

Much of healthcare experience can not be adequately described, managed or interpreted with science. The quality of the experience of illness and recovery emerges via the mists of perception, empathy, emotion, and social dynamic, and to date, only the arts and humanities have provided much insight or practical approaches to engaging with our fellow human beings.

The Still Point (<https://atthestillpoint.org/tour/>) was a multimedia-for-stage project that engaged audiences in California, Texas and Massachusetts to step into the emotional narratives of a doctor and a patient. Each concert event explored the constant vulnerability, intimacy and wonder found in health care. The project, initially started as a web community, evolved to match the perceived needs of the healthcare community as matched to the skill sets (or lack of, i.e. a certain lack of social media savvy) of the the primary artist/healers.

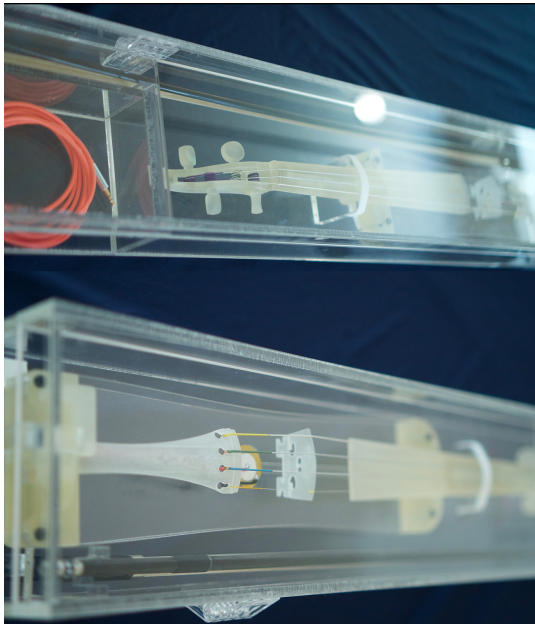
The final project was a meditation in light and sound on the deep emotional narratives found in healthcare. It shared the vibrant paintings of a trauma patient after spending two months in a coma and the art of an emergency medicine physician who painted to overcome debilitating burnout. Each were paired with original and largely improvised compositions on acoustic and electronic instruments. The second work also included live spoken word by Weschler on his burnout, artistic practice and recovery. The performances concluded with an interactive soundpainting - where audience became the performer.



Initially the project was developed with three arms: 1. A web publication to serve as a community hub that inspires artistic reflection and mindfulness through health care related artwork and art created by healthcare providers. 2. A series of public performances to bring attention to the intersection of art, mindfulness, wellness, and health care practice, and 3. A quality improvement survey to study the impact of the such undertakings.

After making initial outreach to the student and resident community and thinking more broadly about the irony of creating another online community when we were trying to address presence, mindfulness and shared empathy, Matthew and I decided to focus on direct contact. We shifted the focus of the website to serve as a tour promotion tool and more fully realize the last two of our original goals.

Audience reception was warm, engaged, and positive. Attendance at our concerts, as well as response to our tour page and press materials, demonstrated significant interest in live performance that addresses the emotional and spiritual narratives in medicine. Audience members were particularly interested in themes of care taking, mindfulness, and shared empathy in relationship to their own lives and struck by the permissive atmosphere created during the performances.



From an artistic perspective, the work has been hugely rewarding.

It has allowed me to fully integrate my prior doctoral work in multimedia stage design with my current interests in health care and the perceptual and emotional aspects of illness, death, and healing.

The design for the final show also spurred the creation of an 3d printed and laser cut electric violin for use as a visual and aural symbol of isolation and digital mediation in the performance as output and the development of a new and adventurous approach to performance at the boundaries of classical and improvisatory music.

Our show ended up being an extended meditation on the work of a single patient and single doctor. My focusing on their highly personal experiences, we we empowered our audiences to consider their own experience of healthcare outside of the science and technology involved.

