

Musicians on-call: Star-studded concert at Methodist sounds a new note in musical therapy

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BY JOEL LUKS

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Houstonians have become accustomed to finding art in unexpected spaces. Whether that's a whimsical [Joan Miró](#) downtown, a lit [Jaume Plensa](#) along Buffalo Bayou or the frisky [Beer Can House](#) amid residential Rice Military, the hodgepodge scenery is indicative of the city's value system.

But few would guess that a visual and performing arts program thrives in the medical center — beyond the traditional sense.

The [Center for Performing Arts Medicine](#) (CPAM) at Methodist Hospital is where injured instrumentalists, singers, actors and dancers flock to get help from experts — in otolaryngology, voice disorders, orthopedics, ophthalmology, kidney disease, neurology, neurosurgery, psychiatry and urology and with physiological issues and emotional concerns.

But moreover, Methodist is deliberately morphing into a tuneful hub where musicians serve as caretakers.

"Houston has two very strong assets at work here," Todd Frazier, program director, explained. "A vibrant arts community and the largest medical network in the world. As such, we can be a forward-thinking institution to garner more information on the effectiveness of music therapy."

The initiative is part of Frazier's strategic vision, and one big step took place Monday at noon with another Miró.

The [Miró Quartet](#) donated its time to perform a free lunchtime concert, hosted by [Texas Voice Center](#) director and CPAM chairman Dr. [Richard Stasney](#), in the Crain Garden at Methodist.

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That such a notable ensemble made a stop at Methodist in the middle of a hectic touring season is big news — it's one of the highest profile groups appearing in CPAM's concert lineup.

That it was the first time a concert was recorded for rebroadcast to in-house patient rooms is significant.

The Miró is the faculty quartet-in-residence at the University of Texas at Austin's [Sarah and Ernest Butler School of Music](#). The program was dedicated to Ginger and Jack Blanton for their support of Texas culture, and included selections from Ludwig van Beethoven's *String Quartet in E Minor, Opus 59, No. 2* and *String Quartet in C Major, Opus 59, No. 3*, which the quartet plans to record in May through the university's label, Longhorn Music.

The ensemble — which played on Stradivarius, Bergonzi, Casini and Tononi instruments of the 17th and 18th century, on loan specifically for the recording project — has been called "tirelessly energetic" by [San Francisco Classical Voice](#), "committed" and "captivating" by [Gramophone](#) and as "full-blooded, freely rhapsodic" by [The Washington Post](#).

The musicians were attracted by CPAM's innovative initiatives, Frazier says. While he served as the executive director of [Young Audiences of Houston](#), Frazier worked tirelessly to integrate arts into classrooms. In his new fulltime position as a health-care-cum-arts administrator, Frazier is swiftly moving the arts-integrated model into the hospital arena.

"For us, it wasn't a question of why, it was a question of when," [William A. Fedkenheuer](#), Miró violinist, told CultureMap. "The medical community is



Photo by Joel Luks

The Miró Quartet performed a free program as part of Methodist Hospital's Center for Performing Arts Medicine concert lineup.



Few would guess that a visual and performing arts program thrives in the medical center. Pictured here is the Texas Medical Center Orchestra.



CPAM's program director Todd Frazier wants the center to be a hub for the study of how the arts support healing.

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actively engaged in the arts — and that is part of the Texas experience."

Following the concert, officials from UT, CPAM and the quartet met to discuss the beginning of an on-going partnership, and the musicians are eager to partake in that effort.

"None of us in the quartet are born here," Fedkenheuer said. "Although Texas feels like our home now."

It didn't take a large cash investment to amass the resources required to record and televise performances internally — the center had access to most of the equipment. But CPAM is on a quest to raise funds to acquire technology for online streaming and to transmit content to some of its national and international partners.

Part of the center's future plan includes having a troupe of on-call musicians onsite ready to lend a hand where hospital staff deems helpful for patient wellness and recovery. That's aligned with the Methodist Experience department, which strives to nurture a positive environment for patients and workers by sponsoring visual art exhibits, conferences and workshops.

"Music, and the arts in general, can work with the medical community to establish ways it can support the treatment and enhance the healing environment for patients, their friends and families," Frazier added.

For the 200 listeners in the audience, which included administrators, medical practitioners, world-renowned surgeons, patients in wheelchairs with intravenous infusion apparatuses, families, friends and children — and the hundreds passing by — it was a much needed respite from the frenzied hospital.

Even in the quietest and most sensitive of passages, concert goes tuned attentively to the Miró's thoughtful colors and musical shapes. For an otherwise fast-paced environment, the sun-kissed atrium was as noiseless as it could be.

Walkers stopped in mid step to listen — and breathe.

ART THAT HEALS

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