

Leonardo Da Vinci Had Health Problems Too

By Lou Lombardo, LMT, NCTMB

This entire hullabaloo about the Da Vinci Code got me thinking. What's all the fuss about a Renaissance painter who has a case of the sniffles?

And, while it's true that Leonardo Da Vinci (1452-1519) was a great painter, architect, mathematician, engineer and philosopher, who would want to write a controversial book and create an equally controversial movie about a grave robber? That's right- a grave robber!

Anatomy is the study of the structure of the human body and Da Vinci was intrigued by the human anatomy. If Playboy magazine was around in the 1400's, he would have been a life long subscriber.

He wasn't your average sophomore in high school, content just to dissect frogs in Biology lab.

No, Lenny, as his close friends called him, crossed over the line of good taste and joined the ranks of the macabre when he chose to rob cemeteries in the dead of the night (no pun intended)

This was certainly a grave situation (pun intended) especially if he got caught, since robbing graves was not a custom widely acceptable by his society's standards.

Da Vinci wanted to see what was underneath the skin so that he could draw an accurate depiction of the human body. He documented his anatomical findings in a series of 750 drawings that were detailed and accurate.

He was known as a genius well ahead of his time.

In fact it was Sigmund Freud who described da Vinci as the man who "woke up too soon in the darkness while other men still slept".

Salute` Leonardo, to your body of knowledge about the human anatomy.

Another scientist interested in the human body was William Harvey (1578-1657). Harvey was regarded as the first experimental scientist. He discovered that blood circulated throughout the body.

There's no evidence that he raided cemeteries to prove his point, which would have been futile for him, unless he was interested in the circulation of embalming fluid.

Harvey published descriptions of the cardiovascular system (heart, veins, arteries, and other blood vessels). He also was the first scientist to explain how veins have valves that prevent blood from flowing backwards in between heartbeats.

To prove his hypothesis, he asked his trusty assistant to “volunteer” to be part of an experiment. He tied a piece of rope around the assistant’s arm so that the blood would collect in the distal veins-far away from the heart.

Harvey observed that the valves appeared as small swellings along the veins. When he pressed on a valve, he noticed that the blood would be pushed out of the vein and into the next valve.

When he held his hand on the distal valve, the proximal vein- the one closest to the heart- would prevent blood from flowing backwards and the vein ultimately remained empty.

And, as they say in England, that’s the bloody truth.

Word has it that the assistant subsequently recovered from a bout of light-headedness and promptly sued Harvey for indecent composure, or maybe that was Ludwig Von Beethoven’s assistant, I forget.

That brings me to another great Italian scientist- the subject of an Oratorio composed by well known local musician, educator and performer- Glenn McClure.

We recently attended Glenn’s World Premier of “The Starry Messenger” based on the life of Galileo Galilei (they must have been hard pressed for issuing proper names to persons of that era).

Galileo constructed a telescope and studied our moon’s surface as well as four moons revolving around Jupiter. He also confirmed the theory of Copernicus that the Sun was the center of our universe and not the Earth. Such preaching was considered heretical at the time and Galileo was condemned for supporting such a theory.

The performance of The Starry Messenger by the Rochester ensemble, Madrigalia, was based on text from the letters of Galileo’s daughter, Maria Celeste.

It included a combination of arrangements that were oratorical, instrumental, choral and dance.

The dance routines included human beings forming a table and chair for Galileo to sit at and record his writings. They also depicted other inanimate things like doors, lamps and coat racks.

I was quite impressed with their athletic abilities especially when they formed a human ball that involved the use of several muscles that we average people never knew we had.

The entire performance was a tribute to the passion of Glenn for a multi-disciplinary integration of the arts curriculum.

The human body has been dissected and depicted in many ways throughout the history of mankind by scientists like da Vinci and Harvey and by composers and performers like Glenn McClure.

I got to thinking about the manner in which people of Galileo Galilei's time were given proper names. If you followed that practice in today's society a son could very well be named Louie Lou-i. Oh baby, we gotta go now- dum dum dum, dum dum, dum dum dum, dum dum, right now!!

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