

"Play me something happy."

THE HEALING MEDICINE of James Jenkins and Body & Soul

BY JANET HERRICK • PHOTOS BY JENSEN HANDE

On a recent sunny Thursday afternoon an exotic sound was heard floating down the halls of St. Vincent's Medical Center.

"Is there a tuba on the loose?" one visitor asked. It was, in fact, a tuba softly playing George Gershwin's "Summertime." Yet the sound was so smooth and liquid it sounded as sultry as a bass saxophone—a sound quite different from the usual combination of intercoms, footsteps, wheeling trays and machines that go ping.

As it turns out this was not the first time there's been a tuba on the loose at St. Vincent's. James Jenkins has been here before...

"PLAY FOR ME, SON."

The first time Jenkins brought his tuba to St. Vincent's it was at his father's request, well before the birth of Body & Soul.

"My father had spent the last seven years of his life in and out of healthcare systems due to complications he suffered with diabetes," explains Jenkins. "Sometimes that required prolonged stays and it would get him down. During one of my visits he said, 'Why don't you bring your instrument in and play for me, son?'" Jenkins, a 20-year tenured musician, and, for 9 years, the principal tubist for the Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra—a man who has played for audiences from around the world—admitted this simple request made him a little nervous. It was a hospital, after all. Would it be



appropriate, he wondered?

"When I was assured it would be OK I brought my instrument in. I noticed right away what an amazing change it made, not just on my father, but also on the staff, other patients, and their visitors. After my father's passing I decided to pursue some kind of program to bring music and the arts into the healthcare system. That was how the seeds of Body & Soul were planted."

Jenkins' initial research found that well-established programs like this existed all across the country, but with a caveat that he sought to avoid: They were exclusive to just one healthcare facility.

"I wanted to be able to bring a diversified group of artists and musicians together to serve a diversified group of healthcare facilities in the community. This became our mission statement—'Enhancing the quality of healthcare through the arts, and enhancing the arts through service.'"

A CONCEPT THAT CATCHES ON QUICKLY.

Jenkins found that his idea struck a nerve in the community. Any healthcare facility he spoke to was ready to participate at the word "go" and likewise, musicians and artists were ready and waiting in the wings. Thus, Body & Soul — The Art of Healing, Inc. was formed as a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization just four years ago. Using other programs as templates, Jenkins and his board developed programs to suit the area's needs. Since then, hundreds of performances have been given in facilities all around the area in places like Community Hospice, Baptist Medical Center, Ronald McDonald House and Mayo Clinic. Some of the participating arts groups include Jenkins' own JSO, the Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens, the St. John's River City Band and the Ritz Theatre. "There are many more," says Jenkins. "We probably do over 500 events a year with around 200 artists participating. It always depend on the size and the scope of the venue, but we try to accommodate as many requests as possible."

The most intimate program, Room Service—inspired directly by his experience with his father—was the very service Jenkins was providing this Thursday afternoon.

Leslie Norman, a St. Vincent's Auxiliary Volunteer, greets and escorts Body & Soul performers around the facility when they come on Thursdays (her counterpart Clarissa Chandler does so on Tuesdays), and this day she leads Jenkins up to one of the critical care units. She is excited. "I've been working with Body & Soul for over a year and I've not had the opportunity to hear James play. I have heard many other musicians come in playing violin or guitar, and just recently we had some vocalists come in to sing and that was just marvelous. Today will be wonderful, though. I know

it will be for James.”

BACK TO WALKING THE BEAT.

Jenkins limited his participation as a musician in the beginning, choosing instead to stay on the administrative end of things. It was paramount to him that Body & Soul not be perceived as a venue for him to grandstand, so in the beginning he hung back. But once the program found its sea legs and demand grew, and certainly after he was awarded the 2002 Cultural Council “Outstanding Individual” Arts Award, Jenkins decided to once again step out and perform.

