



MUSIC *for a* *While*

Guidelines *for Musicians*

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The purpose of this handbook is to orient musicians who wish to contribute their artistry to an environment of care through playing in public lobbies or through virtual delivery at Johns Hopkins Medicine. In it we address required procedures and key artistic considerations for performance and programming. If you are interested in playing for the Music for a While program, please read these guidelines before applying. If selected, you will be expected to demonstrate your understanding of the information in this handbook through your artistic practice, and to abide by all procedures specified here.

Overview

Entering the hospital environment can be stressful. Live music provides a welcoming presence upon entering and when traveling through the hospital. Music, whether delivered live or virtually, can lift spirits while waiting for appointments and enhance the environment of care. The aim of Music for a While is to create public access to music within the Johns Hopkins Medicine environment to elevate mood and reduce anxiety among those who visit, work, and are cared for within the hospital. Programs are short, informal, and accessible to all.

Music at Johns Hopkins Medicine

Music for a While is part of an extensive partnership between the Peabody Institute and Johns Hopkins Medicine's Office of Well-Being and Department of Service Excellence that brings together professional performing artists, hospital staff, and patients. The Peabody Institute and Johns Hopkins Medicine together have developed curated, site-specific programs in high-stress contexts, leveraging the power of music and dance to reduce stress, alleviate pain, promote wellness, and improve patient experience.

Through the Music for a While and Sound Rounds programs and in collaboration with the Program in the Arts, Humanities, & Health, the Office of Well-Being, and the Department of Service Excellence, Peabody provides a platform and support for qualified musicians from the Peabody Institute and the broader Baltimore community to bring their skill to Johns Hopkins Medicine. Artists play in many settings across the hospital, from intimate in-room or virtual bedside visits and

recorded performances via CCTV to lobbies and concert stages on the East Baltimore campus. Musicians reach many different members of the hospital community, including patients, family members and guests, and hospital staff. The Peabody Institute and the Office of Well-Being also support virtual and onsite music-making activities at the hospital by providing practice rooms, classes, and workshops for patients and care providers.

Arts in Health

The activities in the Music for a While program fall in the discipline of Arts in Health, undertaken by artists whose aims are aesthetic. Arts in Health practitioners focus on positive distraction, stress reduction, entertainment, and creative engagement. Musicians in this context enhance a holistic environment of well-being and healing through performance, musical engagement, and music education.

By way of contrast, music therapists working in hospitals focus primarily on individualized health interventions with specific mental health or rehabilitative outcomes. While music therapists may engage with patients in ways that appear similar to those of Arts in Health practitioners, their aims are clinical and therapeutic.

Qualifications of Arts in Health Practitioners:

- **Artistic Excellence:** As in any other performance context, the priority for every artist in a healthcare setting is artistic excellence. Artistic excellence lays the groundwork for a successful performance and for creating meaningful connections with listeners.
- **Flexibility:** Along with artistic excellence, successful performers in healthcare settings are ready to adapt and respond to their surroundings. This includes having a broad range of repertoire appropriate for many different situations and being receptive to feedback from healthcare workers, caregivers, and patients, as well as being aware of the emotional and physical state of those present.
- **Knowledge of Healthcare Culture:** Hospitals and other healthcare settings include a complex network of people, roles, and emotions. As artists stepping into this environment, it is important to have a basic understanding of the culture and day-to-day inner workings of healthcare settings. Musicians should have prior experience in healthcare settings and knowledge of healthcare culture. This could include playing in a healthcare setting, non-musical volunteering with patients, or personal experience visiting or staying in a hospital.

Live Music in the Hospital Environment

Playing in a public lobby as part of the Music for a While program differs in fundamental ways from playing in more traditional performance contexts. In the hospital, musicians are not “center stage” or on stage at all. They are not the focal point of what is happening but become part of the environment of care. It is helpful to think about how the space and the people within it both circumscribe and inspire musical creativity.

Public spaces in healthcare settings are full of distractions, bustling with movement as well as private conversation, alarms, device noises, and booming announcements. None of these distractions are encountered on the concert stage many performers typically inhabit, and it often takes some time for artists to become acclimated to making music in this type of environment.

Listeners in the Live or Virtual Environment

Musicians may experience playing in public spaces or virtually as being relegated to playing “background music,” which can carry negative connotations for artists accustomed to being onstage. This viewpoint does not take into account the power that live music, delivered in person or virtually, may have within a context where people can encounter it unexpectedly or in the midst of other activities. Rather than being in the background, music becomes part of a complex whole, recalling listeners to a sense of humanity and dignity that may otherwise be lost.

