Alzheimer's sufferers could improve their memory by listening to their favorite music

We all know the feeling: a golden oldie comes blaring over the radio and suddenly we're transported back — to a memorable high-school dance, or to that perfect afternoon on the beach with friends. But what is it about music that can evoke such vivid memories?

By mapping the brain activity of a group of subjects while they listened to music, a researcher at the University of California, Davis, now thinks he has the answer: The region of the brain where memories of our past are supported and retrieved also serves as a hub that links familiar music, memories and emotion.

The discovery may help to explain why music can elicit strong responses from people with Alzheimer's disease, said the study's author, Petr Janata, associate professor of psychology at UC Davis' Center for Mind and Brain. The hub is located in the medial prefrontal cortex region — right behind the forehead — and one of the last areas of the brain to atrophy over the course of the disease.

“What seems to happen is that a piece of familiar music serves as a soundtrack for a mental movie that starts playing in our head. It calls back memories of a particular person or place, and you might all of a sudden see that person’s face in your mind’s eye,” Janata said. “Now we can see the association between those two things – the music and the memories.”

His study, “The Neural Architecture of Music-Evoked Autobiographical Memories,” is published online in the journal Cerebral Cortex and will appear in the journal’s print version later this year.

Earlier work of Janata’s had documented that music serves as a potent trigger for retrieving memories. In order to learn more about the mechanism behind this phenomenon, he enrolled 13 UC Davis students into a new study.

While his subjects listened to excerpts of 30 different tunes through headphones, Janata recorded their brain activity using functional magnetic resonance imaging, or MRI. To assure the best chance that students would associate at least some of the tunes with memories from their past, he chose songs randomly from “top 100” charts from years when each subject would have been 8 to 18 years old.

After each excerpt, the student responded to questions about the tune, including whether it was familiar or not, how enjoyable it was, and whether it was associated with any particular incident, episode or memory.

Immediately following the MRI session, students completed a survey about the content and vividness of the memories that each familiar tune had elicited.

Patients with Alzheimer’s Disease could slow the relentless course of the disease by listening to their favorite songs, a new study suggests. Photo: GETTY

Continued on Page 7
We all have little secrets that we may not readily share with others. My secret was the movie, Pollyanna, which is still one of my favorites!

For those of you unfamiliar with the movie, it was a Disney production released in 1960 and its characters were portrayed by some of Hollywood’s best-known actors. It is a beautifully produced movie, as one would expect from Disney, and takes place in the late 1800s, so the costumes, lifestyles and scenery are fascinating.

A young Hayley Mills stars as the orphan, Pollyanna, who is sent to live with her wealthy, aloof and childless Aunt Polly (Jane Wyman), upon the death of Pollyanna’s missionary father. Pollyanna is relegated to a tiny bedroom high up in Aunt Polly’s mansion, but the room delights her because she has never had her very own bedroom.

Pollyanna is the consummate optimist and she shares The Glad Game, which she learned from her father, with the citizens of her new town. The Glad Game was meant to teach Pollyanna how to find something good in every situation, no matter how difficult, turning lemons into lemonade.

Toward the end of the movie, Pollyanna, and those who love her (even the cranky Mrs. Snow, played by Agnes Moorhead), are faced with a crisis that threatens to replace The Glad Game with despair. I won’t tell you the ending, but it is a wonderful, “feel good” movie that is great for kids of all ages.

Why is it my favorite? Primarily because I’m an optimist, which is also why I love my work.

I know how hard it is for so many of you, struggling to care for your loved one in the best way you know how. Money is scarce, time is even more scarce and uninterrupted sleep practically unheard of. The person you adore is slowly changing before your eyes until they don’t even know you. How can one find hope in this situation?

Just like in The Glad Game, we sometimes must search for the good in a situation. That is why, for example, the Alzheimer Resource Center’s mission statement is to “strive to lighten the burden and improve the quality of life for families devastated by Alzheimer’s disease through counseling, support services, research and hope.”

The Brain Bank program, which we administer through the State of Florida, as well as the huge amount of research being done on dementia worldwide gives us reason to hope that a cure or, at the least, more effective treatments, are just around the corner. That may be scant solace to those of you in the thick of care giving, but it is, nevertheless, something to hope for.

You will also notice that the articles in this issue of our newsletter are also about hope and the power a loving caregiver has to improve the life as well as the symptoms of their loved one.

Hope is what keeps us going, even when times are tough. Maybe Pollyanna had it right all along.

Warmest regards,

Nancy Squillacioti
Executive Director
Upcoming Events

Black Tie from the Waist High
Charity Auction
Friday, September 25, 2009
6:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.
Maison and Jardin, Altamonte Springs

The Alzheimer Resource Center, Inc. is celebrating our 25th year of service dedicated to providing education and support services for those families who care for loved ones suffering from Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias. Our focus is on the “forgotten victim,” the caregiver, coping with unending responsibilities as well as isolation, depression and stress.

