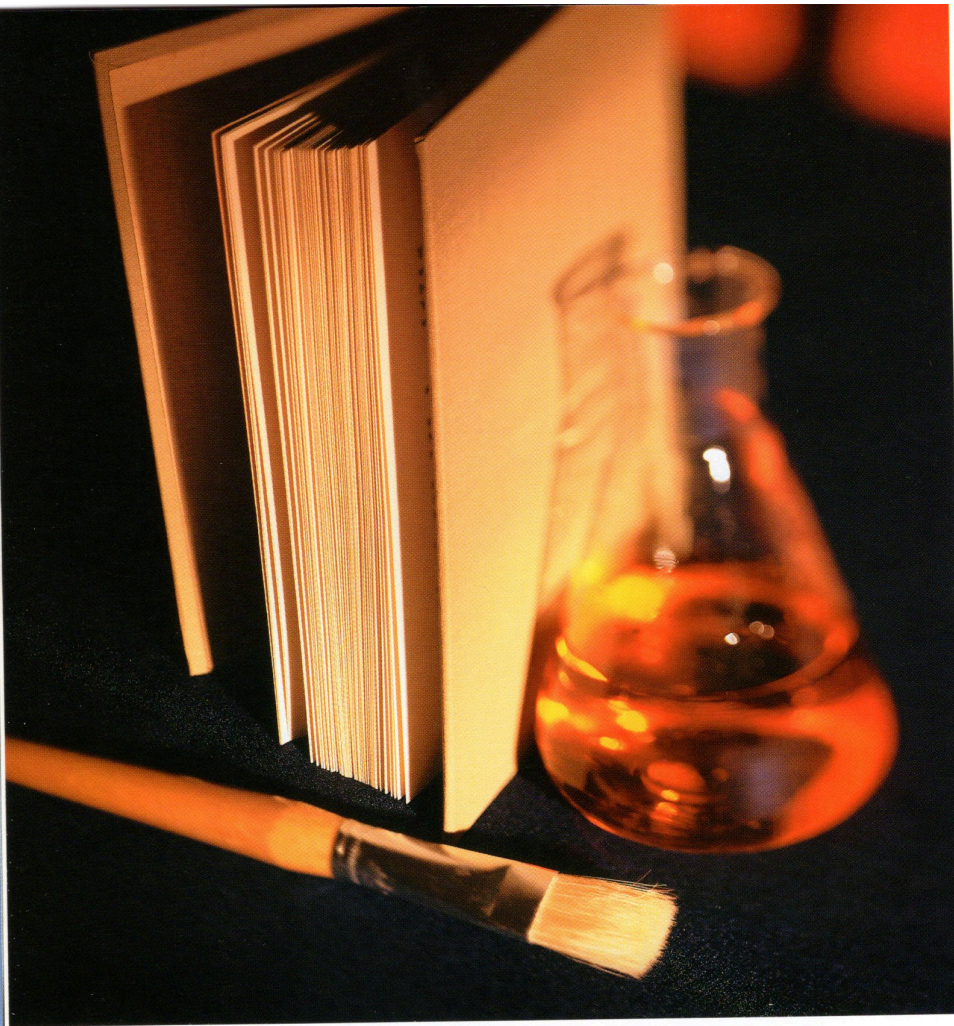


Art and medicine share an important feature—both take shape around life. At Tulane, it's easy to discern another commonality between the two disciplines—the practitioners. In the shards of time left unconsumed by the study and practice of medicine, **many in the Tulane medical community are transformed into painters and potters, musicians and singers, poets and culinary artists.** Why so many in the most demanding of professions are drawn to the creative life is an existential question that is not easily answered. While their motivations may vary, many of these multi-talented individuals have discovered the potential of art and creativity to serve as a balance and complement to medicine. *by Susan Sarver, Photography by Glade Bilby II*

The Medicine of Art





Following a Creative Path

For Kirk Bonner, MD (M'98), a dancer, watercolor artist, and world class sculptor, art has been a means of bringing order out of chaos. Growing up on a sailboat, tweaking out a living as a ballet dancer, acknowledging his functional illiteracy at age 28, and cutting a swath through formal education that has taken him into a medicine/family practice residency, Bonner has experienced more than enough chaos to test the aesthetic power of art. If anything, the rough and unconventional terrain that led Bonner to medicine has only fueled his faith in art's capacity to make sense of things.