There are no audience members here but instead people going about their work, visiting loved ones, or waiting for medical care. These people may include patients, family members, visitors, care providers and other hospital staff. Musicians should not expect acknowledgement or applause. It may seem like there is no one listening at all. This may not be accurate – in the healthcare environment, people are often preoccupied with other concerns and may be taking in the music in ways that are not evident.

[“Empathy: The Human Connection to Patient Care”](#) is a helpful video from the Cleveland Clinic exploring empathy in healthcare settings. Empathy allows us to meet people where they are. As musicians, empathy is a fundamental tool for caring for others through music.

Leaving one’s comfort zone and engaging in a new practice of connecting with others through music can lead to feelings of discomfort. The hospital environment can be challenging for those not accustomed to it. Training modules on orientation to healthcare culture help musicians begin to normalize the experience of being in a hospital and equip them to operate skillfully and appropriately.

Musical Considerations and Programming Guidelines

One of the most important areas for performers to be responsive and flexible is in their programming. Due to the constantly changing dynamics in healthcare settings, performers need to adjust to the situations around them. This includes carefully considering choice of repertoire and length of the program, adjusting based on noise levels in the space, and being sensitive to the reactions of listeners, whether in-person or through online comments.

Scale and Timbre

For musicians playing in person, it is important to recognize that public spaces at Johns Hopkins Medicine vary in terms of noise levels as well as proximity to workstations or clinical treatment areas. For this reason, it is important to find the right scale of music for the specific location. Acoustic rather than amplified music is expected in most circumstances. Soloists and smaller ensembles of 2-4 players are generally more appropriate than larger groups. Piano, guitar, harp, and strings are commonly preferred over brass and operatic singing. However, in certain contexts, the bigger scale is exactly right: for example, a brass quintet or large vocal ensemble during the holiday season. During special moments, music in public spaces can be more attention-grabbing, but for most situations, music is most effective when it helps create a restorative environment.

Format

Although there can be engagement with listeners in some settings, typically public spaces in the hospital and online are not conducive to programming that requires audience participation. For various reasons, those within the healthcare environment may simply need some personal space. When playing in person, it is not necessary to bow, introduce yourself, or announce your pieces unless listeners approach you and ask. When playing online, listeners may appreciate hearing about the music that you present. Short, accessible oral program notes are appropriate.

At times people may make musical requests or want to interact. It may also be appropriate for the musician to reach out to listeners if the

situation seems to invite it. People may want to connect with the musician for many reasons, music-related and non-musical. Always be open to interactions that occur naturally or are initiated by listeners and engage as seems appropriate. These interactions can often be very meaningful and are one of many reasons music is beneficial in healthcare settings. In the virtual environment, you may receive medical comments or questions to which you are not equipped to respond; please refer listeners to their healthcare providers should this occur.

Duration

Appropriate program and repertoire length can vary greatly depending on the time of day, traffic flow, and other activities within the space. The most important thing to consider when determining the length of the program and repertoire choices is flexibility. Circumstances may necessitate shortening pieces, eliminating repeats, or drawing quickly to a close. It is helpful to have repertoire of different lengths, including a number of short pieces. It is also appropriate to play sections rather than whole works.

If playing in the hospital, you may want to consider incorporating intervals of silence in between pieces and continually assess the acoustics and dynamics of the space. Experiment with various lengths and styles of musical selections to observe how artistic choices influence the environment; pause and readjust based on your observations.

Musicians may find that the practice of playing short improvisatory or warm-up passages before launching into something more substantial can be useful in this context, providing the opportunity to assess the space, acoustics, and “mood” of the surroundings.

Volume

Acoustics in healthcare settings are strategically designed to minimize noise: for this reason, performers can expect to find dry acoustics in most cases. Musicians should be aware that sound may not travel as easily as it does in a concert hall. Depending on the instrumentation of the repertoire, performers may find they have to focus more attention on balance and projection than usual. Some lobbies, however, are built with very high ceilings, overlooking balconies, and other features that can create an ideal acoustical environment.

Unlike traditional concert settings, it is important that those listening can communicate easily at all times in the space. If the music is so loud that listeners are forced to raise their voices in order to be heard clearly, it may impact the safety of patients and interfere with staff's ability to accomplish necessary tasks.

