

TALES OF THREE MUSICIANS

watching the wheels

Banishing canine negativity

BY WAYNE WOOD

So, here's the new plan. It's been raining for a couple of days and it's time to get the dogs into the house. They've been having a great time out in the backyard, barking at squirrels who dance merrily above their heads, convulsed in squirrel laughter about the idiot dogs below.

The dogs—beagle Jake, beaglegreyhound mix Zoe, and terrier mix Maisie—are covered in mud.

Under the Old Plan, I would fume about the dirt and aggravation. I would wonder why Sharon and I are so crazy as to have dogs in the first place. I would contemplate throwing rocks at the squirrels. I would say several choice phrases, sometimes under my breath, sometimes more loudly.

New Plan: I think this: I am alive for only a short time on this earth, and this is one of the moments of that life.

Isn't that better? Isn't that more affirming and positive?

Yes indeed, when I'm feeling negative thoughts, I will take a deep breath and appreciate that I am, in this moment, alive enough, and, frankly, in-the-moment enough to want to throttle the living daylights out of the STUPID dogs who somehow manage to get completely COVERED in MUD in only about TWO MINUTES outside.

"How do they do it?" I won't ask.

I also won't wonder about how, in a yard that has far more grass than bare ground, they somehow find the muddiest spots and get their paws totally encrusted.

It's really important, for stressrelief reasons and also just as a simple exercise in living a happier and more productive life, for me to focus on the wonder and beauty of the world that surrounds us, and not on the fact that I'm wasting TONS of TIME dealing with MUDDY PAWS while these dogs put on big happy grins as if to rub in the fact that they

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HOUSE ORGAN

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY SUSAN URMY



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A new song

You've heard Ellen Musick's voice on hundreds of commercials. She's done studio voice work with, among others, Donna Summer and Roy Orbison. But she decided to do something different, and after returning to school for a nursing degree, she is the clinic nurse at the Vanderbilt Outpatient Psychiatric Clinic.



Telling the story

Jewel Lucien of VMC's Liver Transplant Program loves to sing gospel music and has been in productions of "Chicago" and "Dreamgirls." But one of her career highlights was singing "God Bless America" at Tennessee's Inaugural Ball in January.





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Man of many facets

Jon Jackson is a skilled and caring nurse, a painter, a video maker, and a singersongwriter. And then there was that thing where he ran for Congress.

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Time is running out 25th Annual *House Organ* Writing Contest



■ For the 25th year, the July *House Organ* will be the Summer Reading Issue, filled with the winners of the *House Organ* Writing Contest—poems, short stories and nonfiction pieces contributed by staff, faculty and students of Vanderbilt Medical Center.

Every year demonstrates that the Medical Center has a lot of people with literary talent walking around disguised as regular people, and the *House Organ* Writing Contest is a chance to show everybody what you can do.

The rules are pretty simple.

There are three categories: poetry, fiction and nonfiction.

There are no length restrictions in the poetry category.

The fiction category is limited to 4,000 words.

The nonfiction category, which encompasses journalistic writing, memoirs, feature stories, historical pieces, profiles of interesting people, or anything else that's true, also has a 4,000-word limit.

Please indicate the category of your entry; sometimes it's a little hard for the judges to figure out what is fiction and what is nonfiction.

All staff and faculty of VMC, except those who work in News and Public Affairs, are eligible. Medical, nursing and graduate students are also eligible.

Submissions are limited to three per category. Each entry must be submitted online as an attachment in Microsoft Word (or other compatable format), and have the author's name, place of employment or school, and a phone number at the top of the first page. Entries may be sent to *wayne.wood@vanderbilt.edu*. Please put "writing contest entry" in the subject line.

Entries may be edited for space, clarity or style before publication.

Deadline for entry is Monday, May 11. Please push the send button before midnight on that day. The winners will be published in *House Organ*. If we have room, we'll also publish some honorable mentions. Last year there were so many good nonfiction entries that they were published in several other issues.

Address any questions to the editor, Wayne Wood, at 322-4747, or at the email address above.

