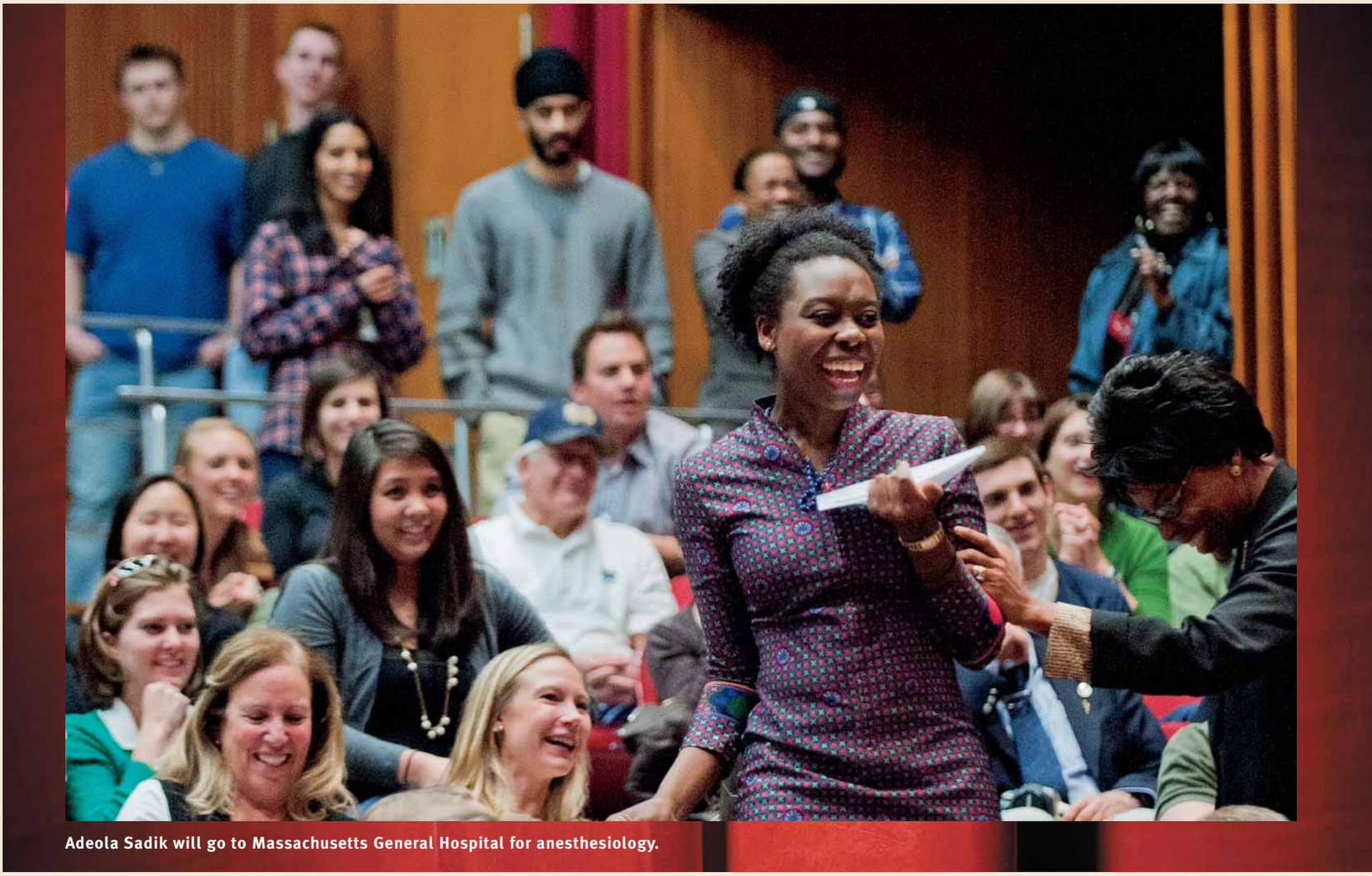


JIM BURKE/CIDDE

Adeola Sadik will go to Massachusetts General Hospital for anesthesiology.

MEET YOUR MATCH

THE ENVELOPES … PLEASE!

TWO PERSPECTIVES ON A VERY BIG DAY

The lecture room in Scaife Hall is buzzing like a nightclub and bumping with bass as the Black Eyed Peas croon *I've got a feeling that tonight's gonna be a good night.* Snapshots of the Class of 2011 flash across the screen, bringing laughter, shouts, and cheers from the actual members of the class, who swarm the aisles. They are glowing, as though lit from within. They embrace, slap hands. Handshakes are firmer than usual. Quiet, knowing nods and pats on the back are pregnant with meaning. It's Match Day. Time to meet the oracle.

Across the nation, more than 22,000 new physicians are poised to learn where they will begin their residency training on this day. Prolonging the suspense here at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine's Scaife Hall is Joan Harvey, associate dean of student affairs. *Two-thirds of you,* she says to applause, *matched at top-tier programs (per* U.S. News & World Report's *rankings). … This year the Harvard programs, the University of Washington, Vanderbilt, and Michigan head up the list of other institutions*

(besides our own prestigious UPMC) which will be most populated by our students next year, with Duke, Brown, and Yale close behind.

