



Professional Issues

Doctors make sweet music with VA orchestra, chorus

Volunteers nationwide trade their white coats for tuxes and give concerts that foster patriotic pride.

Damon Adams

AMNEWS STAFF

SOMETIMES, A DOCTOR CAN'T ENJOY a concert because of an emergency. Even if he plays in the orchestra.

The VA-National Medical Musical Group was performing a concert in Russia when someone offstage motioned to the cardiologist. During



DR. WAHBY

"The Stars and Stripes Forever," the cardiologist put down his trombone, got up, walked off and checked out a person backstage.

"I looked up, and he just left me there," said Victor Wahby, MD, PhD,

music director and conductor of the musical group.

That happens when a symphony orchestra features physicians as singers and musicians. They're the backbone of the VA-National Medical Musical Group, a chorus and orchestra made up of health care professionals. Physicians, nurses, dentists and other health professionals volunteer their voices and instrumental skills to perform patriotic concerts here and abroad.

"Certainly, professional musicians may be more polished, but they often lack the enthusiasm of the gifted amateur," said Las Vegas neurologist Morton Hyson, MD, who sings bass.

The group has a core of 200 health practitioners who dabble in the arts on the side. Physicians make up roughly half of the group, doing everything from conducting to playing oboe to singing tenor. Some work in the VA health system while others practice in groups or in teaching hospitals.

The doctors strike up the band on Flag Day in the nation's capital and for Veterans Day concerts elsewhere in the country. Their next gigs are Nov. 6 at the Cathedral at Chapel Hill in Atlanta and Nov. 11 at Coral Ridge Church in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

They have played with Shirley Jones, Pat Boone and Judy Collins, performed for the Reagan, first Bush and Clinton administrations at the White House, and appeared at Carnegie Hall and before the pope at the Vatican. They typically make an annual jaunt to one or more foreign countries and have played in France, China and Australia.

Not too shabby for a bunch of white coats who sport black tuxes on the side.

"The idea of a doctor playing music has always fascinated people. It shouldn't. Music is an art, and medicine is an art. Timing is everything in