Spielberg, who leads a busy life as the dean of Dartmouth Medical School, relaxes by playing the piano—here, a Mozart sonata.
Great conductors get the best out of musicians and make them want to play," said a musician during a recent National Public Radio interview. Stephen Spielberg, M.D., Ph.D., isn’t a conductor . . . exactly. But as the dean of Dartmouth Medical School, he knows how to get the best out of his "musicians”—other deans, members of the faculty, students—and how to make them want to "play."

In fact, he is a musician—he has sung in a capella groups at various times during his career and plays the piano regularly (in the privacy of his home). So it’s no surprise that he turns to musical metaphors when asked to describe his job. The goal of a dean, he says, is "to prevent too much cacophony around the edges." But, he adds with a laugh, "that doesn’t always mean that you’re in absolute harmony. I mean, you can have 12-tone and other unusual composition styles thrown in. But [the point] is somehow or another make sure that there is a central focus on the needs of the whole, in the midst of all of the individual activities that are going on."

There are indeed a lot of activities at a medical school, and the dean needs to have at least a passing familiarity with all of them—from facilities management to curriculum; from budgets to the research enterprise; from student activities to faculty recruitment; from governmental relations to patient care. On top of all that, just like the conductor of a major orchestra, the dean is very involved in raising funds to ensure the institution’s future.

"The job description is endless, in a way," he laughs. Laughing is something Spielberg does a lot, despite the demands on his time and energy. "The reality of it," he says of being a dean, "is that it’s absolutely undoable—except for the fact we’ve got fabulous people who dedicate their focus and effort to each of these areas. The issue then is to help orchestrate, to help bring them together, to help find paths for synergy, to help find ways of getting more bang for the buck—recognizing the buck is harder to get—and to maximize the way we do business among all those aspects."

So how does Spielberg manage to get everyone working together so well? He cajoles, coaches, and cheerleads. He exudes enthusiasm as he draws out all the attendees at a meeting, the way a conductor draws a full sound from, say, all the violins. In fact, Spielberg looks like a conductor, since he has a penchant for gesturing animatedly.

“He has an optimistic, jovial, pediatrician’s attitude about life,” observes Joseph O’Donnell, M.D., DMS’s senior advising dean and director of community programs.

“I most enjoy his absolutely unharnessed optimism, enthusiasm, and excitement about the Medical School being an excellent medical school,” says David Nierenberg, M.D., senior associate dean for medical education. “In my area, he’s always been eager to listen, absorb, think, and ask why. If we agree, he says, ‘Go for it.’”

The dean’s energy is infectious. “One cannot help but share his enthusiasm and optimism about the future of medicine,” says James Varnum, president of Mary Hitchcock Memorial Hospital.

Spielberg has another secret to success. “There are certain things that make the job doable,” he confides. One is the “opportunity to do something meaningful.” The other is being “in a setting with like-minded people with similar agendas—be it basic science, curriculum, delivery of health care, or policy implementation.” He likes working with people who are “infused with a great deal of passion and vision for the future. That’s what gets you out of bed in the morning.”

While Spielberg says he’s “not an insomniac, up by Laura Stephenson Carter

Laura Carter is the associate editor of Dartmouth Medicine.
Spielberg’s UVM counterpart wants to know what it was like working in the pharmaceutical industry. Spielberg jokes that there are lots of pediatricians at pharmaceutical companies because “they’re so good at dealing with childish behavior.”

at 4:00 a.m.,” he does keep long hours and also travels a lot. Here’s a sampling of some of the events during the past few months that got Spielberg “out of bed in the morning.”

Monday, August 9, 8:30 a.m.
Chilcott Auditorium at DMS
It’s the start of a new academic year for the Medical School. Orientation week for the 84 first-year M.D. students begins this morning. Spielberg bustles into Chilcott and greets Nicholas Osborne, a fourth-year student who’s president of the DMS Student Government, then reviews one last time the notes for the talk he’s about to give. When Dartmouth College President James Wright arrives, Spielberg has a smile and a handshake for him. A succession of faculty members who are also on the morning’s program file in, and Spielberg greets each one. The first-year students—a happy, noisy horde—have by now filled most of the seats in the auditorium.