With the address of his childhood home shifting between the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico, Bonner felt a need for stability. He found it in art. "I just liked to draw as a way to escape, to make something nice, to organize things, and to be productive. I would carve, not out of boredom, but out of curiosity."

Bonner later discovered dance and the sense of harmony that comes from moving to music on a stage. Achieving Bonner's level of artistic success demands discipline and drive, attributes that eventually pushed him rapidly through the tracts of formal education he had missed. "I went crazy with education," he recalls.

Even through medical school, Bonner continued to pursue his creative interests. "Right off the bat, I decided I wasn't going to let medical school change me at all," he says. By completely supplanting one's artistry, Bonner feels, "You're destroying your balance. If you're lopsided, if you've just brought the tautology of medicine and memorized the information, that's what you have to apply." He believes the ability to observe, and the discipline and focus learned through art are useful in medical practice.

Like Bonner, Chancellor John C. LaRosa trekked the creative path enroute to medical school. It all began when his father's band

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lost its pianist to a fractured hip, and 15-year-old LaRosa was called in as a last-minute replacement. His considerable talent earned LaRosa a position in the quartet, and in the years that followed, the young piano man pounded out a lively repertoire of jazz, blues, and Broadway tunes to a road house crowd several nights a week.

"Music means a lot to me," says LaRosa. Whether by the rush of performing or a momentary transcendence upon hearing a favorite aria, LaRosa admits that he is deeply moved by music. "It's just an absolute total involvement," he says. That immersion, while personally satisfying, often involves those closest to him. "Music has always been about family," LaRosa says. "When my wife and I were married, the first piece of furniture we bought was a piano," he laughs. Judith LaRosa, PhD, community health sciences department chair, is a classically trained soprano. LaRosa's children, an attorney son and a physician daughter, are accomplished musicians as well.

"When my two children were in high school, we had a family band called 'The Generation Gap.'"

LaRosa is not surprised by the prevalence of physicians who enjoy artistic endeavors. "Many people in science are musical," he says. However, he admits it's tough to find the time to practice music. LaRosa tries to play a couple of hours every Sunday. "The piano is a wonderful way to relax," he says. "It's a way to get away from the stresses and strains of work. It's getting into another part of my head that is not this [intense work] at all."

Nurturing the Right Brain

"I think that physicians ought to be involved in the arts or at least in something that allows them to use another part of their personality or brain," says Paul Rodenhauser, MD, assistant dean for academic and counseling services. Rodenhauser enjoys writing—poetry, plays and fiction. He began writing in 1994 after a particularly stressful trip to China.

"I just had to write," he recalls. What began as a cathartic exercise ended a year and a half later with four novellas, hand written on a tablet. One of those novellas is now scheduled for publication. Late last summer his one-act play, "Mr. Lafayette's Rocking Chair," was staged for a repeat performance.

Rodenhauser, who has written on the subject of creativity and medicine, feels that most people believe that creativity is an important aspect of mental health; yet, "our culture, especially for people who end up in professions or in medical school probably have to put all that aside and just go with the left brain compulsive stuff," he says. Rodenhauser feels that just getting to medical school demands an exceptional amount of drive and focus on grades. "I think we actually recruit for compulsive people and not necessarily artistic people," he says.

Rodenhauser's personal involvement in both art and medicine sparked his interest in physicians who are artists. He is particularly concerned with helping students recover and preserve their creative talents while in medical school. He takes a personal interest in the students' creative work and coordinates a TUMC program intended to promote artistic endeavors among medical students. Established as the Peterman-Prosser Professorship, the program involves faculty in the arts in workshops to help medical students develop or maintain an appreciation for the creative arts.