Checklist for entries:

Author information: Name, department or school, address and phone number on first page.

Entry information: Category—fiction, nonfiction or poetry. Check to be sure your work is within the length requirement.

Entries must be sent as an attachment in Microsoft Word (or other compatable format).

Deadline is May 11.

BRINGING HARMONY TO THE DSYCHIATRIC CLINIC

BY LESLIE HAST

A new career at 50 suits Ellen Musick very well

here's a good chance that you have heard Ellen Musick's voice before.

For 30 years, she sang in Nashville's recording studios for artists such as Amy Grant, Michael W. Smith, Donna Summer and Roy Orbison and on jingles for clients such as McDonald's, CITGO and hundreds of other banks and retailers across the country.

You may also recognize her as one of the vocalists for Fifth Avenue, a 13-piece orchestra that performed for national conventions as well as local events, including the first Fourth of July celebration at the opening of Riverfront Park in downtown Nashville.

Musick had a job that many in Music City would envy, but as she neared her 50th birthday, she made the bold decision to change careers and become a nurse.

"There was a part of me that wanted to do something that had meaning," she said. "I knew I had sung on projects that had meaning and where the music touched people, but I wanted to do something more direct and personal."

Musick said she also realized her time was almost up in such a youth-oriented business. "At 30, I said 'no way will I be doing this at 40,' and then at 40 I said 'no way will I be doing that at 50,'" she recalled. "I wanted to quit while I still had work. I didn't want to just wake up one day to find the phone had stopped ringing. I saw that happen to many people, and I just think that would be so hard. I wanted to do something new and use my brain in a different way."

Once Musick decided she was ready to leave the music business, she briefly considered using her sewing and interior design skills to start a business called "The Ottoman Empire" to make custom ottomans, but admits she was mostly attracted by the clever company name.

While in her 20s, Musick had discovered she liked being in a medical environment, but there was no question that her career would be in music. When it came time to choose a second career, however, medicine was the obvious choice.

"This sounds crazy, but I liked being in the hospital, and I was always interested in medical problems. When we got our first computer and had access to the Internet, I stayed up until 2 or 3 a.m. reading medical research." After receiving a degree in music from Belmont University in 1977, Musick graduated exactly 30 years later with a nursing degree. The second time around, one of her daughters was also a student there and she was often mistaken for a professor.

"If I went to get a soft drink between classes, the cashiers would want to give me the faculty discount," she said.

Shutting down the Starbucks

Like any proper college student, Musick got by mainly on coffee.

"I should pay tribute to the Green Hills Starbucks because I did all my studying there every day for two years," she said. "I usually had class until 1, then went straight to Starbucks. Many nights I would shut it down at 11 and was back at 5:30 the next morning."

Musick admitted that if she had really thought about how drastic the change was, she would have changed her mind.

"I had no idea nursing school would be so difficult, nor did I realize how difficult it can be to get in to nursing school. If I'd thought more about it, I would have backed out, but I'm impulsive that way," she said.

Through her senior practicum at the Mental Health Cooperative, Musick found a natural fit in psychiatric nursing.

"I loved the patient population, and it was really the first time nursing felt right. At my other clinicals, I was so interested in everything, but I knew they were not what I wanted to do. In psychiatry, it felt right," she said.

After submitting only three applications, Musick found her "dream job" as the first clinic nurse at the Vanderbilt Adult Outpatient Psychiatric Clinic.

"I'm getting to do things now that I had dreamed to be doing after 10 years of practice," she said. "They did need a nurse so desperately, so it was easy to step in and have a real impact on patient care."

Rene Love, A.P.N., clinic manager, said Musick seems like a much more experienced nurse.

"This was a brand new position, and in a new role it's important to come in with life experience and work experience. It takes someone with skills, and I don't think a brand new nurse out of school could do it," Love said. "She has such a passion for it. It's incredible to see. I look at her as such an experienced person, not a first-time nurse."