Norman leads Jenkins to his first stop of the day—a special care unit on the third floor. These are units where patients require 24-hour monitoring. The nurses’ station is situated in the middle of the space so all patient rooms are visible. These patients are quite ill and one wonders if a tuba is appropriate here. But as Jenkins begins, and the opening strains of “Amazing Grace” and “Holy, Holy, Holy” tumble out like rich spun silk, the whole dynamic of the ward changes. It is as much an intimate music lesson revealing the remarkable range of a tuba—an often stereotyped instrument in the mind of the public—as it is a moment to pause to the sound of notes so spiritual.

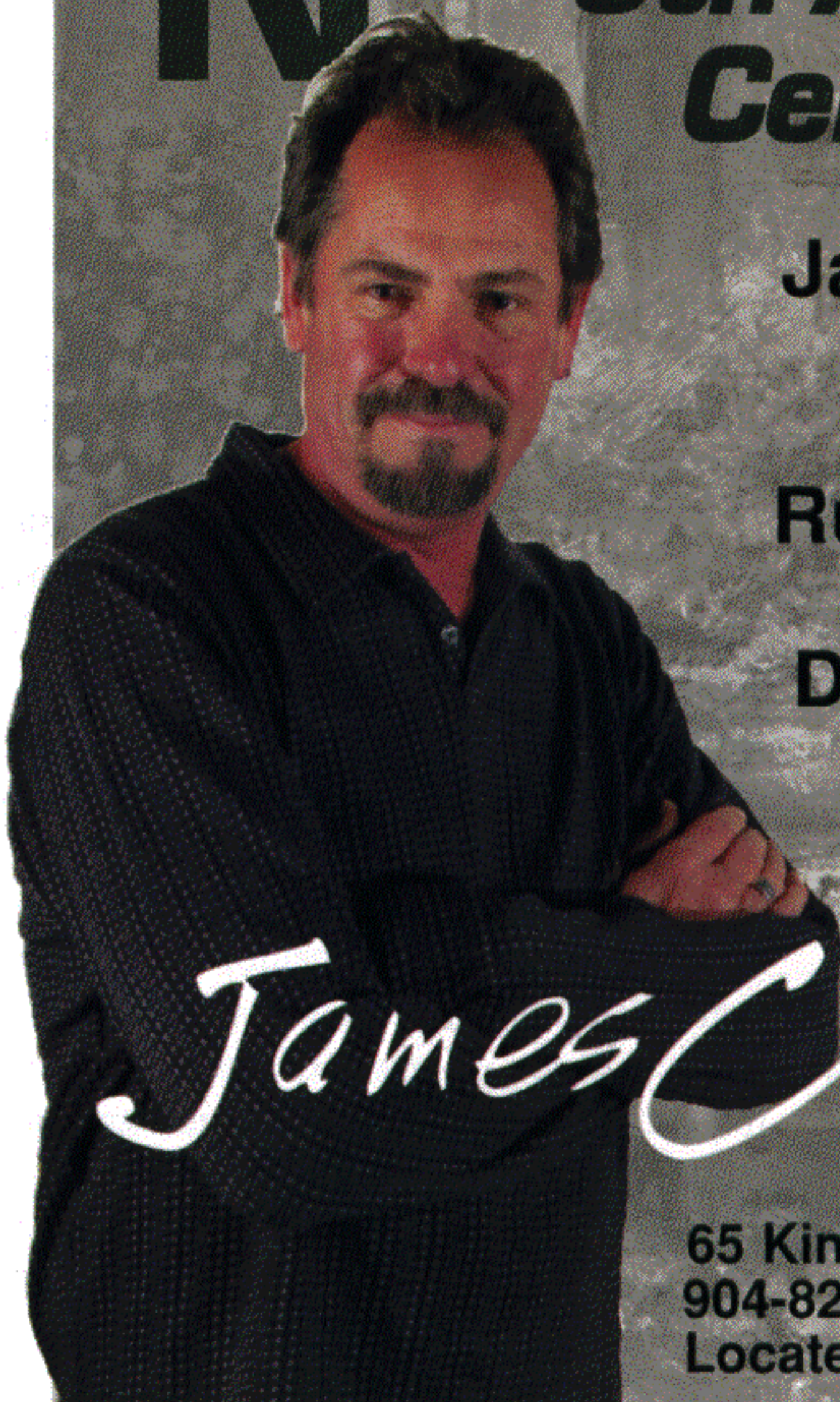
“Hymns are one of the most requested forms of music by patients,” says Norman. “In this critical care unit, music is provided for ambiance since most of the patients here are taking treatments. In the next ward he will interact more with patients and chat with them.”

