

Music as medicine

TunesWork aims to heal sick patients through song



Ann Roach, TunesWork's co-founder.

BY MOZES ZARATE / mozesz@newsreview.com

PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHELLE DELVYN SHIPLEY

"It's kind of like chocolate and peanut butter," Silcox said of their partnership. "I know the people who own these nursing homes, and you sing, and we could put something together."

Roach had been struggling to find work as a professional musician post-recession. "I really started to contemplate walking away from music," she said. "I was so discouraged. I think that's what prompted me to go into this workshop."

Now, Roach works full-time as a music therapist, curating personalized playlists, playing guitar and singing at patients' bedsides.

She said she sees the sorts of transformations from the documentary in her daily work. One patient was completely nonverbal and inattentive until hearing "Tuxedo Junction" by Glenn Miller.

"She looked straight into my eyes and had this look on her face, that look of surprise, and she held my gaze the entire song," Roach said. "Even though she couldn't communicate verbally, it's like she was saying, 'OK, I'm here. I've arrived. ... I know exactly what's going on.'"

In another instance, she said, her friend's father, who suffered from dementia, was able to sustain a 20-minute conversation with his daughter after being triggered by his playlist.

"I was providing the soundtrack for them to reconnect," she said.

Since its founding in 2016, TunesWork has raised more than \$100,000 to get music therapy programs into California hospitals, hospices and memory care facilities. On Saturday, Sept. 7, it will hold the West Coast Jam, its annual benefit concert.

For Roach, it comes back to the first time she saw *Alive Inside*.

"I knew from that point on that if I was going to continue in the music business, that it was going to be for healing," Roach said. "I really felt that if I had been given the gift of song, it could be used to help people." □

Check out the West Coast Jam benefit concert hosted by TunesWork at 7:30 p.m., Saturday, Sept. 7 at the McClellan Conference Center in Sacramento. Richard Elliot, Peter White and DW3 perform. Tickets are \$45-\$79. Learn more about TunesWork at tuneswork.org.

A particular scene from the documentary *Alive Inside* changed Mike Silcox and Ann Roach. In it, 92-year-old Henry Dryer, a nursing home patient who suffers from dementia—normally crouched over his wheelchair and barely responsive—is introduced to an iPod.

A nurse places the headphones over his ears and hits play. Dryer becomes wide-eyed and animated, muttering lyrics and dancing in his chair. He's interviewed afterward about his love for jazz singer Cab Calloway and sings "I'll Be Home For Christmas," one of his favorite tunes.

"I probably went through a half-box of Kleenex," Roach said.

Alive Inside, which won the Audience Award at the 2014 Sundance Film Festival, inspired TunesWork, a nonprofit that advocates for using live and recorded music as a form of medicine.

The effects of music on the brain and body are complex, Roach said. Between the melody, rhythm and instrumentation, there's a lot to compute. Researchers have found that the areas of the brain associated with memory and auditory functions are connected, but not only that.

"Those who suffer from aphasia and can't speak can often sing," Roach said. "The right kind of music can release opioids in the brain and [lower] pain and anxiety." And for those who've had major surgery, she said, music can often stabilize their heart rate at the right tempo.

"Plus, you can't overdose on music," she added.

Silcox, an insurance broker who specializes in memory care facilities, and Roach, a freelance musician who sings in the tribute band Steelin' Dan, met at a leadership conference in 2016.

"You can't overdose on music."

Ann Roach, singer, TunesWork co-founder

Did someone say *fried chicken?* (and bahn mi, and ramen)

Join us everyday for our multi-Asian inspired menu, and reserve for our Chef's Counter and Kaiseki dining experiences.

origami
ASIAN GRILL

4801 Folsom Blvd | Sacramento | 916.400.3075 | origamiasiangrill.com

Thai Food & gluten free options

THE COCONUT on T

Red Curry with Tofu & Veggies

Best of Sacramento
SN&R '18

Best Thai

10 BEERS ON TAP
HAPPY HOUR EVERYDAY: 4:30 - 6PM
\$4 BEERS, WINE & APPETIZERS

1110 T St. Sacramento, CA 95811 | 916-822-4665
Check **yelp** for daily **\$2 Beer Specials**

drunken noodle

~Midtown~
Powered by The Coconut
Thai Food & Gluten Free Options

\$2 BEER DAILY

2502 J St. Sacramento, CA | 916-447-1855