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Musick's story was featured in a new book by Tennessee Congresswoman Marsha Blackburn called "Life Equity," I would say to men and women looking at career changes that every single life experience has value. No matter what you do, everything along the way counts.



which shows women using their life experiences to follow their dreams. Musick said she had plenty to draw on in nursing.

"For me, it was studio experience, PTA experience, volunteer experience and serving on boards. It's also an area where I can use my life experience in a good way, from the death of my parents to the illnesses of my children," she said. "I would say to men and women looking at career changes that every single life experience has value. No matter what you do, everything along the way counts."

Early mornings a change

Thomas Lavie, M.D., medical director of the Psychiatric Clinic, said Musick's music career gave her a sensibility perfect for psychiatry.

"She is unique, kind, loving, and it's



Ellen Musick, nurse at the outpatient psychiatric clinic at the Village at Vanderbilt, was a session singer for 30 years and then decided to change careers and become a nurse.

filtered through her career of creativity," he said. "We're very lucky. Even if we searched for a year, people like her don't grow on trees. She has a bend for psychiatry and life experience in the arts. There's a special mix she brings."

Musick even draws on her life experience as a wife and mother to three daughters.

"She's a mother figure to the staff, especially the young residents. She has been a central figure in pulling together the clinic," Lavie said. "She was out for a nursing meeting recently, and I don't like when she's gone. The feeling is different. She makes the clinic more like a family."

But Musick is quick to point out there are some key differences in her careers.

"The biggest change was adjusting to the early mornings," she said. "Nothing starts before 10 in the music industry. I had gotten up early for years because I had children, but I didn't necessarily have to be functioning."

The most crucial difference is the potential for mistakes.

"If I made a mistake in the studio, I could raise my hand, admit to it and do it again. Mistakes are different in medicine. While mistakes aren't good at either place, they can be life-threatening here," Musick said.

Musick said she doesn't anticipate another drastic career change in her life, and her only regret is that she didn't make the change sooner.

"Even though I'm starting a career at an age when many people are winding down, I am still interested in advancing my career. I want to do as much as I can with the time I have to work. I don't want to lay back and think I'm settled," she said. "I enjoy nursing so much, and I like to think I can do it for a long time. A lot of my friends are looking at retirement, and I'm just gearing up."

ewel Lucien's co-workers say that one day, Broadway or a big record company will steal this Nashville treasure.

"Jewel is one of Nashville's best-kept secrets, but the word is quickly getting out," said Colline Schibig. "Some day, Vanderbilt will lose her to the entertainment industry, and we will say 'we knew her when she worked here.'"

Lucien, data management specialist for the Liver Transplant Program, has had starring roles in local musicals, sang on many gospel compilation albums, and is set to release her second solo album in July.

"The music I write is Christian inspirational," Lucien said. "It's still gospel, but not traditional. It's upbeat tempo. I like the beats, and I like to reach out to a younger audience."

Lucien began singing at age 6, inspired by the trio her mother and aunts formed, and she started developing her songwriting abilities as a child by writing poetry.

"My first poem was telecast on CBS Channel 5 in elementary school. It was about flowers, maybe roses, I can't even remember, but I was excited to read my poem on TV. For a 5-year-old, that was big," she recalled.

At 13, she had her first taste of the recording studio and was immediately hooked.

"That studio experience really was like 'Wow, this is what I want to do.' It was really different hearing your own voice back in the headphones. Of course at home, I would record on the little tape player and play the song back, but to actually hear myself. Then I really did appreciate the singers because everything wasn't on key all the time. You may have thought you were, but to hear it back with the music, you realize it's not as easy as it may look," she said.

Lucien was involved with her high school's plays and musicals but said she still thought of herself as strictly a vocalist at that time. It wasn't until adulthood and the lead role in a local production of "Dreamgirls" that she discovered the connection between singing and acting.

"I realized that if you're singing a song, it's still a story and you're telling it to people in your vocal performance. You can't do one without the other, which is probably why a lot of singers now are doing a lot of acting," she said.

In addition to playing Effie in "Dreamgirls," Lucien has had other roles in local productions, including of Matron Morton in "Chicago," Mrs. Lovett in "Sweeney Todd" and Jenna in "Motherhood: The Musical."

