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Just What the Doctor Ordered

BANDAIDS for BRIDGE Talent Show Spotlights Multiple Gifts of USF Health Students – and Benefits Clinic For Underserved

By Dave Scheiber, USF Foundation



First-year USF resident and event founder Dr. Madeline "Maddie" Snyder and USF Foundation CEO Joel Momberg open the show; (Below) USF Health Dean Charles Lockwood and med student Mike Carr (dubbed "Ed Sullivan and Frank Sinatra") serve as emcees.

"I got the white coat, stethoscope, paying off my school debt blues..."

From Opening Parody Song
White Coat Blues

It's three hours before show time and the spacious party room inside TPepin's Hospitality Centre is already abuzz with the air of a glitzy Hollywood awards gala – a green-and-golden globes countdown, of sorts, to a special evening for an especially gifted group of University of South Florida students.

Small glittery stars have been sprinkled on table clothes and clusters of performers await their turn for sound check on the big stage, set off by a huge black curtain filled with even more bright stars. But the real stars here are the vocalists, musicians and dancers on the program for the BANDAIDS for BRIDGE 2016 talent show – most of them studying to be doctors at USF's Morsani College of Medicine and all tied to the various schools of USF Health.

And the person who got it started stands on stage at this moment in a black, shimmery dress, which reflects like a disco mirror ball beneath a swirling blue spotlight. She is first-year USF resident and now officially Dr. Madeline Snyder, who five years ago had a



brainstorm for an event to showcase the multi-talents of her med-school classmates – all while raising money for the student-run BRIDGE Healthcare Clinic that provides free medical services for people in dire need.

Snyder is in the midst of belting out a parody opening number, *White Coat Blues*, penned by USF Foundation CEO Joel Momberg, who provides a rousing, Dr. John-inspired accompaniment beside her on a grand piano.

“I got blues...oh yeah, I got the blues I got the white coat, stethoscope, paying off my school debt blues,” she wails soulfully, a vocal dynamo whose blond hair flows past her shoulders and whose short stature is complemented by the big personality and smile friends have come to know well.

Snyder is no newcomer to the stage. She earned her Screen Actor’s Guild card doing TV commercials as a child and went on to audition for and be accepted into the elite Entertainment Revue troupe in Tampa, eventually serving as the touring performance ensemble’s captain in her junior and senior years of high school at Berkeley Prep.

As a medical school graduate and busy new doctor, Snyder is no longer director of the show she brought to life, but is serving for the second year on the *American Idol*-style judging panel along with Momberg, Dr. Rahul Mehra (far right) and Dr. Bryan Bognar, who will offer kinder and gentler feedback than anything from the Simon Cowell school of judging.

“I’m so excited – everything is coming together exactly how I imagined,” Snyder says during a break. She points to third-year med student Michael Carr, her successor in the busy directorial job, who is still dressed in his blue scrubs while scanning the room for any last-minute issues.

“He’s got everything under control,” Snyder says, as Carr heads off to change into a suit and prepare for his co-hosting duties with Dr. Charles Lockwood, Dean of the USF Health.



On this night, the students on the bill can forget about studying how to perform medical procedures and instead immerse themselves in a far different kind of performing: dazzling piano displays of Chopin and Celine Dion music; an a capella group worthy of *Pitch Perfect*; some rap and rock, mash-ups and pop efforts that would turn more than a few judges’ chairs on *The Voice*; and a blow-the-doors-off dance straight out of Bollywood.

They can shift from left brain to right, tapping into their life-long passions for artistic pursuits and de-stress from the enormous pressures and long hours that accompany life as a medical student. And if you thought med school students have genes that are more clinical than creative, the BANDAIDS for BRIDGE show would soon demolish that notion.

The nine acts on tap – with a handful featuring such catchy names as Thoracic Park, Say Ahh! Capella and Pirates of the Vitamin C – are not the only key component of the night. Outside the party hall, filling a large foyer, dozens of tables are covered with eye-catching items for the silent auction that second-year med student Vidhya Krishnan has coordinated in her role as assistant director.



She and others reached out to an array of donors to entice bidders with such goodies as sports packages from the Tampa Bay Rays, USF Men’s and Women’s Athletics, a signed jersey from Tampa Bay Lightning captain Steven Stamkos, a wine collection from Cooper’s Hawk and wine tasting events by PRP, a Yeungling Brewery Basket, portrait sessions by Jay Carson, a Tampa comedy improve night and even private hip-hop lessons.

With ticket and auction sales combined, the event raised more than \$30,000 in its first four years to go directly to BRIDGE (Building Relationships and Initiatives Dedicatd to Gaining Equality). Its population includes many patients, some 200 percent below the poverty level. And this year’s event will bring in thousands more dollars by the end of the night.

“I love reaching out to members of the community and engaging them,” says Krishnan. “It’s just so great to be able to participate in an

event like this and to give back in a meaningful way, too.”

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– Vidhya Krishnan

Krishnan has lent her time to the organizational team that also includes producer Megan Melody and assistant producer Madison Collins, both of whom handle the talent, while coordinating the lineup, cues, lighting and back stage area and all other creative design touches for the event.