The endowed professorship was created with a gift from Charles S. Prosser, Jr. (M'44) and his wife, Louise Peterman Prosser (N'44), and a matching grant from the Louisiana Board of Regents. The Prossers hope to fill a void that they feel exists in medical school and in medicine. Prosser, a physician and a writer, says, "We feel that medical schools train people, but they don't educate them." Student planners recently defined primary focus areas and voted on a name for the program—Students Against Right Brain Atrophy (SARBA). In response to that, Prosser hopes to see a "metastasis" of artistic interests among medical students.

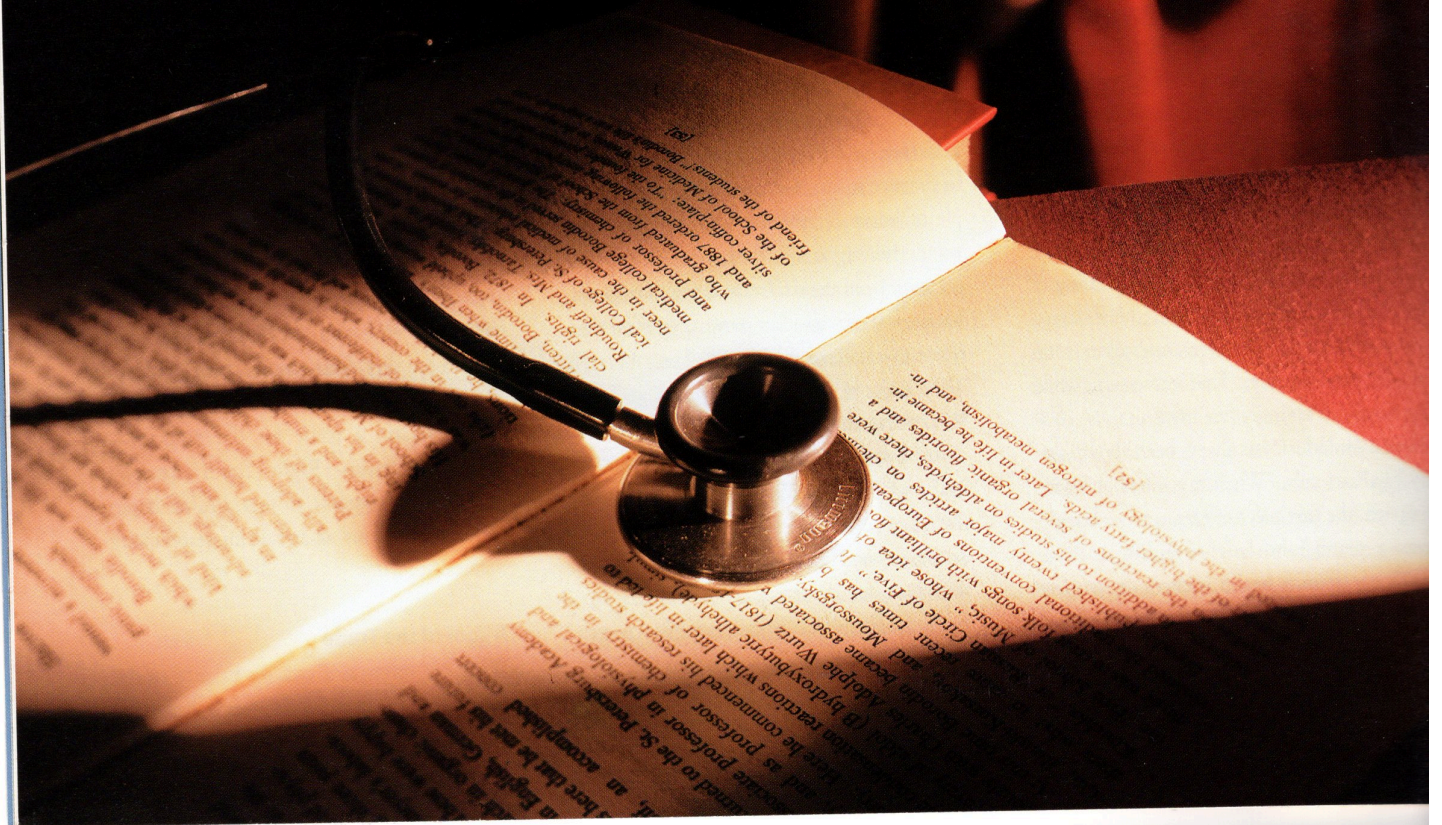
A Tool of the Trade

While art serves as a creative balance to the demands of medicine, it also may enhance the

If you want to work

on your **Life,**

work on your **Art.**



study, practice, and teaching of medicine. During medical school, Bonner sketched his way through anatomy class and often drew details of various pathologies. "I have drawn things for myself just because I have never seen them the way that I wanted to see them," he says.