Spielberg steps to the lectern. “Good morning,” he says. “This is one of the most exciting days here at the Medical School, [the others] being Class Day and Commencement.” He’s setting the tempo: upbeat, energetic. Just before he introduces Wright, he reminds all the students that he’s hosting a picnic for them that evening at the Dartmouth Skiway. “Dress casual,” he advises.

Then Spielberg sits down in the front row and beams proudly as assorted deans and administrators take turns speaking. The mood is joyful, welcoming, nurturing. Lori Alvord, M.D., associate dean for student and multicultural affairs, says, “We’ll take care of you.” Osborne reassures the first-years that they’re now part of the Dartmouth “family.” O’Donnell calls himself the students’ “dream-maker,” promising to help them realize their dreams in medicine and in life. Spielberg has to hurry off to another meeting before the show is over, but his fellow deans have matters well in hand.

Thursday, September 25, 11:00 a.m.
Main Rotunda at DHMC
Today, several officials from the University of Vermont (UVM)—including the president, Daniel Fogel, Ph.D., and the dean of the medical school, John Evans, Ph.D.—are visiting DHMC. Spielberg and several other Dartmouth officials greet them in the main rotunda of the Medical Center. The first order of the day for the visitors is a tour of DHMC’s new Doctors’ Office Building and Cancer Center labs. As the group starts the tour, Spielberg and Charles Mannix, DMS’s chief operating officer, peel off to hold a quick meeting.

After the tour, Spielberg and Mannix rejoin the group in a conference room at the Cancer Center for sandwiches, cookies, and soft drinks. Several different conversations are in progress. Soon a more formal dialogue begins. “The fun thing about working in multiple environments [is] picking up different approaches,” Spielberg says. Since earning a Ph.D. in pharmacology and an M.D. from the University of Chicago, and training as a pediatrician, he has worked at Boston Children’s Hospital, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Johns Hopkins, the University of Toronto, Merck Research Laboratories, Johnson & Johnson, and, as of July 2003, DMS.

Evans, Spielberg’s UVM counterpart, wants to know what it was like working in the pharmaceutical industry. Spielberg jokes that there are lots of pediatricians at pharmaceutical companies because “they’re so good at dealing with childish behavior.” Everyone laughs.

Then he turns serious. Industry focuses on “putting teams together, rather than individuals pursuing curiosity,” explains Spielberg. Industry also
emphasizes applied science, and there’s a greater sense of urgency about getting results from research.

The group talks about the need to reengineer research in the academic environment. “We need scientists who can view molecules and cells and organisms together,” Spielberg says. They also discuss changes in the way anatomy is being taught; hiring policies—the struggle to achieve a balance between bringing in senior faculty with a track record and solid research funding, versus identifying promising junior faculty; institutional e-mail systems and computing capacity; international partnerships; and the high cost of medical journals.

“We’ve asked our library about a consortium with Dartmouth [for] joint buying,” says Evans. That idea hasn’t been implemented yet, but UVM and DMS are cooperating in other areas. “This is a time for a lot of creativity in medicine,” Spielberg tells the visitors. “I’d love to come up and visit you.”

Tuesday, September 28, 10:00 a.m.
New York City
The dean is in New York to visit a donor and is scheduled to fly to Boston that afternoon so he can deliver grand rounds the next day at Children’s Hospital. On the run, he calls Hanover to ask his assistant, Didit Martinez, to hire a car to meet him at Boston’s Logan Airport so he won’t have to wait in the cab line. Martinez makes the arrangements and calls him back. “Meet the driver on the upper level,” she tells him. They chat briefly about how things have gone in New York. “So call if you need anything else,” Martinez says. As busy as he is, Spielberg has only one assistant to keep him organized (compared to three or four for some of his counterparts elsewhere).

