

addition to *The Potluck*, which shows a multiethnic gathering of Central Square residents enjoying a meal together.

"This was a never-ending project," Fichter says fondly. "So many people came by to ask if they could be in it." If they lived in the neighborhood, he considered their request. (Fichter himself

lives just a few streets away.) The 22-by-100-foot mural used about 20 gallons of acrylic paint and took four months to complete with the help of volunteers. He focuses on the larger elements, while volunteers work on smaller pieces, giving an overall effect of unity.

That collaborative aspect is an impor-

tant part of the process for him, despite the challenge of coordinating different talents and personalities. "It becomes a very engaging experience for people, even people who aren't artists," Fichter says. "I've likened it to religion. There's a real sense of withdrawal when the project is complete."

## Vocals, Guitar, and Stethoscope

*Suzie Brown, M.D., writes prescriptions—and love songs.*

**I**N HER SONG "Nice Girl," cardiologist-singer-songwriter Suzie Brown, M.D. '02, declares in a honey-dipped twang, "Sooner or later you'll find out that sometimes/ I wanna scream and yell and run like hell and/ play it really loud/ So think twice before you come my way/ I ain't always such a nice girl." Like many of the bluesy, country-rock songs on *Heartstrings*, Brown's first full-length album, "Nice Girl" is ostensibly a reproof to a composite of lovers who didn't quite get the sultry, determined girl. But it also serves as a reminder to herself: for all her success as a Harvard Medical School graduate, Brown doesn't feel whole until she breaks free from the hospital and jumps on stage with a guitar.

The lesson took Brown, 37, a while to learn. For more than a decade she committed herself to becoming a top research cardiologist. Then, in 2009, just as she was about to complete a grant proposal that would have funded her work into her forties, she decided she couldn't ignore her musical desires any longer. She abandoned the grant for a part-time clinical job, treating patients with heart failure, and devoted the rest of her time to making and promoting her music. She says the decision felt reckless at first: "I think I was afraid to admit to myself that I didn't want a high-powered academic career...even if I could have had it."

Luckily, it didn't take long for the move to pay off. Within a year Brown had attracted A-list producer Barrie Maguire (formerly the bassist for The Wallflowers and Natalie Merchant) and recorded *Heartstrings*, released this May. Today she works three days a week in the heart-failure clinic at Albert Einstein Medical Center outside Philadelphia, plays at least one



Suzie Brown onstage

show a week, and often finds herself up well into the night managing the logistics of her burgeoning music career.

Growing up in the Boston suburb of Natick, Brown always had a native voice that could stop people in their tracks and an ear for what makes a good song, but as the daughter of two physicians, she was certain she'd end up in a strait-laced career, "a doctor or a lawyer or something like that." She flirted with music at every stage in her education, joining an a cappella group her senior year at Dartmouth, moonlighting in a production of *Hair* in medical school, and fronting "a shameless, shameless cover band" during her residency. But her medical training was so intense that she didn't have time to worry about what might be missing in her life.

In 2006 she started a cardiology fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania, and

as her workload eased, the desire to sing crept back in. That fall, in the aftermath of a romantic breakup, Brown wrote her first song. "I just figured, 'If I can't write a song when I'm feeling like this, I will never in my life write a song,'" she says now. She wrote it in one night, in the key of G—because those were the only chords she knew. The experience was cathartic.

"I just felt like, 'Oh my god, I wrote a song,' and it was about love and loneliness," she recalls. Putting her emotions front and center was a radical departure from the stoic disposition she'd learned to maintain as a doctor. "My life over the last decade had been about putting the patient first," she explains. "I also felt that, as a woman trying to be a cardiologist, I had to be tough, I had to not show my emotions."



Visit [harvardmag.com/extras](http://harvardmag.com/extras) to hear tracks from Brown's CD.