At our Harvard show, the audience was remained afterward to talk amongst themselves and ask questions until the building was shut down. The [soundpainting](#), where the audience became an “orchestra” that experienced the sounds, challenges, and quiet triumphs of the hospital, was particularly well received. It served as a way for the audience members to participate in music making during the concert . As I conducted the performance to stillness, with the entire 90 person audience breathing slowly in unison, I believe we achieved a powerful shared experience and artistic statement about the need for unity.



We are still churning through the data from our concert surveys but our initial results point to a great need for shared *experiences* around common healthcare themes of suffering, pain, burnout, recovery and the power of the arts to provide such experiences. In a world as professionalized as healthcare, the distinctly open and permissive environment of the arts, provides a unique and powerful context to engage our neighbor, step into their shoes and create the social bonds, caring and empathy that can help us all heal. Both doctors and patients suffer and and experience moments of joy and wonder on a regular basis. Highlighting and sharing these moments shines a light on the best and most important aspects of our humanity.

The funding and support provided by Medicine and the Muse and the Shenson Fund allowed me to consider medicine and care-taking from an artistic perspective and to integrate my past work as a musician and stage designer with my medical education in a manner that has created much deeper meaning and connection to my experience in medical school.

Press Release

The Still Point | medicine from the inside

*June 7 Berg Hall 7:00pm
Stanford School of Medicine
Free and open to the public*

*Thursday June 15, 2017 7pm
Harvard Ed Portal: Harvard University
In collaboration with Harvard Medical School*

*Saturday June 10, 2017 8pm
Southern Methodist University
School of Music*

*Summer, 2017 7pm
Emergency Medicine Grand Rounds
Yale University School of Medicine*

Join us for a unique performance featuring MacArthur Digital Media and Learning award winning violinist Benjamin Robison and emergency medicine physician-painter-spoken word artist Matthew Wetschler and explore the inner world of medicine brought to life in sound, image and word.

A ballerina-designer-architect arises from a coma to paint her way back to life. A doctor-artist-explorer emerges from the barren landscape of burnout and depression, by bringing brush to canvas. A musician finds solace in the cathedrals of vulnerability and generosity they have built.



At the intersection of science and art, humanity and technology, data and design, healthcare is a crucible where all we commit to our humanness, our joy-in-practice, and our deepest purpose - to aid all those who suffer - as we improve healthcare and health-in-caring in a digitally mediated age.



Discover how we might find deeper healing as a community through the practice of art, mindfulness and shared empathy.

Trailer: <https://youtu.be/nhFIEXB7eeo>

More about the project: <http://atthestillpoint.org/tour/>

The healing of patient and caretaker will be rendered through a continually renewed commitment to vulnerability, mindfulness and empathy.



Janine-Opal in front of one her works, Benjamin Robison and Matthew Wetschler in their respective studios.

Ben Robison

Dr. Ben Robison is a MacArthur Digital Media and Learning Award winning designer and musician exploring new approaches to the violin and improvisation. He is currently completing his M.D. degree at Stanford University and lives, makes and explores in the Bay Area. He aspires to live compositions that reflect our real and mediated world - a world where analog and digital continually collide. Each performance is a personal and unscripted journey.

Matthew Wetschler

Dr. Matthew Wetschler is a physician-artist that lives and works in San Francisco. With paintings made of wood, plaster, and acrylic paint, his abstract works reflect his experiences during medical training and illuminate the demanding beauty of healing. Matthew recently completed his Emergency Medicine residency at Stanford University. He holds bachelors in Philosophy and Fine Art and earned his medical degree and Masters of Public Health at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Janine-Opal

Born in Munich into a family of architects and artists, Janine Opal has worked as a ballerina and photographer and is an award winning filmmaker and architect. She now roams freely within and between these realms, capturing ephemeral moments and visual pulses of presence, change and growth. Her light and sound sculptures as well as her paintings are shown in galleries worldwide.

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