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Winter 2000 • Volume 11, Number 3

DEPARTMENTS

3 The Editor's Page — Elvina Pearce

4 THE MAGIC TRIANGLE: TEACHER/STUDENT/PARENT — Barbara Kreader, Editor
What are the positive and the negative aspects of teaching students in their own homes? — Leslie Michaelis

6 THE OTHER TEACHER: HOME PRACTICE — Elvina Pearce, Editor
What do students have to say about their practice and lessons? — Elvina Pearce and Students

10 INDEPENDENCE DAY: MUSIC READING — Craig Sale, Editor
Why do you prefer an "Off-Staff" rather than a Grand Staff approach to beginning reading? — Ted Cooper, Meg Gray, Kathleen Rountree

16 LET'S GET PHYSICAL: TECHNIQUE — Scott McBride Smith, Editor
How do you teach early level students to play with good tone? — Maryen Herrett, Scott McBride Smith, Adrienne Wiley

20 THE HEART OF THE MATTER: RHYTHM — Bruce Berr, Editor
How does your experience with rhythm help you in the process of teaching? — Steve Betts, Kathleen Murray

28 FROM THE INSIDE OUT: MOTIVATION
How can we link pedagogy, performance, and a cognitive approach to coping with performance anxiety? — Phyllis Alpert Lehrer

32 IT'S NEVER TOO LATE: ADULT PIANO STUDY — Brenda Dillon, Editor
What advice do you have for adults who plan to begin taking piano lessons? — Sybil Barnaby, Patricia Bulko, Lucille Reifman

36 PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: REPERTOIRE — Marvin Blickenstaff, Editor
When you know that high school will be the end of a student's lessons, what repertoire should have been covered? — Gay Garard-Brewer, Jean Fox, Avonne Higgins, Anita Renfroe

40 TOMORROW TODAY: TECHNOLOGY — Sandra Bowen, Editor
How do you use notation software to improve your students' reading skills? — Gail Fischler, Maura Hall, Linda Kennedy, Bobbie Rastall

43 KEYBOARD COMPANION Tech Tips — Sandra Bowen

44 THE WORLD AROUND US: NEWS AND VIEWS — Helen Smith Tarchalski, Editor
How do you know when it's time to say "goodbye," and how do you do it? — Jocelyn Cross Makowski, Christine Mirabella

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KEYBOARD COMPANION
Volume 11, Number 3, Winter, 2000

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Printer
American Web

KEYBOARD COMPANION (ISSN1086-0819), (USPS 013-579) is published quarterly—Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter—by the *Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy*, 90 Main St., Kingston, NJ 08528. Periodicals Postage Paid at Kingston, NJ and at additional mailing offices. Printed in USA.

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Subscription rates are $17.00 for one year, $30.00 for two years, $6.00 for single copies, $11.00 each for groups of five or more subscriptions. Canada: $25.00/year; Foreign: $31.00/year. All non-U.S. subscriptions payable in U.S. funds only. Claims for missing copies cannot be honored after 60 days and four weeks are required for change of address.

Address all subscription and change of address correspondence to KEYBOARD COMPANION, P.O Box 25129, Baton Rouge, LA 70894. Telephone: 800-824-5087. Fax: 225-767-6445. E-mail: sbetts@lsu.edu. Address all advertising correspondence to KEYBOARD COMPANION, P.O. Box 651, Kingston, NJ 08528. Telephone: 609-921-0371. Fax: 609-924-2536. E-mail: fccenter@mindspring.com. Address all editorial correspondence to KEYBOARD COMPANION, 827 Santa Maria Drive, Naperville, IL 60540. E-mail: etpearce@worldnet.att.net.

KEYBOARD COMPANION WEBSITE:
keyboardcompanion.com

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to
KEYBOARD COMPANION
P.O. Box 25129
Baton Rouge, LA 70894

This issue's cover art, "Scales" by Jessie Willcox Smith, is used with permission of The Kelly Collection of American Illustration. (See editorial.)

The EDITOR'S PAGE

by Elvina Pearce

In the Autumn issue of KEYBOARD COMPANION, student retention was targeted as one of the themes which the magazine intends to "vigorously pursue, continuing to research reasons for student dropouts, and continuing to explore new and more effective ways to ensure high levels of student enjoyment and success." "Enjoyment" and "success" are, of course, the key words here for rarely do students want to discontinue an activity they truly enjoy, particularly when they are successful.

