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Sound Idea

Actor Alan Cumming tunes into music therapy for patients

Scottish actor Alan Cumming, who voices kilt-wearing, Braveheart-channeling Gutsy Smurf in the upcoming movie *The Smurfs*, made a special guest appearance this past April at the bedside of Sal, a patient undergoing chemotherapy at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York City. There, he performed songs as part of a music therapy program.

"It was humbling and intense," says Cumming, 46, also starring in the hit CBS series *The Good Wife*. He played an instrument called an ocean drum, which mimics the sound of crashing waves, as 52-year-old Sal sang gospel songs by Elvis Presley.

"His life had been turned upside down by his disease," says Cumming, "but here he was singing and chatting. For him, music therapy was a conduit to open up and look at things in a more inspirational way." Music therapy is used to ease patients' pain and anxiety and can also help reduce chemotherapy-related nausea and vomiting, according to the American Cancer Society. Over the past several decades, it has become a common part of comprehensive care at large cancer centers throughout the United States, including Memorial Sloan-Kettering.

Cumming and Sal were brought together by the N.Y.C.-based Gabrielle's Angel Foundation for Cancer Research (www.gabriellesangels.org), founded in 1996 by Denise Rich, a Grammy-nominated songwriter, after the death of her daughter from acute myelogenous leukemia. Gabrielle's Angel funds research for both conventional and integrative therapies for leukemia, lymphoma, and related cancers. Grant money from the foundation supports the music therapy program at Memorial Sloan-Kettering.

"I was really moved by what the organization was doing," says Cumming, who recently became an Angel Ambassador for the foundation. In that role, he will help raise awareness about the need for cancer research.

Cumming is looking forward to participating in music therapy again. "I didn't quite know what to expect," he says. "Lots of emotions well up at once. In a depressing place where people are so ill, here we were having a sing-along. It's the power of music on a basic level."

—Matt McMillen



Take a Shot

Amanda Peet campaigns for vaccine smarts

Amanda Peet and her husband, screenwriter David Benioff, weren't feeling very festive last Christmas. Their 10-month-old, Molly, had developed a horrible, hacking cough that spasmed through her body.

"We didn't know what it was," recalls the 2012 and *The Whole Nine Yards* star, 39, who's in Los Angeles to film the new NBC series *Bent*. "I would call my brother-in-law, who's an infectious disease specialist, and try to jam the phone up by her face as she was having a coughing fit." Finally, on Molly's fourth visit, her pediatrician decided to do a swab for pertussis (whooping cough), even though her symptoms didn't entirely fit the cold or flulike symptoms of this highly contagious respiratory tract infection.

The test came back positive. Baby Molly, who was too young to have received all the doses in the pertussis vaccine series, was the latest infant to develop the disease in what health experts call the largest whooping cough outbreak in California in decades. (A booster vaccine is now available for teens and adults to avoid passing the disease on to babies who haven't yet had all the shots.) More than 9,000 people in the state got pertussis in 2010, and at least 10—all infants under 3 months—died.

That terrified Peet, which is why she's working to promote August as National Immunization Awareness Month in partnership with Every Child by Two (ECBT; www.vaccinateyourbaby.org), an organization that works to improve childhood vaccination rates.

Like many new parents, Peet had read news stories about controversies surrounding childhood vaccines and was initially anxious when it came time to immunize her first baby. Coming from a family of doctors, Peet researched her decision extensively. Ultimately, she became so convinced of the importance of vaccines that she signed on as a spokesperson for ECBT.

Peet says many of the safety concerns have been addressed by the scientific community. "Don't listen to me," she says. "Listen to the science." —Gina Shaw

"Don't listen to me. Listen to the science," says Amanda Peet.



LEFT: JORDAN MATTER PHOTOGRAPHY; COURTESY OF EVERY CHILD BY TWO