



*Surgical lifestyles*

## *Surgeon melds music and medicine*

*by Karen Stein, Associate Editor*



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**T**he impact of music on individuals is so highly personal that it would be impossible to express what music universally means. One generally accepted statement about music's effect, however, is that it greatly reduces stress, whether passively listening to it or actively playing it.

Such is the case for Matthew Indeck, MD, FACS, a surgeon and keyboardist. As director of general surgery, director of surgery at GMG Wilkes-Barre, and vice-chairman of the division of surgery at the Geisinger Health System in Wilkes-Barre, PA, Dr. Indeck views music as an outlet for stress. "It can take my mind off headaches day to day, as I can totally isolate myself in the music," he said.

A classically trained pianist who identifies Greg Rolie, the original keyboardist for the rock group Santana, and Lee Michaels as his main rock and roll influences, Dr. Indeck began lessons at age seven and played in rock bands throughout high school and college. Although Dr. Indeck had continued to play as a hobby, he had put band playing behind him until a night he was on call two years ago, when a conversation about rock and roll bands between him and a hospitalist, the lead singer of a band that had been considering adding a keyboardist to the mix, led to an invitation to audition.

### ***The band***

Dr. Indeck's band, Six Drink Minimum (or "Six DM" when performing in more upscale venues), plays rock songs from the 1960s to the 2000s and has a groupie following of friends, neighbors, nurses, physicians, and hospital staff.

Dr. Indeck said he enjoys all the selections the band plays, as the band has tremendous breadth and range. However, he specifically referred to their cover of "Moondance" by Van Morrison as a personal favorite. "We converted the song to a jazzier version. Each player has a riff, and the singer kills it," he said. "We do a lot of improvising with the songs we cover, but 'Moondance' in particular stands out for me."

The band continually updates its repertoire to encompass a wider breadth of songs. Occasionally they will play a medley of four or five songs by one group—for example, they have performed medleys of music by the Rolling Stones, Santana, the Pretenders, and Tom Petty. "The more we play

in front of the public," he said, "the better and tighter we get."

In addition to playing keyboards, Dr. Indeck sings backup vocals for some songs and does a talking bit when the band performs "Love Shack" by the B-52s. The band plays venues such as weddings, holiday parties, picnic parties, and church receptions—no seedy nightclubs yet, Dr. Indeck joked. A recent gig at a country club generated much interest among the audience, Dr. Indeck said, and Six Drink Minimum has been asked to donate their time to play a gig to an auction benefiting Children's Miracle Network.

### ***Balancing vocation with avocation***

Dr. Indeck says that although it's not easy to balance his surgical life with his musical life, he has learned to accommodate both in his schedule. A benefit to playing electronic keyboards is that he can plug in headphones and practice at night on the keyboards, which are kept in the basement, so as not to disturb his wife.

Because the members of Six Drink Minimum have families in addition to their demanding careers, most practices take place on Sunday evenings, the most convenient time for all. They normally get together for two-hour sessions. The actual gigs are scheduled far in advance so that everyone can plan around family events and call schedules.

The key to successfully organizing the group, Dr. Indeck said, is that everyone thoroughly enjoys being in the band and performing. His bandmates are an awesome group of people, he said, adding, "For eight people to spend that much time together and enjoy it says a lot."

In reference to the impact of a hobby that is demanding on his personal time, he added, "Hopefully the practices aren't interfering too much with family activities. So far no one has said anything. In fact, my wife's only complaint is that we like to dance, and now that I'm playing with the band, I'm not available to dance with her."

### ***Physician-musicians***

Dr. Indeck believes that his interest in becoming a surgeon and playing music were informed by being mechanically minded and using his hands to solve problems. Though surgery is finite—see a patient, formulate a plan, operate—there is always



Dr. Indeck (center in left-hand photo, background left in right-hand photo) with Six Drink Minimum.

something new to discover, he said, similar to the band's improvisation when playing the songs that people might already know. Furthermore, he said, like music, surgery has a rhythm to it.

Dr. Indeck doesn't normally volunteer to patients that he is in a rock band, though some already know and have asked him about it. However, if he sees a patient who is in a band, he might trade information as a conversation piece.

Many surgeons and other physicians have musical interests, Dr. Indeck said. Six Drink Minimum, for example, is composed of four physicians (a surgeon, a hospitalist, a neurologist, and a dermatologist) as well as three college professors (sisters who Dr. Indeck says are "unbelievable singers") and an engineer (a professional musician who in his youth played for the rock band Kansas). Although it may be difficult to schedule practice time, none of the band members has any ambitions to be a professional musician. "We should change our name to 'Keep Your Day Job,'" Dr. Indeck joked.

Many physicians find that they learn much more than just composition from pursuing musical interests outside of the medical setting. People skills and greater social awareness are among the lessons physicians learn through playing music.<sup>1</sup> Others say that learning to communicate with other musicians through playing helps to inform effective patient interaction.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Indeck agrees, adding that such communication teaches a person to truly listen to others.

### Rock star

Though Six Drink Minimum has not yet received any press, Dr. Indeck himself has been in the news. In 1996, when Dr. Indeck was the trauma direc-

tor at Geisinger, he performed surgery on Irina Scherbo, wife of Russian gymnast Vitaly Scherbo, who had crashed her car into a telephone pole on an icy road in State College, PA, and had come to the emergency room "in severe hemorrhagic shock with not much chance of survival."<sup>3</sup> Dr. Indeck performed a splenectomy and repaired fractures and lacerations in her liver. In addition, a case in which he treated someone who had been stabbed in the neck with a javelin was featured on a recent cable television show about amazing injuries.

Dr. Indeck has no plans to give up surgery for rock and roll, though he doesn't rule out the possibility of concentrating more on music in the future. "When I retire, I would consider pursuing music as a bigger focus in my life," he said, adding with a laugh, "if I can still lift the keyboards." □

### References

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