Collins, a first-year student, was involved in high school musicals. She was invited to join the team by second-year student Melody, a former community theater actor, when they met during orientation. Both are attending USF as Naval scholarship students and will serve in the Navy after graduation. At this particular moment, each is scouring the room to make sure everything is ready to roll.

“I just think it’s important to be able to keep your hobbies alive,” Melody says. “And we have some incredible talent in this class. In the past, we accepted everybody, but the shows ran about 3-and-a-half hours, so we had to cut about half the acts this year. The show is shorter, but the caliber is going to blow you away.”

Melody explains that working closely this year with the USF Foundation has made an important difference: “It was a huge help – they have a lot of networking ability that we’re not capable of doing as medical students. The Foundation provides the means to professionally reach out to people for support, and that’s crucial.”

Carr, meanwhile, oversees the entire team.

The Tampa native attended Florida State as an undergraduate, then enrolled at USF for a year of graduate school before transitioning into medical school. A classical pianist since early childhood, he was thrilled to hear of a talent show in which he could play, and did so as a grad student. “I love performing and it was a great opportunity to meet people,” he recalls.

Then, as a first-year student, he worked at the BRIDGE Clinic and witnessed first-hand the immense impact it had on indigent patients. That made him want to stay involved in the show even more. He became Snyder’s assistant and replaced her last year. Balancing med school demands and directing responsibilities is no easy task, but Carr credits his student team and faculty advisor, Daniel Woolbright, who helps him with the financial side of the event.

“And I’d text Maddie whenever I had a question – she was always there to guide me,” he adds. “I will tell you that Maddie is amazing. She’s performed her whole life and this is her dream.”



It’s a dream with deep roots. Snyder grew up in Baltimore, where she quickly fell in love with performing. She landed parts in commercials (one with comic actor Martin Mull of *Roseanne*), took voice lessons, enrolled in dance and acted in dinner theater. Her mother, a bridal buyer, would drive her to Washington and New York City for auditions, and it seemed that young Maddie was on her way to an entertaining career.



The turning point in her childhood came with her family’s move to Tampa, and being accepted into Entertainment Revue, a professional outfit founded and run by Cynthia Gries. Based out of Busch Gardens, the troupe performed shows and medleys around the region, and Snyder even got to perform in New Orleans during a Final Four week.

But she also excelled in school, especially in math and science, which she attributes to her father, who works in business finance, and her maternal grandfather, a chemist. “I got my math brain from my dad and science brain from my grandfather,” she says with a laugh.

As much as performing was in her heart, Snyder followed her head and enrolled in the University of Pennsylvania as a biology major. But volunteering in the cancer unit early on at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia piqued her interest in becoming a physician, and she switched to a pre-med track.

"Having a creative streak helps you to go out of that medical box and connect with your patients on a different level."

– Dr. Madeline Snyder

All the while, she kept her performing flame burning – often singing for classmates at Smoky Joe's Tavern, a popular bar on campus. Then came the move back to Tampa to attend USF Health Morsani College of Medicine. She fully intended to dive right into her studies and put performing on hold.

"But within the first month, I was thinking, 'I love people, and I've spoken to my classmates and a lot of them have a background in singing and dancing, and I love all these things, too. So let's try to figure out a way to do all these things in medical school.'" With that in mind, she typed up a business plan and proposal for a talent show, presenting it to then-dean of USF Health, Dr. Stephen Klasko.

Dr. Klasko wanted to make sure Snyder had enough talented students to pull it off. She guaranteed him she did. The bigger challenge was figuring out a worthy

cause for the show to support. Having been involved with the BRIDGE Clinic during her first year, it struck Snyder as the perfect beneficiary. "Every Tuesday night its doors open to help people who otherwise would not receive health care," she says. "And all the different schools in USF Health are involved in it."

Snyder shared emcee duties with her dean the first show, and it was smash hit, involving faculty and staff as well as students. One of her friends suggested the name BANDAIDS for BRIDGE. "And the rest is history," Snyder says. "It became an annual event and has gotten bigger and better every year."

Snyder has an idea of why so many doctors seem to be naturals at music. "We're disciplined and able to master a class or an instrument," she says. "Learning to play violin and piano takes time and patience. And these are traits I think are within many good doctors."

For Snyder, there is another benefit to the whole undertaking.

"I think it helps me be better with my patients," she says. "Even in a hospital setting, if somebody is clinically ill, all they hear about all day is their illness and medications and tests.

"They appreciate it when a physician sits down at their bedside and talks to them about things other than their disease. And having a creative streak helps you to go out of that medical box and connect with your patients on a different level."

Backstage, actually a room of a hallway, Say Ahh! Capella's 12 members are running through one of their two numbers as the show nears. The sound is stunning as they sing a haunting, gospel-bluesy tune. It's called *Bottom of the River* by Delta Rae, with swirling harmonies, intricate echo vocals and a cool, choreographed stomp.