As I read and edited the articles that appear in this issue, a number of things jumped out at me which relate to enhancing student enjoyment and success. Thinking in terms of a young beginner, surely the most important thing—at least to the child—is the *music itself* and being able to make it at the piano! Apropos of this, in this issue's "Music Reading" column, Kathleen Rountree reminisces about her own experiences as a young beginning piano student. She recalls her first lesson when she climbed the stairs of her teacher's porch with "great excitement. I was going to play the piano!" As she walked through the doors of the living room, she had only one goal—"to play a great 'song.'" But her teacher had "plans of her own for the lesson." She "intercepted the beeline" Kathleen was making to the piano and steered her instead to a "folding card table in the corner" where the entire lesson was spent "drawing notes and learning about lines and spaces." It was not until the second lesson that she was "allowed to sit at the piano and play single notes" identified off of flashcards. And it wasn't until lesson three or four that she was finally allowed to play something "vaguely resembling a 'song.'" In spite of the fact that her early study got "better as time went on", and that she "learned a great deal," still, Kathleen summarizes her "overwhelming memory of those first lessons" with one word—"disappointment."

Those of us who teach beginners should perhaps ask ourselves two questions: 1) what kinds of "songs" do our beginners want to play?, and 2) how *soon* and how *successfully* are they able to play them? Apparently for many students who begin piano lessons, the desire to be able to play "songs" they want to play in a reasonable amount of time is not being fulfilled soon enough in the student's experience or else the dropout rate would surely not consistently remain so high.

In addition to being able to successfully play appealing music, certainly the environment at the lesson also plays a vital role in fostering student enjoyment. Is there enough emphasis on the *positive* versus the negative? This issue's "Home Practice" column focuses on student answers to questions posed in a recent questionnaire. In responding to the question "What do you like about coming to lessons?", one student's reply was, "I get to learn what I'm doing wrong in my 'songs.'" Since this was one of my own students, this response gave me much food for thought. I asked myself, "Is there enough emphasis at lessons on what students are doing *right*??" How often at the end of a piece's performance do we ask, "What did you like about your performance?" Surely seeking student input is an important part of the evaluation process, and the student's knowing what he or she did *well* should go hand-in-hand with knowing what needs to be improved. Sybil Barnaby, one of the writers for this issue's "Adult Study" column, offers this advice: "Do not measure your progress by the notes you miss, but by the ones you play correctly." Patricia Bulko, another adult student writing for this same column, ends her article with these words: "Music makes my soul sing ... what a journey!"

Children approaching their first piano lesson with "great excitement" are just beginning this "journey," each bringing with them, among other things, a soul that wants to "sing." Helping them to find their voice, inspiring them to continue wanting to "sing," and then enabling them to successfully do so is the awesome responsibility entrusted to each of us. *What kind of a "journey" will it be?*

About Jessie Willcox Smith (1863-1935), the artist who did the painting, "Scales," which appears on this issue's cover:

Jessie Willcox Smith was one of the most gifted women illustrators of her time. Early in her career she decided that her art would concentrate on the universe of the child and for over thirty years she worked with great sensitivity and tenderness in that arena. She created her images with a mixture of media, combining charcoal, watercolor, gouache and even oil to create just the right tone in each piece. Many of her pieces are drawn from the child's point of view, making them all the more endearing. A popular and prolific book illustrator, she depicted many of childhood's fears and joys and did so in a sympathetic, non-judgmental manner.

The image, "Scales," was reproduced in one of the popular books illustrated by Smith, *The Bed Time Book*, written by Helen Hay Whitney. It was published in 1907, the same year Smith moved to the famous studio at Cogslea with fellow illustrators Violet Oakley and Elizabeth Shippen Green. According to Alice Carter in her recent book, *The Red Rose Girls*, "Jessie Smith relied on the works of several other artists to provide inspiration for her paintings of children. She especially admired Abbott Thayer. 'He is eternal and his children have souls and minds of noble beauty.'"[1]

[1] Carter, Alice. *The Red Rose Girls: An Uncommon Story of Art and Love*. NY: Harry N. Abrams, Publishers, 2000, p. 129.

The Magic Triangle:
Teacher/Student/Parent

Barbara Kreader, Editor

Barbara Kreader has continued to teach in her independent studio in Evanston, Illinois since 1974. She is also Senior Editor for Educational Keyboard Publications for Hal Leonard. Her previous responsibilities have included faculty member of Northwestern University's Division of Preparatory and Community Music, editor of Clavier magazine, and editor of Baldwin's Soundboard newsletter.

What are the positive and the negative aspects of teaching students in their own homes?

by Barbara Kreader

"Come on in!

Marion, the cleaning lady, and the piano teacher are here!

Someone come get the dog!

Down, Princess!

Josh, are you ready for your lesson? Where are your books?

Will someone please get this dog?"

This scene, or one like it, often greeted me during my first years of teaching. I traveled to students' homes to give piano lessons. Although I owned a piano, I lived in a neighborhood far away from the residences of the students referred to me through my graduate program at Northwestern University. On my way home from classes, I stopped by several homes to give lessons.

I had already taught two years of elementary school, so I felt reasonably comfortable in my teaching skin, but I behaved like a true greenhorn when it came to scheduling, billing, and setting professional boundaries with parents. Teaching in the home didn't help.

