

Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain

On April 8, 2008 over 800 faculty members, students, health care professionals, and community members joined together to celebrate the 6th Anniversary of the Center for Bioethics. This event combined the Herbert G. Cohen, MD Memorial Lecture in Neuroscience, sponsored by the Fanny and Stephen Rosenak Foundation with our 6th Anniversary celebration. Rhoda Cohen and her son Mark have been loyal and generous supporters of the Series in Neuroscience.

Dr. Oliver Sacks, the renowned author and neurologist, discussed his most recent book, *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain*. Oliver Sacks is Professor of Neurology and Psychiatry at Columbia University and recently appointed Columbia University Artist. He is best known for his neurological case studies, including *The Man who Mistook his Wife for a Hat*, *Awakenings*, and *An Anthropologist on Mars*. *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain* joins the list of case studies. Dr. Sacks' work has been honored by the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. He is a frequent contributor to the *New Yorker* and the *New York Review of Books*, as well as many medical journals.

Dr. Sacks discussed the ways that music can move us to the heights or depths of emotion – from transcendent joy to deep sorrow. Music can persuade us to buy something, or remind us of our first date. It can lift us out of depression when nothing else can; it can get us dancing to its beat. What makes music so irresistible? Citing the latest neuroscientific research and many clinical examples, Dr. Sacks examined why humans are a musical species, how music is processed in many different areas of the brain, and how music can be used therapeutically in conditions ranging from Alzheimer's disease to aphasia, and Parkinson's disease.

Following his presentation, Dr. Sacks answered questions from members of the audience who have found music therapy to be highly beneficial as well as from those who found the notion puzzling. Dr. Sacks said that in many cases music therapy had led patients to overcome barriers and boundaries when contemporary medicine alone had proved inadequate. He told incredible stories of people with dementia and various debilitating neurological disorders who have found that music allows them to function more fully in their lives. He cited cases of patients who were paralyzed but were able to move once music was played. Other people in the later stages of dementia have been able to remember words to songs and to perform in choirs, even though they could not remember how to get onto a stage. Even in his own life, he said, music therapy has played a profound role in helping him cope and recover from different injuries.

Dr. Sack's examination of the power of music on the human spirit provided both delightful and informative insights into the relationship between the brain and

music. It was an extraordinary journey into the wonder and magic that is music and a great way to celebrate anniversary and the life of a distinguished surgeon, Dr. Herbert Cohen.