As a humble dermatologist and music lover, I am most honoured to be asked by my senior colleague and friend Dr. L.Y. Chong to write something interesting about Music and Medicine, the two big Ms in my life: one my career, the other my favourite hobby. Actually to be a musician (professionally) is much harder to achieve than a medical doctor. To be a doctor, you don't need to be a genius although it helps, but music demands a talented mind, especially helpful if you happen to be a genius or at least somebody approaching that calibre. Music helps us to relax and immerse ourselves in its artistry, experiencing the emotion and to be touched by its inner feelings. It is God's gift to mankind. I know a number of eminent surgeons preferring to use some music as a background when they embark on difficult operations or using music to relax their patients during operation. Talking about musical instruments, the best is usually costly, e.g. the Italians make the best violins in general and the French interestingly make the best violin bows. For pianos, the best is Bozendorfer (Austria); Steinways (USA or German made); or Fazioli (Italian). Bozendorfer has innate naturalness and sweetness about it, but the big models can also sound wonderfully powerful, classy and charming. It seems able to communicate inner feeling better than the Steinways whereas the big Steinways are more powerful with more extrovert personality, therefore more suitable as a concert piano used in big concert halls. Steinways also have a brighter tone than Bozendorfer. Therefore some famous pianists like to use Bozendorfer as self use but use Steinways as concert instruments. The famous pianist Horowitz even travels with his favourite Steinway. Fazioli is also a famous Italian concert piano. In general, it sounds more powerful and resonant even more than the Steinways but needs a heavy hand to produce sound. Tone colour is neutral, quite sweet and has its own personality. Music is just like medicine, the more you experience it, the better you will get acquainted with it. Just like the more patients you see, the more experienced doctor you will make of you. Therefore, never give up a chance to hear more concerts or hear more CDs or more radio broadcasts. Radio 4 of RTHK FM 97.6 to 98.9 is a good place to start listening to classical music and moreover, it is free as long as you have a radio that can receive FM broadcast. If you like a particular composer, in addition to listening to more of his/her compositions, you can also learn a lot about his/her by studying their biographies or personal letters. Recently, I embark on reading Mozart’s letters to his father, mother and sister. It makes fascinating reading and let me know more about the man himself, how he thinks, what is his personal philosophy, the background of his contemporary fellows and so on. By doing this, I believe you can appreciate that composer’s music much more. As for Mozart, it is actually quite difficult NOT to like his music and I recommend this composer to anybody who is a beginner in classical music to listen to his music, for it will give a good general introduction to the classical music world. Mozart wrote all sorts of music including chamber, solo instrument, organs, concertos, symphonies, operas, etc. There is not a single repertoire that he didn’t venture into and excel in it.

What about musicians and medicine or medical people? History is full of interesting stories about these. For example, do you know that Tchaikovsky is a homosexual? In his time, which was orthodox Tsarist Russia, this was not permitted. Rumour had it that he had liaised with some of the Tsar’s relatives in sexual matters therefore he was eventually drawn to suicide. It was interesting to note that he did his best once to try to hide his homosexuality by marrying one of his students only to end his marriage in disaster and suffering mental breakdown as a result. On the other hand, everybody knew that Beethoven was not too friendly at times! Contemporary people found him quite abrupt and down right rude at times. It is only by advancement of modern medical science recently that by analyzing his skull bone, one finds that he actually suffered from chronic lead poisoning due to large amount of lead used in beverage containers, and water pipes in Beethoven’s time. No wonder the poor soul always complained to his physicians that he had constant bad headache, abdominal bloating and colic, in addition to neural damage causing permanent deafness. Yet despite all these difficulties and great personal agony, the man could still produce astonishing works of great beauty and majesty. The discovery of lead poisoning in Beethoven was recently made into a film documentary and aired in ATV when I watched it a couple of weeks ago. What about the association of medical men with musicians? Of course, there are good examples: one of these is the dedication of some of Brahms’s quartets to the great Austrian surgeon Billroth (of Billroth gastric surgery fame). Apparently, they were very good friends. The Rachmaninov 2nd piano concerto is one of the most romantic piano concertos ever written. The story had it that Rachmaninov
suffered mental depression after harsh criticism of his 1st symphony. It was through a kind and supportive psychiatrist friend’s therapy that he was able to recover completely from his mental illness and started to compose again. Hence he dedicated the 2nd piano concerto to this doctor friend as a sign of gratitude. In fact, the psychotherapy used by the good doctor was a simple yet effective phrase that he asked Rachmaninov to repeat 3 times each day to himself “I am the greatest composer of my time!!”

It would be nice to hear as many concerts as possible in one’s life time to enhance one’s cultural life. But in practicality, sometimes it is not possible due to busy clinical practice and sometimes we feel just too tired to go to concerts after a hard day’s work. Hence a good HiFi system is essential so one could hope to emulate or bring the concert hall experience to one’s home so to speak. The better your HiFi system, the better you should feel the experience about this real living concert performance. First, we must acquaint ourselves with the true sound of the instruments, Jazz bands or human voice. Therefore one should start by going to concerts to hear what a real instrument, or what Jazz band, or human voice sound like. Once you have the mental picture of the real thing, you should be able to make less mistakes by creating a genuine HiFi system that will approximate the real life experience.

Some rough guidelines are as follows:

1. One should spend more money on the source be it a CD player, tuner (for radio broadcast) or LPD (long playing disc) system because if you start with an inferior source, it would not be accurate because the signal will be amplified even worse than it already is down the HiFi chain, e.g. amplifier, cable and loudspeakers.

2. Hear as many prospective HiFi systems (within your budget) as possible before committing to buying. Therefore, go to HiFi Shows and hear friend’s HiFi systems. For examples, if you like Jazz, the 1st thing is to go to listen to the Jazz band live, buy a CD of the same performance and test the CD on the various prospective HiFi systems so you will be able to shortlist a few systems that closely match the real life sound experience. In that case you will not be too far wrong.

3. Talk to experienced friends, musicians, sound engineers (some of my best friends are recording engineers) to get an objective input so you can shop wisely.

4. In general, if you play your favourite CDs for a long period on your chosen system and do not feel tired, it is a good system because it encourages you to keep playing your favourite discs! I also sometimes tell my HiFi friends that if you feel emotionally connected to the music through your HiFi system, whether it is sad or happy, it is a good system for you and you only; never mind what other people say or think about your system because it is THE system you have “to live with” day and night! Just like living with your wife or girl friend.

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**Answer to Clinical Quiz**

**Radiographic Findings**

Bilateral renal shadows are enlarged. Multiple ring-shaped and curvilinear calcifications are present diffusely in both renal shadows.

**Diagnosis:**

Autosomal dominant polycystic renal disease.

Definitive diagnosis is established by ultrasound, which will show typical finding of multiple cysts of varying size in the enlarged kidneys. Ultrasound would also be able to detect complications of these cysts such as haemorrhage, infections, cyst wall calcifications and renal calculus disease.

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