Encouraging news, but it's all this crowd can do to keep from shouting, "The envelopes, please!" There are babes in arms, couples gripping one another's forearms. Finally, one by one, the members of the Class of 2011 are summoned by Harvey, by Arthur S. Levine, senior vice chancellor for the health sciences and dean of the school, and by Chenits Pettigrew, assistant dean for student affairs.

Cameras flash as students make their way to the front. Attire ranges from nightclub chic to Penguins game day. There are glittering green top hats for St. Patrick's Day. Upon hearing her name called, the owner of a pair of spike-heeled boots takes approximately one half her med school career to descend 36 steps from the back of the auditorium. (What's the point of learning your future if you can't look stunning while doing it?)

Most open the envelope on the spot. Many borrow the mike to share their news.

"I'm staying in Pittsburgh!" someone shouts into the microphone. He commences a vigorous touchdown dance amid a loud ovation and a series of high-fives.

One student reads her letter and pitches forward as she clutches at her throat. She looks at the paper in her hand again, takes the mike, and says, "Massachusetts General Hospital." A student discharges a can of spray confetti indiscriminately as his classmates climb the stairs to their seats holding their letters.

In the back of the hall, a salt-and-pepper-haired doctor stands surveying the scene and grinning. He applauds vigorously each time another fourth-year says, "Pittsburgh!"

Some approach the stage like boxers entering the ring. One quietly sneaks back up the stairs with her still-sealed envelope in hand. A questioning look from a friend causes her to shake her head and mouth, "Not yet." She exits the auditorium. Minutes later, she's back with a grin and a thumbs-up.

One student looks up from her letter and says, "Mom and Dad, I'm coming home."

And that's all you need to know about what's happening here. Classmates are hugged, supported, and caught as they stumble in their emotion. Nobody falls down here. Some will swear their feet never touched the ground.

A woman says, "Radiology at UCSF" into the microphone, then seems to bite her finger in an attempt to hold it together long enough to make it up the stairs to row 14 and pick her way to the middle. She runs a gauntlet of hands—guiding, lifting, reaching out to say, *We're here with you*—until she finally reaches husband and child and dissolves into tears as she is wrapped in the crushing embrace of her future.

—Chuck Staresinic

NO ROMANCE

DOES HER PROGRAM LOVE HIM?

Someone told me once that Match Day is like a wedding. On that day, you and your residency program are bound together, for better or for worse, in a ceremony among friends and family.

Yet, as I learned this year, the Match is not the culmination of a fairy-tale love story. The interview season is like speed dating for the pros. I interviewed with more than 200 people from 27 different programs for 15 to 20 minutes each. I traveled to 10 states and 20 cities in two months. There wasn't even a second date or phone call: Communication between programs and applicants is strictly limited between interview and Match Day.

Lucky for me, I have a fairy-tale love story—with my girlfriend, Tarini. But this put me into a love triangle of sorts, because Tarini matched last year in one of the most competitive programs in the country. I love my girlfriend. She loves me. I desperately wanted to be in the same program as she is. But, did her program love me?

As I looked around Scaife Hall's Lecture Room 6 on the day of reckoning, I found that my situation was not uncommon. Match Day may determine the future of our relationships more than our careers.

After interview season, I ranked the programs, and the programs ranked their interviewees. Then, a computer determined my residency program based on a mathematical formula. Soon, I would find out what the computer had spat out. If Match Day is like a wedding, it's an arranged marriage. I felt like I had no control and that my fate was in someone else's hands.

Forty minutes into the Match ceremony, my palms became sweaty. I was hot and then cold. I was anxious. I was happy when my friends' names were called and they learned of their matches. Then, I was jealous that they already knew. *Where was my name?* Finally, I heard it. My heart skipped a beat. But, nope. Just a classmate with the same first name. I got hotter. *Why do we get our match this way again?* This was torture.

Then, I was called.

I tried not to stumble on my walk to the stage. Dean Joan Harvey was smiling at me. *Was it a pity smile?* She knew I was trying to match with Tarini. As I approached Dean Harvey, pure fear raced through my veins. My hands shook, but I was able to grasp the letter and walk to a corner of the auditorium. I took a deep breath. A calm came over me. I knew my hard work would be worth it. I ripped open the envelope. *Why is this letter folded so awkwardly?* I couldn't find the words on the page. Finally, I saw some words. I refocused, glossed over the boilerplate "Congratulations." There it was, my residency location: I'd matched at Tarini's institution for internship and at another strong medical center (on the other coast) for my advanced program. It was not perfect, but I was happy.

I smiled, and my eyes locked with my friends'. These were the people who had pulled me across the finish line. One had played Rock Band with me for hours to help me relax after a bad day in the hospital. Another had accompanied me on a 1 a.m. trip to the ER for a simple paronychia during board studying. They knew my deepest fears and my greatest dreams. They were family. I hadn't said a word, yet they knew how I felt. They cheered!

This was not like a wedding at all. No church bells. No ritual kiss. Only an aging auditorium and an awkwardly folded letter. There is no good analogy or apt comparison. It's just Match Day.

—Brian Lau (MD '11)

Read another Match story by Brian Lau, on the little-known Scramble: pittmed.health.pitt.edu/Summer_2011/web-extra.htm.