

SIMPLY SMASHING:

Billy Corgan's New Passion

BY GREGG SHAPIRO

Smashing Pumpkins front man Billy Corgan has lived in Highland Park for the last eight years, where on any given day he can be found eating sushi at Happy Sushi on Roger Williams Avenue (“the best sushi on the North Shore”), buying wine at Ravinia Wine Shop (owned by his friends), having dinner at Abigail’s American Bistro (“very hip”), and even attending the occasional concert at Ravinia, where he’s contemplating a Smashing Pumpkins engagement in the near future. Lately, Corgan has been lending his voice and name to something else he’s passionate about: integrative medicine. Corgan and NorthShore University HealthSystem’s Dr. Leslie Mendoza Temple recently sat down to talk to *Sheridan Road* about NorthShore Highland Park Hospital’s Integrative Medicine Program, which combines conventional Western medicine with healing-oriented alternative therapies—including acupuncture, meditation, massage, herbal and food therapy, Qigong (energy therapy) and art, and writing and music therapies—to treat a variety of ailments.

Sheridan Road: Billy, how did you first become aware of NorthShore’s Integrative Medicine Program?

Billy Corgan: NorthShore massage therapist and integrative psychotherapist Char Walker approached me about helping with the program. Her husband, Matt, was in the Pumpkins at one point, so our relationship goes back and they’re some of my closest friends.

SR: How do you see North Shore Integrative Medicine’s role in the health care community?

BC: I’ve been in sort of a holistic modality for more than a decade. I almost never take any over-the-counter medicines, anything. On a personal level, I’ve spent a lot of time talking to Leslie about what it means to live like that and how she’s trying to bring these two worlds [Eastern and Western medicine] together. Because ultimately, with the changes in our health care systems, the economy, a lot of these modalities are just a lot more practical



for a lot of people. I was attracted to help because I am living that way.

SR: Leslie, what did it mean to you and to North Shore to have Billy performing at the benefit?

Dr. Leslie Mendoza Temple: It was groundbreaking. We’ve never had anything like this before, not even a concert. Billy has changed our place at NorthShore in a sense of raising the awareness that we even exist. We’re a pretty small program, we’ve been around for 11 years, but for many years we were struggling with just establishing our presence. Over time, maybe over the past four years, we’re getting specialists referring patients to us. Often times, we were this big repository for the last stop. And now it’s not so much, “I’ve run out of options, and go send the train wrecks over there,” it’s “Well, they do some cool things over there with allergies. Dr. Temple knows some herbs you could use.” And we’re part of the NorthShore System, which is huge for them. We’re highly credentialed; we have an M.D. heading the program.

SR: Is integrative medicine the medicine of the future?

BC: Yoga is now something that is completely accepted in American culture. No one even thinks twice when the soccer mom goes to her yoga class. But if we think back 30 years, yoga was a weird thing, it was a hippie thing. I think it’s the same with integrative medicine. I think 20 years from now, this won’t even be a discussion; there’ll be a balance on how different things can help.

SR: Is there any similarity between what you do as a music artist and the work you’re doing with NorthShore’s Integrative Medicine Program?

BC: Ultimately, we’re in the compassion business. As an artist, I’m in the compassion business and so are these beautiful women

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[from NorthShore's Integrative Medicine Program]. I think the biggest struggle sometimes as human being is, "How do we help?" I've lost three family members to cancer. Believe me, no one understands better than me the frustration that you feel when you have a family member who's really struggling, and we're all looking for answers. Chemo works sometimes, but not all the time, and sometimes it's about quality of life. I have a friend here in Highland Park, who was just diagnosed with ovarian cancer and the ladies [at NorthShore] have worked with her a little bit. She's an older lady, and I've been somewhat involved in



BACK ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: PATRICIA PIANT, CHARLOTTE WALKER, CAROLE BECK
FRONT ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: BILLY CORGAN, LESLIE MENDOZA TEMPLE
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the discussions with her family and what's going to happen, and it does come down to quality of life versus an aggressive therapy that maybe will keep her alive, but she'll really suffer. So bringing integrative medicine into that conversation—here's a path that maybe will give you a different quality of life. Chemo is ultimately a destructive path...if it's effective, well, then it works. But my mother took chemo and still died. That's where I feel passionate, because I think we all need to have those choices. People do want to pick how they're going to die or the path they're going to choose, and integrated medicine, in its very nature, takes that into account because quality of life is at the center. □