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Susan May Wiltrakis

Susan May Wiltrakis recorded two albums and performed for a national audience as a professional jazz singer before coming to medical school.

Written by **Kendra Carter**



Susan May Wiltrakis may be the only medical student at the **UAB School of Medicine** who can say she's been a guest on the Oprah Winfrey Show.

Wiltrakis, a professional jazz singer in her third year at UAB, performed on the Chicago-based show in 2003 prior to releasing her first album, "**The Rose,**" at age 12. An article about her singing had been published in the Chicago Sun-Times, and producers for Oprah's show invited her to perform live as one of "The World's Most Talented Kids."

"I couldn't pass up that opportunity," she said. "I got a lot of attention afterward and appeared on other Chicago television shows."

She said that while she was growing up in the Midwest, she got involved in theater, which expanded her love of music.

"I was a theater kid growing up, so I heard a lot of cabaret numbers because theater and cabaret often overlap," she said. "A show producer connected me with a Chicago record label, which connected me with predominantly jazz musicians."

Wiltrakis recorded her first demo at age 10 and released her 13-track album "The Rose," which includes jazz staples "Feeling Good" and "As Time Goes By." Her second album, "Black Coffee," was released in 2006. Wiltrakis served as the artistic director on both her studio albums, getting involved in the entire recording and graphic design process.

While she pursued arts outside school, Wiltrakis focused her studies on science. She attended private school through fifth grade, then enrolled in an online program with coursework from Northwestern University and Stanford University. She essentially skipped sixth, seventh and eighth grades, she said, and followed the online program through high school while she worked as a professional jazz singer in Chicago.

At 15, Wiltrakis enrolled at **Valparaiso University** in Northwest Indiana. She graduated in 2010 with degrees in chemistry and biology before entering the UAB School of Medicine at 19. She's currently enjoying her third year, where she says she's able to combine the medical skills she's learned in class with the people skills she developed as a performer in patient care. And while she hasn't decided where her medical career will take her, she's considering residency programs for pediatrics or internal medicine.

Wiltrakis still sings for fun and for events like scholarship dinners and the **Best Medicine Show**, a fundraiser for **Equal Access Birmingham**. She also has devoted some of her free time, however, to research in pediatrics and infectious diseases. She presented last year at the Pediatric Academic Society Conference the results of a national collaborative trial on predictors of influenza severity and resolution in infants, as part of work she did with **David Kimberlin, M.D.**, co-director of the **Division of Pediatric Infectious Diseases**.

"I like the idea of doing academic medicine. I'd be able to teach and conduct research, but be able to see patients," she said. "I could see myself integrating clinical research into my practice."

Could she see herself recording another album? Maybe, if she can find the time.

"I'd love to when I have some more free time. I don't have a one- or two-month block of time when I can record right now, but hope to in the future," Wiltrakis said. "That's always going to be part of who I am."



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