Jenkins is a man with a smile that is as generous as it is genuine. His demeanor is warm and calming. But as he moves to the next ward on the next floor up, a shadow briefly crosses his face. He admits, “This always makes me think of my dad.” The smile quickly returns when he steps into the room of an older lady confined to bed rest. Norman does the introductions and asks, “What would you like to hear today? Something soothing? Something spiritual?”

“Play me something happy,” the patient asks with her small voice. Norman nods knowingly to Jenkins and takes her leave to the hall and Jenkins begins his Room Service performance. Soon the small voice grows larger as she begins to sing along. Jenkins praises her singing and says, “Hey, let do another! See if you know the words to this!” As the

continued page 32

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continued from page 21

Body & Soul

singer joins the musician in a quiet but peppy version of "When The Saints Come Marching In" Norman smiles in the hall.

"This is how it often is, not always, but often the performer speaks to the patient, and as they interact it brings the patient up to a whole other level. It is very inspiring each time."

THE EVIDENCE OF HEALING IS THERE.

Many accounts have been documented of patients responding favorably to Body & Soul's art and music therapy, from significant boosts in spirit to claims of being drawn from the depths of a coma to follow the sounds of music to the surface.

Next door to St. Vincent's Medical Center at St. Catherine's Labouré (pronounced 'la boor RAY') Manor, a skilled nursing facility, nurse-practitioner Germina Rio conducted a 16-week scientific study of Body & Soul and the effect of the program on patients. The results of the study revealed that participants moved from measurable states of depression to increased and sustained states of wellness, more evidence that lifting the spirit encourages the body and mind to follow.

ACCESS IS KEY.

"The success of the program is tied directly to patient access," explains Jenkins. "The more folks we can access in as many places the more we have a chance to facilitate healing, or, as in the case of those like my father or those in hospice situations, it becomes an increased quality of life and comfort issue."

Jenkins explains Body & Soul offers many programs beyond Room Service, which is specifically designed to link strolling minstrels with patients who are unable to leave their rooms. For more mobile patients, programs like Arts in Action provides music, theatre and dance performances in public spaces inside the healthcare facility such as a lobby or auditorium, while Community Ticket offers free or reduced rates to performances off-site. There is also C.A.P. (Children At Play) that allows child patients a chance to hear and play orchestral and acoustic instruments.

Programs that involve artwork include Helping Hands, where patients participate in art workshops as well as receive demonstrations of art techniques. The Snap-Shots program provides patients over age 10 with disposable cameras to capture their healthcare experience on film, which is later displayed. Lastly, Art in Public Places brings



the artwork of a featured Florida artist to the public walls of healthcare facilities from designated facility galleries to cafeteria walls.

THE NEXT HORIZON.

While thoroughly pleased with the success of Body & Soul to date, Jenkins wants to move forward to his next set of goals. He says, "We are currently looking for new forms of funding which involve some potential grants. Right now we are funded by donations and by the healthcare facilities that hire us. That helps to pay administrative costs and pay our musicians and artists an honorarium. It is small compared to what they can make in the private sector, but this helps to round out the giving experience for them."

Back in the room of the now beaming patient on St. Vincent's fourth floor, Jenkins brings his private concert to a close and thanks her for sharing her lovely voice. The sunlight briefly ducks behind a cloud and, as if responding to the mood, Jenkins closes with "How Great Thou Art" as he leaves the room. He moves on down the hall leaving joy in his wake as he continues his quest to help heal bodies one soul at a time.

For information about Body & Soul — The Art of Healing, Inc www.bodyand-souljax.com or 874-8680.

