

TORONTO

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MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2003 • WWW.METRONEWS.CA

Music is his love but dentistry pays the bills

Dr. Alan Shiner doesn't regret turning show business down to become a dentist, even though it could have been him instead of Paul Shaffer playing for millions every weeknight on TV.

"I was offered the job of piano player for the pilot of Saturday Night Live. I recommended Paul and he took the job instead of me," he says nonchalantly.

Sitting in the living room of his North York home, next to his grand piano, Shiner says if he knew then what he knows now, he probably wouldn't have gone to dentistry school in the early '70s, just as his music career was starting to take off.

"There wasn't a lifelong dream to become a dentist, it was a practical thing. I was influenced to become a professional — Jewish conditioning. 'Don't become an artist, don't become a musician.'"

So he went to dentistry school at the University of Toronto and played music on the side.

While still in dentistry school, Shiner became music director of a CBC variety show called Mark's Grab Bag, which featured performers such as Dan Aykroyd, Gilda Radner, Martin Short and magician Doug Henning.

"I was made all kinds of



VINCE TALOTTA / TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Dr. Alan Shiner could have been the piano player for Saturday Night Live, instead he chose the more practical decision.

offers to compose music for some of the guests, for various things they were working on. If I had exams while they were taping the show, I would either run back and forth between school and the studio or Paul would fill in for me."

After graduating, Shiner spent a year playing and composing, then started practising dentistry in 1976.

Though he never allowed the work to become too demanding, refusing to practise what he calls "assembly-line" dentistry, he wasn't able to devote much time to his music. Still, he managed to write some of the more memorable com-

mercial jingles in Canada, including the "Nine six seven, eleven eleven" song for Pizza Pizza.

"I was lucky I had the music to fall back on. After a couple of car accidents I had to stop practising dentistry in the early '90s. I put my music on hold for a long time, but I've got back into it recently — a lot more pop writing."

Including a song that was recorded, but never released, by Mariah Carey in 1997. He also started Nova Sounds, a music production company that works with corporate clients and artists such as the Pointer Sisters.

Torstar News Service