By continuing to assess what is happening around them, musicians can meet the space and people within it where they are, neither overplaying nor underplaying. At times quiet music is most appropriate, and in other moments strength is exactly what the situation requires.

Musicians have less ability to assess and respond to the acoustical environment when playing virtually. Listeners are muted to minimize disruption and may enter and exit throughout the scheduled program time. If listening on a tablet or personal device, they may be able to control the volume level. If the program is broadcast via a monitor, the volume level will be preset by the hospital.

Genres and Preference

There are many different genres and styles of music that are effective in healthcare settings. Artists working in this context are most successful when they have a portfolio of diverse repertoire. However, it is important that musicians are personally committed to all musical selections they offer – it is never appropriate to “play down” to listeners. Artistic excellence and authenticity are extremely important in the hospital.

In choosing repertoire, here are some considerations that should be at the forefront of making selections:

- **Mood:** Because the primary purpose of Music for a While is to reduce anxiety, it is best to avoid music that is tonally or rhythmically aggressive. Some works of avant garde jazz or hard rock, atonal works or songs (even rendered without words) that reference death or dying may trigger even more anxiety rather than serving to lower stress levels. This does not mean, however, that performers need to perform exclusively “happy” repertoire. In fact, pieces such as *Georgia on My Mind* or Barber’s *Adagio for Strings* can be cathartic, allowing listeners to experience intense emotions that may be difficult to express.
- **Preference:** It is helpful to offer repertoire that listeners may recognize, such as pop songs from different eras and genres, jazz numbers, selections from musical theater, well-known classical melodies, or folk songs. The decision to play spiritual music in a public space should be made with care, as it is important to respect the religious or non-religious traditions of all in the environment. Hearing familiar music in a stressful situation can soothe and ground those present. Research on the use of recorded and live music to date suggests that offering choice of repertoire and access to personally preferred selections enhance music’s beneficial effects. For these reasons, it is important for musicians playing in the hospital to explore repertoire that will appeal across ages, genres, and cultures, and to respond to requests for particular selections as best as they are able. If it is not possible to play what has been requested, it is appropriate to respond by offering something of a similar style, or to ask for other requests to find some common ground.

If you are new to playing in a healthcare environment, you will likely navigate situations you have not encountered before. By reading these guidelines carefully and understanding the limitations on performing in this context, you will be more properly equipped to contribute music's healing presence to the environment of care. By drawing on your technique, musicianship and repertoire knowledge, and through preparing appropriate selections, taking the time to assess the space before and during playing, remaining flexible and responsive, and receiving feedback from mentors, hospital staff and listeners, you will build the skillset of an Arts in Health practitioner.

Required Training for In-person Program Delivery

After being accepted into the Music for a While program, musicians need to complete all orientation and training required of Johns Hopkins Medicine volunteers before being able to begin playing. Training modules cover critical hospital policies regarding patient privacy, infection control and handwashing protocols, fire and safety information, and standards of behavior. Because it takes a significant amount of time to complete training and orientation (which includes an online application, confidentiality form, background check, medical tests, and nine online training modules) and because musicians may want to explore playing in the healthcare setting before committing to the full training, you may visit the hospital two times before all training modules and medical tests must be completed. In your first session, you will observe the work of a trained Music for a While musician. For the second session, you will be escorted by a Music for a While musician who will observe you playing and provide support. Thereafter, once you have completed your hospital training and have your badge, you will be accompanied on your shifts and provided with mentorship as needed.

Required Training for Virtual Program Delivery

After being accepted into the Music for a While program, musicians need to complete all orientation and training required of Johns Hopkins Medicine virtual volunteers before being able to begin playing. Training modules cover critical hospital policies regarding patient privacy, infection control and handwashing protocols, and standards of behavior. Orientation includes an online application, confidentiality form, background check, and six online training modules. Peabody will provide mentorship as needed.

Interested in Applying to Play for Music for a While at Johns Hopkins Medicine?

If you are an experienced performer interested in volunteering for Music for a While at Johns Hopkins Medicine, please fill out a [digital application](#). You will be asked to submit a performance resume, a recent video recording demonstrating your artistic skill, a sample repertoire list, and a brief personal statement. Applications will be considered on a rolling basis and artists will be engaged as needed. You can expect notification within a month as to whether your application has been accepted.

