the participants, such that there is a palpable let-down when the meetings come to an end on Sunday. Meeting and learning come naturally in an environment of beauty, clean air, and abundant artistic and recreational opportunities. Surprisingly, absenteeism, which is rampant at many medical meetings, is minimal in spite of the lure of the great outdoors. Central to the celebration of the anniversary from July 28 to August 1, 1992 must be the recognition of how fortunate we have been to be in the right place at the right time—in Aspen.

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