



New York

A member of the Toomai String Quartet with a young patient at Jacobi Medical Center in the Bronx, New York City, during one of Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute's Musical Connections programs, October 2009.



Chicago Symphony Orchestra Music Director Riccardo Muti (center) leads a free open rehearsal of the Festival Orchestra, comprising members of Mexico's Carlos Chávez Youth Orchestra and young musicians from the Chicago area, as part of the Second Biennial Chicago Youth in Music Festival, May 2011.

Chicago



Seattle

Seattle Mayor Mike McGinn welcomes Music Director Ludovic Morlot and the Seattle Symphony to City Hall for a free Community Concert on January 25, 2011. The Seattle Symphony performed additional free concerts in January at the Highline Performing Arts Center and Roosevelt High School.

Seattle Symphony

# MUSIC Cities of

by Joseph Carman

# Songs of Healing

**Carnegie Hall's Musical Connections program is bringing music into the lives of New Yorkers in hospitals, prisons, homeless shelters, and senior-care facilities.**

**T**his is a scary song," announces Billy, a plucky fifteen-year-old participating along with seven other HIV-infected youths in a songwriting workshop at Jacobi Medical Center in the Bronx section of New York City. With composer Thomas Cabaniss punctuating his efforts in B-flat minor at the keyboard, Billy sing-speaks, "If you jump, you know you're scared/Monsters underneath the bed!" In another part of the medical center's auditorium, Ashley (names have been changed to protect participants' identities), a statuesque sixteen-year-old with stylish blue bracelets and a mouthful of braces, works with bass guitarist Matt Aronoff in revising the lyrics for her contemplative song "I Remember." The thirteen-week workshop that is bringing out Billy's and Ashley's songwriting talents was inaugurated in 2011; along with several other musical projects taking place at Jacobi Medical Center, it is part of Musical Connections, a two-year-old program of Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute that brings live musical experiences to people in need throughout New York City.

Through concerts within Jacobi Medical Center—in the Rotunda, the infusion room of the oncology department, or through workshops for pregnant teens to create lullabies for their unborn babies—Musical Connections has evolved from a community-engagement

program into a tool for healing through music. "We're exploring the synergy between music and medicine," says Barbara DeIorio, Jacobi's public relations director. "Where do these seemingly disparate entities meet? How do they support one another? We're sort of learning what it's all about as we go along. It's a lot more powerful than any of us could have imagined."

During the 2011-12 season, Musical Connections presented 182 concerts in 34 locations, conducted 11 music workshops, and reached more than 8,000 people in healthcare and other facilities. The organization serves incarceration centers such as Sing Sing Correctional Facility and Crossroads Juvenile Justice Facility; homeless shelters; and senior-service organizations. Out of its \$70 million annual budget, Carnegie Hall spends around \$10 million each year on education and community activities.

Musical Connections is one of a number of educational and service programs funded by Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute (WMI), which was endowed in 2003. Be-



Bridget Kibbey performs at Sea View Rehab and Hospital in Staten Island, New York City, during one of Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute's Musical Connections events, March 2011.

NEW YORK

Chris Lee

# Freedom of Expression

**LEAH HOLLINGSWORTH, associate of community programs at Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute, reports on a visit to Sing Sing Correctional Facility, where music is changing lives.**

When I first met Rob, I was scared. He's a man about my age, with well-kept dreads held neatly back in a rubber band, honest eyes, a genuine smile, and a firm but warm handshake. He wears a lot of green. Rob is an inmate at Sing Sing.

Rob plays the guitar, and he's been practicing a lot lately. He plays pretty well, but he's a bit self-conscious—he hasn't had much in the way of music lessons. But through Carnegie Hall's Musical Connections program, Rob has written a string quintet in three different clefs, for five instruments that he had never heard play together.

Daniel Levy, a teaching artist and composer working in the Musical Connections program, has gone to Sing Sing every few weeks since October 2010, leading a guitar workshop for nine inmates, most of whom have taught themselves to play since coming to the facility. Levy says he thought he would just teach beginning guitar lessons to the men, but they quickly surpassed his expectations. During the sessions, inmates worked on improvisation and note-reading, playing everything from *Stand by Me* to Pachelbel's Canon. The men heard that a professional string quintet was

coming to Sing Sing in January and asked how to write string quintets. Short for time, Levy could only provide a "one-sheet" of how to arrange music for strings. Two weeks later, they came to him with completed pieces—"real scores," Levy says. He helped them edit their work; he coached and inspired them; he helped boost confidence—but mostly he taught them to work on their own.

The quintets by Rob and several other inmates were performed one Friday in January 2011, before 76 other inmates and about ten Sing Sing staff. At the first and only rehearsal for the concert, with the Toomai String Quintet, the first piece up was by Tim, an older inmate. The first violin part was plaintive and yearning, beginning as a caressing, modest phrase and blossoming into rich, heartfelt desire, with inner voices filling out the sound. When I looked over at Tim, he was slowly shaking his head with incredulity. "Holy shit," he said, wiping his eyes. "I had no idea it sounded like that. Well," he stammered, "it's a love song." The rehearsal continued, the air thick with feeling. Manuel Bagorro, my colleague at Carnegie and project manager of the Musical Connections program, whispered, "If we ever doubt what we do, or why we

do it, let's remind each other of this moment."

Next was Rob's piece. The violin part was exquisite, the accompaniment varied, interesting, engaging—an aggressive motif, punctuated by short bursts of sixteenth-note scales, plus a fanciful theme, a melody that is simple but not uncomplicated. It's an amazing piece. "I knew these guys were special, how hard they work," said Olga Marchese, head of school programming at Sing Sing. "I knew what they could do."