This annual fund-raising event is crucial to the agency and its ability to continue assisting caregivers in the community. Come bid on sky box tickets for Magic game donated by Mayor Buddy Dyer or “a massage a month for a year.” How about dinner and a limo ride for eight? This year’s auction will be hosted again by Jenelle Taylor from Gala Gals and includes music, gourmet sit-down dinner, appetizers, beverages and a cash bar as well as amazing auction items focusing on “Opportunities & Experiences.” We anticipate 150 attendees - tickets are on sale now - so don’t wait!

Corporate tables of eight start at $500 and other sponsorships are available! Unusual silent and live auction items may still be donated. For more information contact Lorraine M. Gismondi, Development Manager, at 407-843-1910, ext. 303.

16th Annual Caregiver Educational Conference
Saturday, November 7th  - 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
St. Margaret Mary, Winter Park

Dr. Garrett Riggs, Assistant Prof. of Neurology & Medical Education
Dr. Robert Cohen, Clinical Neuropsychology
Dr. Craig Curtis, Medical Director at Compass Research

Contact ARC for available CEU’s.
Please see insert for information and registration.

CAREGIVER WORKSHOP
“How to Communicate When Logic Doesn’t Work”
Saturday, September 12th
Registration:
9:30 a.m - 10:00 a.m.
Workshop:
10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Osceola Council on Aging
700 Generation Point
Kissimmee, FL 34744

The workshop is free but seating is limited. RSVP by Monday, September 7th to Jerry Hamilton 407-843-1910 ext. 304. Sponsored by:

CAREGIVER WORKSHOP
“How to Communicate When Logic Doesn’t Work”
Saturday, December 5th
Registration:
9:30 a.m - 10:00 a.m.
Workshop:
10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Arden Courts,
Alzheimer’s Assisted Living
1057 Willa Springs Drive
Winter Springs, FL 32708

The workshop is free but seating is limited. RSVP by Monday, November 30th to Jerry Hamilton 407-843-1910 ext. 304. Sponsored by:
CHRIS’ CORNER:

Maximize multiple goals in the estate planning process

Christopher Burns, CFP®
CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™

Many clients seek to maximize multiple goals during the estate planning process. This idea is appropriate for a client who wants to: Minimize the burden of estate taxes, create an income tax deduction now, take care of their family, add a layer of liability protection for the family, and meet their philanthropic goals.

The idea uses a Limited Liability Company (LLC) and a Grantor Charitable Lead Annuity Trust (LLC-GCLAT). The client set up a family investment LLC which owns cash, marketable securities, income producing assets and life insurance. At inception, the client owns 100% of the member interest in the LLC.

The client makes gifts of some LLC interests to a Grantor Charitable Lead Annuity Trust (GCLAT). The client gets an immediate income tax deduction equal to the present value of the gift to charity.

The family LLC is managed by the client or other friendly party so that its taxable income is minimized. The LLC makes distributions to the charitable beneficiary from the LLC’s.

After the implementation of the GCLAT, the client may make one of three choices:

1. The client decides to keep the remainder interest (all money returns to the client) at the end of the trust term.
2. The client decides to make a gift of the remainder interest during the GCLAT term to a grantor trust.
3. The client decides to sell his right to the remainder interest in the GCLAT.

If the third sale option is chosen, the sale price is based on the value of the remainder interest. The sale could be made to family members through another trust using an installment note or a one time gift from the grantor (client).

After the GCLAT interest, the client will have been able to:

1. Transfer assets to family-estate and gift tax free
2. Reduce his current income tax burden
3. Support his favorite charity

To find out how this or any other idea may apply to your financial plan please feel free to contact Chris Burns, CFP® at 407-389-1122.
Want to help the Alzheimer Resource Center without spending an additional dime out of your own pocket? Then make sure to dine at the Columbia Restaurant located in Celebration, Florida during the month of September.

During the month of September, Columbia Restaurant will donate 5% of all guests’ lunch and dinner checks to local charitable organizations CHOSEN by their customers. All you have to do is enjoy an amazing meal at the Columbia Restaurant located in Celebration, Florida and select The Alzheimer Resource Center on the ballot provided by your server. That’s it! Then 5% of your bill will be donated to our organization! If you have any questions, please call 407-843-1910.