Monday, October 4, 5:30 p.m.
Fuller Board Room at DHMC
Spielberg and Mannix have been invited to attend a meeting of the DMS Student Government. Spielberg talks about an upcoming accreditation survey and the possible overhaul of a first- and second-year course called On Doctoring; feedback from students will be an essential part of that process, he reminds the group. He asks if the students have any other concerns. They would like to have a student representative on the Committee on Student Performance and Conduct (CSPC). Spielberg promises to discuss the matter with the other deans.

Wednesday, October 6, 9:00 a.m.
Spaulding Auditorium at Dartmouth College
Spielberg is slated to welcome several hundred attendees at the annual Dartmouth Symposium for Life Sciences. “This has been an incredible week in medicine,” Spielberg says, sotto voce, to Department of Medicine Chair Murray Korc, M.D., as the speakers wait for the symposium to begin. Vioxx, a major anti-inflammatory, had just been pulled off the market because it was found to increase the risk of cardiovascular events (see page 3 for more on the Vioxx withdrawal). And Chiron, a British vaccine manufacturer, had shut down its production of flu vaccine because of contamination problems. “Half the vaccine in the world has disappeared,” says Spielberg.

As the auditorium fills up, the audience’s chatter drowns out the conversation near the stage. Spielberg laughs loudly at something that Cardiology Chief Michael Simons, M.D., has said. The topic of today’s gathering is angiogenesis—the growth of new blood vessels, a process that has many promising therapeutic applications. It’s Simons’s research specialty, and he has assembled several world-class scientists to talk about the field.

Soon it’s time for Spielberg to step on stage.
“Good morning,” he says. “Welcome. I’m Stephen
Spielberg and his closest advisors talk frankly about a variety of issues, including the feasibility of a request from the DMS Student Government to have a student sit on the Medical School’s Committee on Student Performance and Conduct.

Spielberg, dean of the Medical School. No one would argue [that] angiogenesis has become a central focus” in medicine. One of the nice aspects of being a dean, he adds, is getting to host events like this. “But one of the downsides is I have to go to meetings. So I’ll be in and out.” Spielberg takes a seat in the front row and listens intently as Kari Kustaa Alitalo, M.D., Ph.D., from the University of Helsinki, talks about lymphangiogenesis. When Alitalo concludes his presentation at 10:00 a.m., Spielberg slips quietly up an outer aisle.

But early afternoon finds him back in Spaulding once more, and he stays through presentations by specialists from Scripps Research Institute and Genentech and by DMS’s Korc.

Thursday, October 7, 1:50 p.m.
Emergency Department at DHMC
Spielberg has spent the morning at the Lake Morey Inn in Fairlee, Vt., attending a Center for the Evaluative Clinical Sciences (CECS) seminar on redesigning clinical microsystems. He’s about to spend the afternoon in the DHMC Emergency Department. He and neurologist James Bernat, M.D., have been invited to lecture to a class being held here. Emergency physician Kevin Curtis, M.D., who has designed a course for Dartmouth undergraduates on clinical biomedical research, meets Bernat and Spielberg in the old DHMC emergency room and escorts them to spacious new emergency room quarters due to open the following week.

“Wow!” Spielberg can hardly contain his enthusiasm as he walks into the sparkling, unoccupied space. “Wow!”

He also bubbles with enthusiasm about the course itself—a collaboration between DMS and Dartmouth College. “I want to congratulate you,” Spielberg tells the six undergraduates. “You are pioneers in this kind of course.” After his presentation—about the ethics of pediatric clinical trials—one of the students stays after class to talk with him. Spielberg is clearly delighted. As everyone strolls out—through several sets of double doors, toward the parking lot—the student and Spielberg are still deep in conversation.