"I just like getting in character. It's a challenge," she said. "I like to do the different dialects too. The British accent was a first for me in "Sweeney Todd." And Matron Morton is tough, so that was hard to do because I'm not that way at all."

Hurricane loss shaped her life

Lucien says her personal trials also help her acting abilities. She was born and raised in Nashville but was living in Southeast Texas when Hurricane Rita struck.

"We anticipated being gone maybe three days and returning home, but it turned out to be three months before we could enter the city again. We left with three days of clothes. We lost all our dogs, everything. Even in the middle of the evacuation, I kind of knew that we wouldn't be going back," she said.

"It helps with acting because it makes me more well-rounded of a person. I know it's not the worst that could have happened to me. I could not have made



it out and could not be here. But it definitely builds character and increases my strength."

Although Lucien says she receives tremendous support from her co-workers and husband, Melvin, her biggest fan is her 11-year-old son, Elijah.

"Elijah loves going to rehearsal and knows all the lines before I do," she said.

In January, Lucien was invited to sing "God Bless America" at Tennessee's Inaugural Ball.

"Oh that was an honor," she said. "It was such a great night. Everybody there



I realized that if you're singing a song, it's still a story and you're telling it to people in your vocal performance. You can't do one without the other.

was excited and ready to celebrate. It was an emotional moment, even in the middle of the song, when I considered why I was there and what my reason for singing was."

Despite decades of being on stage, Lucien said she still gets butterflies when she steps into the spotlight. "My nerves are on end in the beginning always, just thinking about the big crowd and anticipating," she said. "Even now, I can't focus on the people. I put myself in an alone place because that's when I sing the best. Just pretend no one is there, and just be Jewel and sing."

Whether she's acting in front of a

sold-out crowd or singing alone in the shower, Lucien said there is one constant—her faith.

"It's always a part of everything I do," she said. "I couldn't do anything without that."

Lucien's new CD will be available in July on iTunes, Napster and Rhapsody.





on Jackson's music career, like so many others, started with a broken heart. But add a Waffle House to the equation and you've got a story befitting a guy who goes by "Trailer Park."

"To get through college, I stayed at the Waffle House. I would get coffee and put on my headphones and study," he said, "and there was this regular that came in, and of course I fell in love with her and she rejected me."

So, at 21, he picked up a guitar and started writing songs, teaching himself to play with the familiar melodies and tempos of the Beatles.

Now, just five years later, Jackson, a nurse in the pediatric intensive care unit, has recorded an album, "Green Apples," and plays gigs all over the Southeast.

And there's more to Jon Jackson than just music. He's a nurse and a painter, and he's even wanted to be your congressman—but more on that later.

Jackson says his music is "a niche thing, not everybody likes it," but it would be impossible to squeeze it into a genre. There are elements of classic coun-

JOE HOWELI

try, rock, ragtime, folk and bluegrass, but the common thread is Jackson's guitar, soulful voice and insightful lyrics.

The title track "Green Apples" is a humorous take on the Biblical story of Adam and Eve ("You can't see it 'til you taste the truth,") "The Sycamore Tree" is a nature ballad ("Stars are out, there ain't a cloud in sight. It's a Carolina moon on a Tennessee night,") and "Comin' Home" is about murder and jailbreak ("I walked into the kitchen, picked up a knife, and I asked her if her [nagging] was worth her life.")

Once Jackson had his heartbreak catalyst, songwriting comes easy.



After finishing a late night shift in the PCCU at Children's Hospital, Jon Jackson returns home to drink a cup of coffee with his earth dwelling gnome friend.



Jon Jackson has a special bond with Violet Mai Toler whom he holds nightly when working. Toler recently received a heart transplant.

"When I force it, it's so contrived and cliché and there's no emotional connection. Usually it's done in 15 minutes and is the easiest thing in the world. I'm just waiting for songs to show up," he said. "I sit down...and I just start strumming, putting chords together. Then I hum a melody. Eventually words will start coming and I just go from there. I wish I had more time for songwriting. That hook is deep, and it hurts when I can't write."

