



Cutting-edge musician enters the OR

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Dr. Cam Bowman, a Juno award-winning rock musician, may be using a different type of instrument as he begins his surgical residency, but he insists that both medicine and music will always be a major part of his life.

"I have played music since I can remember," says Bowman, fresh from directing the University of British Columbia medical school's spring gala for the third — and final — year. The gala was "a great way to finish medical school."

The school will be hard pressed to find someone as qualified to guide the event. Bowman learned piano by ear "at a very young age, playing what I was hearing on the radio. I wasn't interested in practising Royal Conservatory stuff."

Nurturing a dream to play in a band, he played throughout his school years in choirs, concerts and jazz bands. After a year of pre-med university courses, he joined a "green" rock band, playing keyboards, performing vocals and writing original songs. He later switched to The Revengers, which evolved into Barney Bentall and the Legendary Hearts. The band's members wrote their own rock music and after making a few demonstration tapes they decided it was time to create their first music video. They hired some film students for the job and even though the result was technically imperfect, it captured the ear of MuchMusic and earned ample airplay.

The group then persuaded Toronto manager Bernie Finkelman to take them on and, within a week, found themselves with a recording deal at Columbia Records. "We had been banging on that door for years and years to get a record deal," recalls Bowman. "We were just amazed."

He left university to enter "full-time musician land. I knew that I'd love to come back to medicine at some point, but I had to do this. It was an opportunity I couldn't let pass by." The band's first record went platinum and one song, *Something to Live For*, snagged the number one spot across Canada, earning a Juno award in 1988.

Hoping to build on the success of their debut album, the band produced their next record in the US, but it was less successful than the first. They self-produced a third album on Vancouver's tiny Keats Island, but it didn't fare well either. By 1994, the group was planning a fourth record and Bowman was turning 30. He made the "very tough decision" to leave the band, which had become "family" for 9 years, and return to university.

Worried that medical school wouldn't take him seriously, he shouldered a full course load at Simon Fraser University to complete his prerequisite courses and made it to medical school a year later.

For the first term he focused solely on his studies, avoid-



Courtesy of Cam Bowman

Melding art and medicine: Drs. Cam Bowman (left) and Andrew Seal

ing musical activities. In the winter of 1996, however, he joined the medical school choir, which needed a new artistic director to replace Gordon Horner, who was graduating that spring. Horner had started the spring gala 2 years earlier. At first Bowman was reluctant to take on the extra work, but Horner "wouldn't take no for an answer." He finally agreed, and began running weekly drop-in practices for 20 to 50 students who sang everything from Christmas carols to pop music. "It has been a wonderful experience," he says.

As artistic director for the gala, Bowman added live theatre, poetry, Chinese harp and flamenco dancing to the 3-hour show's eclectic lineup. Because of a lack of rehearsal space, the gala has to be "put together on paper" a few weeks before the event. There has never been a shortage of talent, and Bowman has never turned anyone away at his informal audition. The dress rehearsal takes place on the day of the show in UBC's acclaimed Chan Centre.

Despite the limited rehearsal time and Bowman's anxiety, "it has always gone without a hitch." The 1999 show featured 24 acts. Bowman credits the crew, all student volunteers, for its success. He is also grateful to Dr. Andrew Seal, associate dean of student affairs at the medical school, for encouraging artistic students to keep up their outside interests despite the academic workload.

During his residency program, Bowman says he will try to find time to sing with the medical school choir and compose — his favourite musical activity. "I'll never stop doing music," he says. ?