Monday, October 11, 9:00 a.m.
Derzon Courtyard at DMS
One of Spielberg’s chief priorities is to build new research facilities on the Lebanon campus—a translational research building and a new home for CECS and the Department of Community and Family Medicine. He also hopes to renovate some of the lab space on the Hanover campus. He intends to get input about the plans from the members of the DMS Board of Overseers, who are in town for one of their semiannual meetings, but first he wants them to see the existing facilities. So he’s arranged for them to tour both campuses—what he later calls “the good, the bad, and the ugly.”

Brian Edwards, DMS’s director of space planning, first leads the group through labs, classrooms, auditoriums, and offices in the aging Vail and Remsen buildings on the Hanover campus; some of the spaces have seen better days but some, like the genetics labs, have been recently renovated. Then they enter Strasenburgh—a cramped structure that Spielberg likens to an upside-down submarine; built as a dormitory in the 1960s, it now houses the offices of Dartmouth’s vaunted CECS program. “This is the seat of world-class thought,” Spielberg says as the Overseers file through Strasenburgh’s narrow, dark hallways. “These people have a national reputation and this is [where they] have to work.”

Next, vans whisk the Overseers to DHMC. William Hickey, M.D., senior associate dean for academic affairs, leads a tour of the new Cancer Center labs as well as of the 10-year-old labs in the
Borwell Research Building. Spielberg notes that the Cancer Center's open-lab concept and central atriums foster collaboration among the researchers.

"This is the type of architecture that we're talking about relative to the new building," Hickey explains, "not exactly laid out like this, but the open laboratory model, no walls, accessible offices, and having natural light as much as possible."

In the student lounge, Spielberg stops to admire a piano. "This is actually my favorite item," he says with a smile. "This was Rad Tanzer's piano." Tanzer "was a plastic surgeon who invented many of the procedures that are used for children with birth defects." His widow donated the piano to DMS after his death in 2003, Spielberg explains.

**Tuesday, October 12, 5:30 p.m.**
**Kellogg Auditorium at DMS**
Today, Spielberg is addressing a faculty meeting. In his typical, upbeat fashion, he brings the group up to date on various issues, including plans for the new buildings. "We're going to try to increase the level of communication around the School," he tells them.

He brags that nearly 100 percent of Dartmouth's medical students are involved in community service and that DMS was one of three finalists for a national community service award from the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC). He crowns about the fact that DMS was one of only eight schools worldwide invited to contribute articles on medical education research to a special issue of the AAMC journal *Academic Medicine*. He reports on several collaborations with Dartmouth's undergraduate and professional schools. He notes the steady increase in funding for research and a couple of recent fund-raising successes. He reminds the faculty that DMS is the right size and in the right setting to effect real change in medicine.

Then the dean fields questions: about timelines, the reliability of funding for the building projects, and assorted other issues. Someone asks what avenues will be used to communicate about the building projects. Spielberg responds that information is being disseminated continuously to faculty and staff—via meetings as well as through print and electronic communications. But, he admits, "in any organization rumors start. Urban myths are destructive." With effective communication, he adds, he hopes to keep rumors and myths at bay.

**Wednesday, October 13, 8:00 a.m.**
**Faculty Conference Room at DMS**
The first item on this morning's schedule is a meeting of the senior associate deans. The group meets weekly and once a month is joined by the rest of the deanery. Present today are Nierenberg, Hickey, Mannix, Álvord, and Constance Brinckerhoff, Ph.D., who oversees the graduate programs. Gerald O'Connor, Sc.D., Ph.D., who oversees the CECS educational programs, weighs in by speakerphone. Spielberg and his closest advisors talk frankly about a variety of issues, including the feasibility of the Student Government's request to have a student sit on the student disciplinary committee. "This has come up in the context of trying to have students understand what we understand—that the CSPC processes are fair, for the good of the institution, not mysterious, not draconian," says Spielberg.

After discussing the pros and cons of the proposal—including confidentiality concerns—the deans decide to appoint two fourth-year students as voting members of the committee, with one of them to attend any given meeting. "The ultimate message is students are partners in the process," concludes Spielberg.

