Alice G. Brandfonbrener, MD—A Personal Remembrance

Alice Brandfonbrener died peacefully at home on May 31, 2014, after a protracted illness. For all of us involved in performing arts medicine, she was the inspiration and guiding spirit. She will be missed.

Alice was born in New York City in 1931, graduating from Wellesley College in 1952 and subsequently from the Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons in 1957. Following a rotating internship at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York, she completed a medical residency at Northwestern University Medical Center. Her marriage in 1956 to Martin Brandfonbrener, a rising star in academic cardiology, produced four children and 12 grandchildren. Two of her children are professional musicians, one an attorney, and one an architect.

Virtually her entire subsequent career was devoted to student healthcare, starting at the University of New Mexico in 1964, where Martin’s early academic career took her, and then, in 1968, back to Chicago and Northwestern University. Her involvement in what has come to be known as performing arts medicine started early. She was the Director of the Health Service at the National Music Camp in Interlochen, Michigan, during the summers of 1971 to 1977 and then assumed the same role at the Aspen Music Festival and School from 1978 through 1985. In 1983, she became the outpatient director of the Northwestern University Student Health Service in Evanston, Illinois, and in 1985 took on that position at the Chicago campus of Northwestern University.

In 1985, she established one of the first performing arts medicine clinics, the Medical Program for Performing Artists, at Northwestern Memorial Hospital, and in 1990 she moved that very successful and innovative operation to the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, also, of course, a part of Northwestern University Medical Center. During her 15 years of active practice in that position, she saw thousands of musicians, from young students to world-renowned professionals, mentored and trained dozens of health care students and professionals, and received visitors from all over the world who were interested in seeing how a thriving performing arts medicine clinic could be established and maintained.

I first met Alice on July 28, 1983. In March of that year, a flyer had come in the mail announcing “A Conference on the Medical Problems of Musicians” to be held in Aspen, Colorado. I knew there were a few physicians seeing musician patients, including the group at Massachusetts General Hospital, where famed pianists Gary Graffman and Leon Fleisher had been evaluated and treated. But were there enough doctors involved in this (at that time) arcane field to support a medical meeting? I had begun seeing musicians with hand and other problems about 5 years earlier and jumped at the chance to meet others with similar interests. At the Cleveland Clinic, we had a number of physicians and a couple of therapists who were becoming involved in seeing instrumental musicians and had a group already active in developing what was being called dance medicine. “Music Medicine” wasn’t yet on the map. Alice had singlehandedly organized this conference, had somehow managed to convince the Music Associates of Aspen and the Aspen Music Festival and School, as well as the Aspen Valley Hospital, that this was a project worthy enough to underwrite, and had assembled a remarkable faculty that included music luminaries such as Harold C. Schonberg, chief music critic of the New York Times, illustrious Aspen pedagogues including Dorothy DeLay and Jan DeGaetani, and several members of the Massachusetts General group.

By the end of that landmark conference, Alice was pretty sure that, while supportive of the concept and her efforts, the Aspen Music Festival was not prepared to finance a second conference. We talked briefly about the possibility that I might be able to engage interest at the Cleveland Clinic in at least co-sponsoring such a symposium and, early that fall, a meeting was set up with Alice, a representative of the Music Associates of Aspen, a member of our Continuing Education Department, and myself. Alice charmed the participants enough to agree to hold the 2nd Annual Symposium on the Medical Problems of Musicians, in Aspen, the following summer, with the financial and educational resources of our institution. Thus began a collaboration that represented one of the most memorable and rewarding experiences of my professional career. Alice and I co-directed the Symposium, renamed in 1986 to include problems of dancers as well as musicians, from 1985 through 1994, jointly deciding on the specific topics and faculty, gradually expanding the scope, and watching the excitement generated at each subsequent symposium. Her contacts in the music world, her charisma, and her enthusiasm remained the driving force in pro-

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pelling the symposium and the burgeoning field of interest in the special health issues related to artistic performance.

Each of the ensuing summers, a small group would meet at the spectacular Aspen home of Alice’s college roommate, initially to discuss the possibility and then the reality of forming an organization dedicated to the delivery of healthcare to performing artists, education of professionals wishing to become involved in this field, and promoting research in the as-yet (and to some extent still) unexplained and unexplored problems of the performer. Her insistence on rejecting the unnecessarily narrow term “music medicine” and her unwillingness to accept the excessively vague designation “arts medicine” prevailed, culminating in the birth of the Performing Arts Medicine Association in 1989, with Alice appropriately being named its first president, by acclamation. Those meetings, of course, also led to the establishment of the journal *Medical Problems of Performing Artists*, launched in 1986, under the editorial direction of (who else but?) Alice herself. This quickly became, and has remained, the premier organ for reporting the ever-increasing clinical and research knowledge in the field.

Our relationship flourished over the ensuing 20 years, despite being able to spend all too few days per year together. There were numerous phone calls, some quite lengthy (generally not my nature), and countless emails (hopefully forever lost in cyberspace), discussing and sometimes debating politics, family (including dogs, children, grandchildren, and Martin’s tragic illness and death), various patients (including Alice, herself), and performing arts medicine—the meetings, the performing arts medicine textbook we coedited with Bob Sataloff, and the many people involved.

To say that Alice was the inspiration for the development of performing arts medicine and for the involvement of so many of us in the field is a gross understatement. Her intelligent guidance and leadership, her imagination and innovative expertise, and her intuitive understanding of what was needed and what would and wouldn’t work were critical to the success of the movement. Her insistence on accuracy and honesty in the field was also critical. She detested arrogance and sloppiness of thought or action. There was no place for it in the Symposium, in the Journal, or in the practice of medicine. Her voice, to be sure, has been silenced, but her influence lives on.

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