O P E N B O O K

# Financial Reform: The Doggerel

seem late to the parade. Yet its editors (IBM professor of business and government Roger B. Porter, adjunct lecturer Robert R. Glauber, and Center for Business and Government senior fellow Thomas J. Healey, all of the Kennedy School) shaped an unusually intelligent discussion of the intersection of business and government oversight during a late 2009 conference, now published here. Their Kennedy School colleague Richard J. Zeckhauser, Ramsey professor of political economy, summarized his recommendations on enhancing transparency this way:

**Fancy financial** products and nuclear weapons share features beyond their irremediable escape from Pandora's box. Those who own them have power, respectively financial/economic power and military/political power. Though we might prefer that none had them, if our competitors have them, we certainly want them too. With financial instruments, this interactive relationship is true of firms as well as of nations. Further, both engineered financial products and nuclear weapons are extremely difficult to regulate, since critical elements of secrecy provide some of their value.

Surely some stiff modes of regulation will emerge to be placed on exotic financial products and on new financial institutions. But academia and Wall Street are infinitely creative, and 10 years from now new products and institutions will exist that offer or appear to offer superior profit opportunities, and that steer around the newly emplaced regulations....

Regulation...cannot be the complete approach to effective risk control. Private players must have adequate and appropriate information to take actions that protect and avoid actions that endanger themselves. Thus I propose that we cast a bright light that reaches into the financial shadows....

My analysis suggests that the current financial system has become effective at burying information that should be and can be uncovered. This unacceptable

**Cole Porter, prescient  
financial analyst**

**The financial cata-**clysm of 2008 has by now perhaps yielded as many books as failed investment banks, mortgage firms, and hedge funds. *New Directions in Financial Services Regulation* (MIT, \$35) would

situation poses continuing dangers. Thus, I conclude, with apologies to Cole Porter:

Let's Do It: Let's Illuminate

We know that banks do it, geeks do it;  
Even educated Greeks do it.  
We do it,  
We all obfuscate.

Investment firms in New York do it;  
Hong Kong hedge firms seeking  
torque do it.  
We do it.  
We all obfuscate.

In London Town, AIG did it;  
Moody's, Fitch, and S&P did it.  
We do it.  
We all obfuscate.

The Fed, feeling beyond reach, did it;  
Bernie Madoff, in Palm Beach, did it.  
We do it.  
We all obfuscate.

But I think that we can evolve; do it.  
We only have to resolve; do it.  
Let's do it;  
Let's illuminate.

Small light-emitting diodes do it;  
Bugs and bolts of lightning do it.  
Let's do it;  
Let's illuminate.

Enlightened leaders, they have done it;  
Like Edison, we could bank on it.  
Let's do it;  
Let's illuminate.

This song was like the polar opposite. I'm telling people I'm lonely and that was, like, this amazing thing."

Medicine and music might require different mindsets, but Brown has found that her training as a cardiologist has promoted her songwriting in one key way. "In cardiology, when you're learning how to do procedures like catheterizations and echocardiograms, you think, 'I can't do this, it's impossible, I'll never learn how,'" she says. "But then you do learn how, so you realize everything seems impossible until you learn how—and then almost nothing is, really. In terms of the music thing, it gave me a certain attitude of can-do, like, if I



ZOE SLESS-KITTAN

can learn how to be a cardiologist, I can learn how to play the guitar."

Her lack of musical preconceptions has freed Brown to jump across genres. Many of the songs on *Heartstrings* feature a country tilt, which favors the raspy edge of her pure voice. That surprised her. "I don't even listen to country," she says. "The most country I listen to is Bonnie Raitt [72] and Gillian Welch. It's just what came out." In "Song for Amy," written in memory of a friend who died of lung cancer, Brown sings in a slow folk cadence that recalls Joni Mitchell; the title track is a soulful lament about lost love that Brown built around the chords from Nina Simone's "Want a Little Sugar in My Bowl."

With songwriting, there are no prerequisites to clear before she's licensed to make music—and Brown likes that. "I feel completely unqualified to be a songwriter—completely," she explains. "It's this weird realization: to be a cardiologist you have to go through 15 years of training and take X number of board exams. To be a musician, you just make it up." ~KEVIN HARTNETT

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