The deans move on to discuss diversity in the admissions process and committee assignments;
explaining that angiogenesis concerns “how blood vessels move into organs and provide nutrition. Critical for fetuses,” he adds, and for combating cancer, too. “I had a ball,” he continues. “I learned a lot of developmental biology.”

There were lots of questions after he was done. One person wanted Spielberg’s take on a National Public Radio story about a new breed of doctors who are choosing specialties, like dermatology, that are less likely to disrupt their lives.

“I heard the same report,” says Spielberg. “I’m struck by our students and their dedication. A number are going into surgery,” because they are interested in the field and are influenced by their teachers. “I’m confident that the students we’ve [got], with ongoing dialogue, will make right choices.”

“Where’s the money coming from? What are your challenges?” someone else asks.

“Tuition is less than 10 percent of the Medical School budget,” responds Spielberg. “The Medical School budget is $200 million this year. A great portion comes from faculty in terms of grants. DMS has stayed ahead of the curve.” There has been a gradual shift in recent years from individual to collaborative research—and that’s what the NIH is most likely to fund these days, he adds. “Right now everybody is a born-again collaborator.” But at DMS, he says, there’s true collaboration. He cites Dartmouth’s Advanced Imaging Center as an example. The Departments and Sections of Radiology, Psychiatry, Neurology, Neurosurgery, and Cardiology, plus the Cancer Center, are all active partners in the center’s funding, he says.

And, he reminds this group of longtime supporters, with a capital campaign about to launch, philanthropy will also be key. “Absolutely—spread the word about what you know,” chimes in Brian Lally, vice president for development.

Spielberg has good news for the Dean’s Advisory Board: DMS has received “a wonderful donation from Dean LeBaron”—$5 million to construct a commons space that will join the Borwell Research Building with planned new research facilities.

nominations for the Dartmouth-wide Martin Luther King Social Justice Awards; improvements to the quarters for Student Affairs; and plans for handling flu shots for students, given the nationwide shortage of flu vaccine.

Thursday, October 14, 12:00 noon
Fuller Board Room at DHMC

About a dozen community leaders and key donors have been invited to have lunch at DHMC. Spielberg works the room, chatting animatedly with people before the luncheon begins. As the dean begins his formal presentation, the microphone makes a funny sound. “Doesn’t sound good at all,” Spielberg jokes. “I think it’s an F-sharp.”

Once the microphone is fixed, Spielberg dazzles the audience with anecdotes about the Medical School, the terrific work of its researchers and clinicians, DMS’s role as national leader, and its plans for the future. He describes medical science in terms that this lay audience can understand. “I went to a Life Sciences Symposium on angiogenesis,” he says,
Remsen where rodents dare not tread.” And, he quips, Strasenburgh is “not for the claustrophobic.”

Then he turns to some good budget news. “We closed the year in balance,” he reports about the 2003-04 fiscal year. And regarding National Institutes of Health grants in the current fiscal year, he adds, “we’re ahead on NIH funding.”

And there’s still more good news. Spielberg says that DMS has received “a wonderful donation from Dean LeBaron”—$5 million to construct a commons space that will join the Borwell Research Building on the DHMC campus with new research facilities that are on the drawing board (see page 16 for more on this gift).

COO Mannix points out that a unified plan for both campuses is being developed—the renovation of older buildings on the Hanover campus and the addition of new buildings on the Lebanon campus—and emphasizes the need for rumor control if piecemeal word of the plans gets out.

“We’re going to be doing a lot more [talking about the projects] in the next few months,” Spielberg assures everyone as he adjourns the meeting.

Spielberg and Mannix head to their next meeting, with Hospital President Jim Varnum and Executive Vice President Paul Gardent. While waiting for Varnum and Gardent, Spielberg and Mannix chat. Spielberg articulates a growing need for what he calls “integrative scientific leaders” and expresses concern at how long it takes to train M.D.-Ph.D.’s. He urges Mannix to tour some of the unrenovated spaces in Vail and Remsen. “It’s a warren of little dominions. You gotta take a tour, Charlie.”