Rodenhauser feels that involvement in art has augmented his teaching. "I often use cartoons to teach personality disorders or movie clips to portray psychopathology." Rodenhauser teaches a literature and medicine elective that is offered to first-year medical students. Students read assigned novels, then gather at Rodenhauser's home in the evening to discuss each work from both an artistic and a medical perspective. He finds that fiction can provide a framework in which to explore the physician's role and the physician-patient relationship.

Artist and fourth-year medical student Bob Kirkcaldy, who plans to pursue a combined residency in psychiatry and internal medicine, sees art as directly applicable to medical practice. "Art can help patients come to terms with illnesses, treatments, the dying process, and the process of adjusting to life without disease," he says. [Creative endeavors] "get past the rational mind and access dormant or unspoken emotions and thoughts." He feels this process is both spiritual and life-affirming and that it promotes healing.

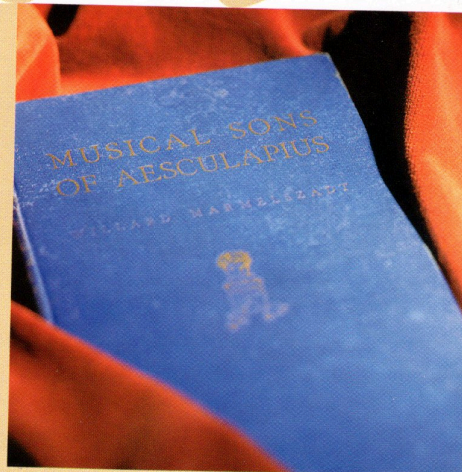
With funding provided by the Peterman-Prosser Professorship, this past summer, Kirkcaldy attended an intensive program in poetry therapy in Washington, D.C., in order to learn how to use poetry writing therapeutically in clinical practice. According to Kirkcaldy, "For some people, creating is a necessity, as much as the need for water, acceptance, and love. I think the need to give voice to the struggles of healing is also a necessity, and this can be done effectively and profoundly through the arts."

While the commercial value of art is generally derived from the product, it seems that a distinct therapeutic value can be found in the process. The creative process might well be the right medicine for patients and physicians alike.

In his 1998 Ivy Day speech, Rodenhauser challenged the class of graduates to discover a creative means to enrich their lives through the next stage of their education. Putting a spin on physician/writer Anton Chekhov's assertion that those who wish to work on their art should work on their life, Rodenhauser suggested that the reverse might also be true. "If you want to work on your life," he said, "work on your art." There are many in the medical community who already have found that to be an effective prescription.

art

Jazz aficionado William Marmelzat, MD (A&S '39, M '44) fed his musical interests in medical school by spending his lunch hours taking music classes at Newcomb College. He became so intrigued by the connection between music and medicine that, as a side project to studying medicine, he conducted research on the subject that led to his



writing *The Musical Sons of Aesculapius*. The book, titled after Greek mythology's god of medicine, traces the careers of some famous and not-so-famous physicians who were musicians.

Writing the book was an artistic endeavor in itself, Marmelzat recalls. "I've written the best and the worst book on the subject," he laughs, explaining that it is the only such book on the subject. For his efforts, Rudolph Matas personally presented Marmelzat with the Rudolph Matas Award of the Tulane University Medical History Society (1943). A year later, the book earned him the William Osler Medal, established by the American Association of the History of Medicine.

Currently, Marmelzat is an emeritus professor of medicine at the University of Southern California Medical School and an emeritus visiting professor of dermatology and professor of the history of medicine at TUMC.