Katherine Embree, R.N., who works in the Cardiology Clinic and sang with Jackson on "The Sycamore Tree," describes him as an "old soul."

"He's had so much life experience. He is not afraid to write what he feels. He doesn't care what people think. He's doing this because he loves it," she said.

Spend five minutes with Jackson, and it's evident he was meant for songwriting. He has a slow, measured way of speaking that shows how much he values his words, and he is earnest, with every word coming straight from his heart. He has a shy smile and doesn't make a lot of eye contact but has the kind of piercing eyes that make you think he sees things the rest of us can't. And if he has an instrument in his hand, he's playing it.

Embree and Jackson first met on 8 South, and he later shared his CD with her.

"I was nervous to listen to it because I was afraid I would hate it. But when I did listen to it, I loved it," she recalled. "He spits songs out like gum balls, gum balls that don't lose flavor after 10 seconds."

Although Jackson has never shared his music with the patients he cares for, his artistic temperament makes him a perfect caregiver. He formed an especially strong connection with a 2-month-old patient who was awaiting a heart transplant and says that she made the long night shift so much easier.

"I love this kid," he said. "Sometimes you just connect with patients for no reason. So I look forward to going in, and I just hold her all night."

Jackson said he was elated when she received a new heart and was able to go home healthy.

"It's really rewarding for me because I've been her nurse this whole time waiting for the thing to happen, and honestly, I sort of expected it to end sadly," he said.

The nickname isn't a joke; Jackson really does live in a trailer—a doublewide with a porch littered with lawn chairs that sits on a wooded and rolling stretch of land. He calls it serendipity that his landlord had converted a barn on the property into a recording studio.

"I was so nervous in the studio. I hadn't played out in front of people more than two times," he recalled. "But the knocks you take are nothing compared to the benefits. It just changed who I was. I realized I was a free person, not constrained by anything but myself."

He said all it took to become a recording artist was a little bit of courage.

"I had the time and money, and I knew I would wake up in 20 years and be glad I had done this," he said.

"Trailer Park 4 Congress"

Jackson used the same logic last summer when he decided to run for Congress. Instead of a Waffle House and broken heart, that all started with a pocket Constitution he got for Christmas.

"I read it in bed at night, and it just inspired me," he said. He realized the country's founders meant for politics to be in the hands of its citizens, not career politicians.

So on the slogan "Trailer Park 4 Congress," Jackson ran for the U.S. House of Representatives seat from Tennessee's 5th District. He received 5,433 votes, beating the other independent candidate by a little over 2,000 votes.

The campaign will probably be best remembered for its videos. "I had no script and nothing really to say. The idea was to be transparent, but a lot of people just thought I was an idiot," he said with a laugh.

The videos are a far cry from the image of other politicians, but he does introduce the public to his simple philosophy about politics—that anybody can do it.

"There are two things that hold people





(above) Jackson ran for the U.S. House of Representatives seat from Tennessee's 5th District. He received 5,433 votes. (left) Jackson has recorded an album, "Green Apples," and plays gigs all over the Southeast. He plays a variety of instruments and is known for his songwriting and distinctive voice.



Jon Jackson checks on Violet Mai Toler, a child who recently received a heart transplant and is recovering from the surgery.

back—fear and laziness. With this, it was fear. What will people think? What will my family think? But I realized that wasn't a good enough reason."

And, echoing his logic for beginning his recording career, he imagines a day in the future: "I knew I would wake up in 10 years and be glad I had done it," he said.

Connected by creativity

Jackson works 12-hour night shifts three days a week, the perfect schedule for playing local gigs and touring. He is a regular at Norm's River Road House and has played at the Basement and 3rd & Lindsley, and he was recently able to engineer an eight-day stretch that allowed him to play shows in East Tennessee and North Carolina.

When he isn't on the road, Jackson has a new project, a stop-motion music video for the song "Untitled." He built a studio in the trailer's second bedroom and painstakingly painted a field of sunflowers and blue sky, pausing to take thousands of photos. When the photos are played in sequence, the flowers appear to grow.