IN HONOR/MEMORY OF:

IN MEMORY OF:
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Patricia Baranowski
Edward Browne
Helen Cagle
Rose Carlo
Donald Carpenter
John Cather
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WITH GRATITUDE:

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Ray Rauch
Seward Jones
Ginger Griffith
Jody Blaylock, UCF Intern
Mallory Friedman, UCF Intern
Individuals with Alzheimer’s disease who have a closer relationship with their caregiver — especially when the caregiver is a spouse — may have a slower progression of cognitive and functional symptoms, according to research published online June 29 in the Journal of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences.

Maria C. Norton, Ph.D., of Utah State University in Logan, and colleagues analyzed data from 167 people with Alzheimer’s disease and their caregivers. Participants were examined every six months for up to six visits; caregivers responded to a relationship closeness survey and patients were tested for symptom progression and functional impairment.

The researchers found that patients who had higher levels of closeness with their caregivers, and those whose caregivers were spouses, had slower cognitive decline. The effect of closer relationships on patients’ functional and cognitive declines was seen even after adjustment for potential confounders. In addition, the authors note, better relationship closeness had an increased effect when the caregiver was a spouse.

“It is conceivable that relationship closeness may reflect caregiver strategies that flexibly adapt to the needs of the person with Alzheimer’s disease, encouraging, when appropriate, participation in cognitively and socially stimulating activities, which help promote sustained functioning,” Norton and colleagues conclude. “Conversely, less close caregivers may experience more negative stress from the burden of care provision to a person with whom they feel more distant, especially if the caregiver has little understanding of what to expect as dementia progresses.”

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The surveys revealed that, on average, a student recognized about 17 of the 30 excerpts, and of these, about 13 were moderately or strongly associated with an autobiographical memory. Moreover, tunes that were linked to the strongest, most salient memories were the ones that evoked the most vivid and emotion-laden responses.

When he took a look at his MRI images and compared them to these self-reported reactions, Janata discovered that the degree of salience of the memory corresponded to the amount of activity in the upper (dorsal) part of the medial pre-frontal cortex.

While this correlation confirmed Janata’s hypothesis that this brain region links music and memory, it was another discovery that sealed his conclusion.

A lifelong music buff, Janata had earlier created a model for “mapping” the tones of a piece of music as it moves from chord to chord and into and out of major and minor keys. By making tonal maps of each musical excerpt and comparing them to their corresponding brain scans, he discovered that the brain was tracking these tonal progressions in the same region as it was experiencing the memories: in the dorsal part of the medial pre-frontal cortex, as well as in regions immediately adjacent to it. And in this case, too, the stronger the autobiographical memory, the greater the “tracking” activity.

“What’s cool about this is that one of the main parts of the brain that’s tracking the music is the same part of the brain that’s responding overall to how autobiographically salient the music is,” Janata said.

Because memory for autobiographically important music seems to be spared in people with Alzheimer’s disease, Janata said, one of his long-term goals is to use this research to help develop music-based therapy for people with the disease.

“Providing patients with MP3 players and customized playlists,” he speculated, “could prove to be a quality-of-life improvement strategy that would be both effective and economical.” Source: University of California - Davis

Alzheimer Resource Center's Brain Bank Program:
As of July 1, 2009, the Central Florida Brain Bank has acquired five new counties which means we now serve: Alachua, Brevard, Duval, Hernando, Hillsborough, Indian River, Lake, Leon, Marion, Martin, Okeechobee, Orange, Osceola, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, Seminole, St. Lucie, Sumter, and Volusia counties. If you have any questions, please call Martha Purdy, Brain Bank Coordinator, at 1-800-330-1910, Ext. 308.
Meet Other Caregivers

The Center has several support group meetings available throughout the Central Florida community. If one of these does not fit your schedule, please give us a call so that we can put you in touch with other support groups that can assist you.

**Caregiver Support Groups**

1st Tuesday, 10:00 a.m.*
Easter Seals Daybreak
Winter Park

1st Tuesday, 6:30 p.m.
The Heritage of Lake Forest
Sanford

2nd Friday, 12:00 noon*
Osceola Council on Aging
at the Senior Center
Kissimmee

2nd Thursday, 6:00 p.m.
Arden Courts
Winter Springs

3rd Thursday, 6:30 p.m.
Summerville of Ocoee
Assisted Living
Ocoee

4th Monday, 6:30 p.m.
Horizon Bay at Lake Orienta
Altamonte Springs

4th Tuesday, 6:30 p.m.
Golden Pond Communities
Ocoee

Couples Support Group
Please call 407-843-1910 for information

**Reeves Untied Methodist Church Support Group**
2nd Tuesday, 10:00 a.m.
Alzheimer Resource Center

**Orlando Men’s Breakfast Club**
1st and 3rd Thursday, 10:00 a.m.
Bakely’s Restaurant Winter Park

* Respite Care Provided Upon Request