Gardent arrives and the conversation switches to a faculty search that’s under way. “We’re looking for leadership who can foster the development of younger faculty,” says Spielberg.

When Varnum gets there they turn their attention to the search for a new ob-gyn chair to replace Barry Smith. They also discuss a proposed new plan to evaluate department chairs. “A great part of their job is stewarding their department,” says Spielberg. And Varnum mentions the important role that the chairs play in institutional leadership.

Friday, October 22, 12:00 noon
Fuller Board Room at DHMC
Today Spielberg is giving talk to the DMS Alumni Council. All the members are graduates of DMS, but some are also members of the DMS faculty or connect with Spielberg in other ways. “I often speak to overlapping audiences,” says Spielberg, “so I think I’ll talk today about pharmacogenomics.” The Councilors, who’d expected a “state of the School” update from the dean, chuckle. “No, no, no,” Spielberg quickly continues, waving his hands. “But, actually, I never get to talk about pharmacogenomics any more.” However, he goes on, he loves talking about the Medical School. In conclusion, he says that the students who come to DMS have the “right heart and head combination.”

Friday, October 22, 2:50 p.m.
Dean’s Office at DMS
Spielberg is back in his office, catching up on e-mail at his computer. It’s a rare break in his day from meetings. But not for long—in a few minutes he’s scheduled to participate in a conference call with other members of a national advisory board that he serves on, for an organization that fosters and promotes pediatric clinical research.

“Let’s see if there’s anything I need to know about,” he whispers to himself as he clicks through his e-mail and sips on a cup of coffee. “Ah, yes,” he whispers.

“Huh,” he grunts. “Flu clinic canceled,” he reads half to himself.

At 3:00 p.m. sharp, he dials into the conference
notes that big foundations like to give money for high-profile causes. “The problem is pediatrics is always at the bottom of the heap,” he says.

The conversation continues, and at the close of the call Spielberg says to the director, “I think you’ve done a spectacular job.”

Wednesday, November 3, 7:50 p.m.
Cook Auditorium at Dartmouth College

Paul Farmer, M.D., Ph.D., a noted physician, humanitarian, and medical anthropologist, has been invited to Dartmouth to give the annual Helmut Schumann Lecture.

Spielberg, dressed casually in a brown-and-olive striped sweater, hurries in just as the lecture is about to begin. The room is packed, with people filling the aisles. Spielberg scoots down to the front of the auditorium and sits, cross-legged, on the floor. Farmer—who is the subject of a recent book by Tracy Kidder, *Mountains Beyond Mountains*—begins his talk. A few minutes into it, he suddenly notices the dean. “I know I’ve arrived when the dean will sit on the floor to hear me speak,” Farmer jokes.

Saturday, November 13, 9:00 a.m.
Roosevelt Hotel, New York City

Spielberg and his wife, Laurel, came down to New York yesterday to attend several Dartmouth College campaign kickoff events—a gala dinner last night and today a series of celebratory talks and panel discussions. (See more about this event on page 14.) Spielberg is slated to give closing remarks at a panel titled “Transforming Medicine,” after Susan Dentzer, a Dartmouth graduate and a health reporter on the *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, has moderated a discussion between Mark Israel, M.D., director of Dartmouth’s Cancer Center, and John Wennberg, M.D., director of CECS.

“I think this is a truly special time,” Spielberg says when it’s his turn. “Medicine can no longer work in isolation—we need biology, chemistry, computer science, sociology . . . . Medicine is not going to succeed in a vacuum.” He also stresses the importance of DMS working collaboratively with the rest of Dartmouth. “It’s important for Dartmouth College grads to understand” how science is integrated everywhere in society, he says. “The Medical School is a partner in the undergraduate experience,” as well as with Dartmouth’s other professional schools—the Tuck School of Business and the Thayer School of Engineering. Collaborative initiatives are flourishing at Dartmouth, he concludes, because “we are right-sized.”

It’s a refrain he’s delivered many times before. But, like the good musician that he is, he plays it each time appassionato—with passion.