"I always wanted to do a music video because when I think about songs and lyrics, I think about images," he said. "I paint for eight hours a night and only get two seconds of video, but it is so awesome to watch. It's a great idea and it's working, which is incredible."

It's even more incredible that Jackson taught himself to paint, just like he taught himself to play guitar.

"When I was a kid, I drew stick figures," he recalled. "I paid a guy to come and paint at first, but I knew I could do it myself. I would go to sleep and see in perspective, and then I could draw in perspective. There was just something that clicked. It's the same with music. I go to sleep and hear melodies and songs clearer."

Jackson said the many threads of his

life—music, nursing, public service, art are all connected by creativity.

"Creativity is the core and the spark. That's the chase for me," he said. "A lot of people say they're not creative, but that's [wrong]. Everyone has it in them. You just puncture through this reality and touch something."

Jackson's CD is available on iTunes or CD Baby. Visit *www.myspace.com/trailer parkjackson* for info on upcoming shows.

The music video for the song "Untitled" can be seen at *www.mc.vanderbilt. edu/houseorgan/TPJv.htm*



A local live performance of his music. Jackson works 12-hour night shifts three days a week, which allows him to perform around the area. He is a regular at Norm's River Road House.

watching the wheels continued

are so obliviously happy to be walking mud baths.

And while the yard is on my mind, which it is a lot of the time because I'm CONSTANTLY having to deal with wiping dog paws, I also plan to notice the beautiful green hues of a Tennessee spring, the flowers that bring bursts of color to the yard, and the way the sunlight dances through the trees. I'm not going to dwell on the fact that the garden hose is all tangled up again.

"How can this possibly happen?" I won't ask.

Under the New Plan, I realize it is pointless to waste valuable moments of my only life on earth fuming about the fact that I can carefully put the hose away, and over the course of a few days while it is just LYING THERE with NOBODY touching it, a curious kind of Hose Physics takes place in which it gets all kinked up and TOTALLY TANGLED to the point that it takes, like, FIVE MINUTES to get enough water flowing through it to water those beautiful flowers that, in my new, positive state, I'm remaining focused upon.

"Doesn't this violate some Newtonian, or possibly Einsteinian, law?" I won't ask.

And speaking of the music of the spheres, under the New Plan, every clear evening, I will spend at least a couple of minutes looking up at the night sky, lost in the wonder that is the cosmos in which we all live. I pledge to cultivate a sense of wonder that begins at the moment I see the first star of the night and doesn't end until, as I stroll across the backyard to get a better look at the unworldly glimmer of the planet Venus against a violet-blue firmament, I fall in a HUGE FREAK-ING HOLE that my STUPID DOGS have dug out here apparently for the express purpose of making me break my leg in the dark.

"I feed them, I take them to get their shots so they will stay healthy, I worry about them when we are away during a thunderstorm, and this is how they repay me—by trying to snap my leg in two while I'm trying to enjoy a minute or two of peace here in the yard?" I won't ask.

Yessir, under the New Plan, if I really work at it, someday I may be able to be as successful at effortless happiness, at live-in-the-moment joy, as—well, as those stupid dogs whose paws I'll be wiping again any moment now.

House Organ online is your passport to employee information

If you missed *House Organ* at the newsstands in April, there was a pretty good reason: the April issue, which was our third annual April Fool's edition, was online-only. Check it out by clicking on the "Back Issues" button at *www.mc.vanderbilt.edu/houseorgan/.*

(The "Back Issues" section is also the way take another look at those great looking dogs and cats from Pets of the Medical Center issue in February or find a story from last year.)

The *House Organ* Web site is also your passport to employee information. You can to find links to:

- The Faculty/Staff Discount Program (Perqs)
- The latest in Health and Wellness information, including what's going on at Health Plus
- The VMC Event Calendar, which has daily information about events across the Medical Center
- The main news page for the Medical Center, to keep up with happenings at VMC
- The VUMC House Organ Facebook page
- The Vanderbilt Employees' Credit Union