Three other inmates—Denis, Isaias, and Mo—wrote a piece called *Rise of the Turtles*. I asked about the title. "Well," said Mo, "Turtles are green. They live in shells. And sometimes they come out of those shells. And sometimes, they win the race." He paused. "Sometimes they can win the race."

The concert that night was over two hours long. The concentration in the room was unlike any that I've experienced. The inmates leaned toward the musicians, jumped to their feet in gratitude and joy at the end of each set. Their faces shone. When asked to clap the clavé rhythm, they all joined in, imitating the rhythm precisely. When taught a Spanish *coro* to sing, they filled the chapel with



Musical Connections at Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute: An inmate (in green) from Sing Sing Correctional Facility performs with Chris Washburne and the S.Y.O.T.O.S. Band at Sing Sing, February 2010.

enthusiasm and spirit. Heads bobbed and feet tapped. Some men closed their eyes.

These men are starved, their imaginations parched. They exist on a meager diet of opportunities, with scarce chances to create anything of their own. And they are starving for freedom, for the freedom to make their own choices, to explore their own voices.

We've all heard that overused truism about music setting people free. At Sing Sing, it does. Music is a key to freedom for these green-clad prisoners, these men who are starving for a way to create, to express, to escape their circumstances. And this program—and that Friday-night concert—can feed the hunger of these men who are so talented and so motivated, so diligent and also so desperate. Music can be their voice; opportunities like this, their food.

fore then, the organization had concentrated its engagement activities on comprehensive school-based programs. With the endowment, WMI strategically planned its growth to include a variety of constituents. "Serving those in acute need in non-traditional community settings was a priority that we hadn't tackled yet," says WMI Director Sarah Johnson. "Through Musical Connections we provide high-quality musical experiences for those people, ranging from individual interactive performances to

multi-week and multi-month workshops." At Jacobi, she says, the staff started to propose larger ideas, like what it would mean to have a "musical hospital."

Cabaniss says that the songwriting workshop for HIV-infected adolescents, which he developed in collaboration with the Jacobi staff, starts as "a blank slate. Some of the kids come in with journals. But it takes a few weeks for them to feel enough trust to tell you what they've been writing. We play games, do exercises, fill in the blanks,

and engage in imaginative writing work to get that pump primed." When the skeletal frame of the lyrics emerges, Cabaniss—who worked as education director for the New York Philharmonic before becoming a teaching artist for Musical Connections—and his staff help the participants flesh out rhythms, melodies, and harmonies for the song. The workshop culminates in a public performance at Jacobi, where the young songwriters hear their compositions sung and played by the professional fusion

ensemble Nos Novo, which blends Celtic and Brazilian sounds with jazz and features vibraphonist/percussionist James Shipp and singer Jo Lawry, who also plays melodica and fiddle. Last year there were about 250 in the audience.

The workshop's participants, who come to Jacobi for healthcare and social-work services, have benefited from their creative exploration. Dr. Kendra Haluska, a staff psychologist at the center, says she has noticed dramatic changes in their expressiveness and willingness to open up. "I've seen their confidence levels spike," she says. "We're also seeing some of the teenagers taking their medications more readily, and they're coming more regularly to the hospital to see their doctors. Just keeping in contact with us helps their care."

Ashley came to the songwriting workshop on the advice of her social worker. She had attended poetry slams before, but this was different. "I knew I could write a poem, but I never knew I could transform it into a song," she says. Soft-spoken Sidney, 21, wrote a song called "Dance and Sing" about standing up for himself. "The workshop is very intimate," he says. "Being here is very therapeutic. I don't have to feel any pressure. I think it made me more confident in myself, my voice and my writing."

Cabaniss was struck by the level of creativity of the participants, who have never known a life without HIV. "I've certainly been surprised by the depth and the honesty and the unvarnished quality of some of the lyrics," he says. The results also made him rethink the creative process: "As trained musicians, we see all the time that it's a very specialized art form. It takes chops. But it's easy to get divorced from the creative capacities of those who don't travel in those circles. This project brings you back into contact with real life."

Jacobi, whose "musical hospital" model DeIorio describes as singular in the U.S., has started some of its own research on the effects of music to mitigate pain and anxiety, using Carnegie Hall musicians and Jacobi clinicians. Musical Connections has also forged stronger relationships between

**Musical Connections has evolved from a community-engagement program into a tool for healing through music.**



Claire Bryant performs with a participant in a concert at the AHRC social-services organization during one of Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute's Musical Connections programs, February 2011.

the medical center and other entities within the community, such as senior centers and developmental agencies. Some of the Jacobi concerts draw 300 listeners, including patients, staff, and members of the local community.

Clive Gillinson, Carnegie Hall's executive and artistic director since 2005, believes that bringing great music to the largest possible audience is a core value of his organization. But how does Musical Connections relate to the musical standards of Carnegie Hall, a regular presenter of the Berlin Philharmonic and other titans? "Often arts education work can begin to feel like it's watering

down the art form," says Cabaniss. "What's interesting is we are able to get to things that are very direct, real, and meaningful, and have serious content without sacrificing the artistic standards that Carnegie Hall represents. In the end I want a concert that sounds really good. I also think it's equally important that we honor and acknowledge the experience of others and find a way to express it that is honest. I think that's what all great art strives to do." **S**

JOSEPH CARMAN is a senior advising editor for *Dance* magazine and writes about the performing arts.



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