First-year med student Katrina Wachter sings the solo, has arranged the performance and is the group's new musical director. "I took classical singing lessons at Franklin & Marshall and I knew I wanted to keep singing – and then I heard about this a cappella group at USF Health," she says. "I thought that was really special. Singing is a passion for me along with medicine, so the fact that I can do both in an environment where I'm learning to be a doctor is something that really drew me here. It gives us an outlet and release – a chance to put away



the books for a little while and just sing.”

Second-year student Katie Allen, last year’s musical director for the group, remembers that only four students showed up to participate in the 2015 talent show. But word got around and Say Ahh! Capella tripled in size for this year, meeting only once a week for 90 minutes through the year.

“It’s so great to have this event,” she says. “A lot of times we’ll get to practice and be so stressed from the day. And sometimes I think, ‘I should be studying instead of going to practice.’ But every time practice is over, I think we all realize the benefit of this and feel so much better. We’ve all found that if you take time out of your day, and do something you love, you can be much more efficient.”

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– Katrina Wachter

The show gets underway shortly after 8 p.m. with Snyder and Momberg drawing loud laughs and applause for *White Coat Blues*. Another large crowd has turned out for the event, including noted donors Carol and Frank Morsani. The Morsanis have served as judges in the past, but this time are happy to relax and watch the evening unfold from a table near the stage, laughing and applauding with the crowd.



“Is everyone having a good time?” Snyder, ever the entertainer, yells to the audience, which roars back in the affirmative. After bantering about finally becoming a doctor, she croons an Etta James classic with an appropriate title, *At Last*, backed by Momberg’s jazzy ivory work. The night is off and running, fueled by the jabbing and joking interplay between co-hosts Lockwood and Carr. Even the judges get into the action, as Dr. Bognar kids with the Carr and his dean (“Thanks Mr. Sinatra, and I think it’s nice you brought along Ed Sullivan.”)



The first act, Thoracic Park, is fronted by Andre Lee, who sings a lively version of the Red Hot Chili Peppers’ *Otherside*. He’s joined by fellow students Edward Oh, John Cassel, Usman Ahman, Jameson Kwang (who will re-surface later to bring down the house on piano) and Scott Hoeckele. “Dude was rocking it with his red Converse and doing Jagger,” quips judge Bognar. “I’m so damn jealous.”

The second act, Elaine Tan, offers a poignant counterpoint to Thoracic Park’s entertaining alt-rock presentation, taking her seat at the grand and playing a beautiful version of *The Prayer*, with the previously raucous crowd hanging quietly on every evocative note.



Then comes one of the evening’s genuine highlights courtesy of Say Ahh! Capella. The ensemble of medical and pharmacy students turns in a flawless, fun performance of two songs: the smooth groove of Ed Sheeran’s *Thinking Out Loud* and its chain gang feel of *Bottom of the River*, which ignites a boisterous ovation upon its conclusion.

Not to be outdone, two previous talent show winners, violist/vocalist Samson Lu and singer Cienna Wesley join Grammy-nominated USF student (for best Latin jazz album) Jose Valentino Ruiz on jazz sax and flute to absolutely kill it in a Leona Lewis and Beyonce Mashup.



Bionqua Lynch and Ollie Marseglia follow with a knockout version of *Beauty and the Beast* that would have made Disney proud, leading to intermission. The second half is just as strong. The Mixomas (Mark Bender, Doris Deng, Abhinav Mohan, Shane Leighton, Raj Patel and



show producer Megan Melody) shine with a soul-pop offering of Adele's *Hello* and B.O.B.'s *Airplanes/Wish Right Now*, with the crowd going crazy over Mohan's rhythmic Eminem-style rap. "That just reminds me of how uncool I was in medical school," Dr. Bognar interjects.



Few in the crowd may have realized that the next act, Jameson Kuang, was the low-profile pianist in Thoracic Park. He returns to perform Chopin's *Waltz in A-flat Major*, and mesmerizes the room with his effortless, acrobatic playing. From the judges' table, Momberg pronounces: "I'm a piano player. *He* is a musician."



The Celtic vibe of Pirates of the Vitamin C feature four violins and a drummer (Caroline Bresnan, Katherine Woo, Key Yan Tsoi and Jude Nawlo). They change the pace with a captivating sound that has Dr. Lockwood talking about his Celtic genes, which soon prompts Dr. Bognar to joke, "I'm still trying to picture Charlie in Celtic jeans."



USF Naach – the Indian dance troupe of Nupur Godpole, Om Prakash Nankisoor, Harish Shyam and Natalie Menendez – ends the performances in high-octane fashion. Down on judges' row, Snyder labels it the best talent show yet. "I'm absolutely amazed," she says. Dr. Mehra adds: "I'm rendered speechless. There's no way to single out a winner."

But one is named. The judges pick four finalists: Say Ahh! Capella, Jameson Kuang, USF Naach and Leona Lewis/Beyonce Mashup. And a text vote from the audience determines a deserving champ – Mashup performers Samson, Cienna and Jose, giving Samson and Cienna their second victories.

Another show is in the books. But the *other* kind of books can wait a little longer for the medical students who performed, organized or simply attended. They hit the dance floor to celebrate a great night and more money raised for a worthy cause. And somewhere in the middle of it all, Dr. Madeline Snyder is beaming.



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