In 1974 fewer homes had family rooms. Most pianos sat in living rooms along with the television, stereo system, and family pets. The clatter of the nearby kitchen added to the general confusion. While most families treated me with respect, they thought of me under the heading of "household helper." Along with the also under-appreciated babysitter and cleaning lady (yes, they called them "ladies" in those days), I shared the family living space. As a fledgling teacher, I was too shy to request that upstairs vacuuming wait until after the lesson or to ask the sitter to take siblings to another room to play *Twister*.

Of course, the pianos came in all shapes, sizes, and sounds. Improvised benches were common. One family used a different folding chair every week, each seemingly lower than the previous one. Before each lesson, another family had to remove the fish tank routinely perched on the lid covering the piano keys—a sure sign no practice was happening.

Most troubling were the well-meaning parents who chatted with me both before and after lessons. I routinely listened to the myriad marital, medical, and mental challenges facing each family. These confidences sometimes went on longer than the lessons.

Obviously, most of the difficulties I encountered were related to my inability as a young teacher to set professional boundaries and to demand a suitable teaching atmosphere. Twenty-six years later I know I could do that. Yet my first unpleasant experiences stay with me. Happily, this issue's author, Leslie Michaelis, is a young teacher who already knows how to tell the dog to go lie down and the parents to keep the room quiet. She finds teaching in students' homes a positive experience as do her students and their families. ▲

by Leslie Michaelis

When I come to the students' homes . . . everyone is happier, including me.

I absolutely love teaching at students' homes! I find it easier to get to know the families as they really are, and I become truly comfortable with them. I like knowing I am making their lives easier. When parents and children are running from soccer to Chinese school to ballet, they come to lessons stressed and all worn out.

I gave lessons to the two daughters of one family at the music store where I teach two days a week. The father brought them, along with his one-year old son. This youngest child hated being confined to the store for a full hour, and he ran around bothering everything and everyone simply because he was a baby. The dad spent the entire time frantically following him around trying to keep him from destroying music and pianos and guitars. When I suggested I go to the family's home, everyone, including the store personnel, breathed a sigh of relief. The income the store was making from my teaching failed to offset the cost of the potential damage the child could cause the merchandise, so they gave the switch their blessing.

When I come to the students' homes, the other children in the family can enjoy being at home. The parents can help them with homework or collaborate on projects. If they want, they can complete their own work or get dinner ready while the children relax and hang out. Everyone is happier, including me.

I value teaching students on their own piano. I can show them how to better adjust to playing and working with their particular instrument. Sometimes the students have a piano much nicer than my own or the one in the store. One family owns a six-foot Yamaha with General Midi. Often, too, the teaching space in students' homes outclasses what I could offer either at home or at the store.

I enjoy the fact that my teaching and my private life remain separate. I like having my home be my *home*. My husband can enjoy our house on his own time and can do what he wants when he wants. I don't have to keep the house all squeaky-clean every minute. When we have children, I will know the babysitter is handling what they need, and I won't have to worry about the baby crying in the other room.

I also enjoy leaving the house to work. I do marketing for a large music publisher in the mornings and if I had to continue to stay in my house to teach, I would feel down about it. I dress up in professional clothes, put on my make-up, and feel good about going to work.

I do charge more for traveling to the student's home but most families find it so much more convenient that they don't mind the added cost. So I can teach fewer students and make the same income. In addition, I can choose the neighborhood in which I teach. No matter where I live, I can go where children need teachers, and I can choose areas where piano lessons are valued and taken seriously as an activity.

I schedule the lessons loosely. For example, I allow a half-hour for a fifteen-minute drive between houses. That way I don't have to rush. If the weather is bad or I want to talk to a parent for a while, I have the leisure to do so. Also, if Johnny didn't practice for the sixteenth week in a row, and I want to tear my hair out, I have time to stop at Starbuck's!

The only negative aspect of teaching at students' homes is trying to keep all my supplies together. I used to carry around three bags and three suitcases full of books and equipment. This year I am streamlining my materials. I have also purchased a data planner specifically designed for piano teachers. It allows me to keep track of the students' personal data, their book purchases, billing, my mileage, and all pertinent information all in one place. My students pay at the end of each lesson; this includes the cost for any books I have purchased. I allow no excuses. This eliminates billing and make-up lessons. My students rarely cancel and then it is only for illness.

I am extremely happy with my life. My schedule allows me to be both a stay-at-home wife and a professional working woman. I originally taught in students' homes because I had to do it. Now I do it because I *choose* to, and would have my teaching schedule no other way. ▲

Leslie Michaelis studied piano performance at the University of Texas and received her B.M. from George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. She currently works in the Educational Keyboard Division at Hal Leonard Corporation, and teaches 25-30 students in the Chicago suburbs.

In the next issue: **What goals do you have for your piano study?**

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The Other Teacher:

Home Practice

Elvina Pearce, Editor

Elvina Pearce, Editor of Keyboard Companion, studied piano with Isabelle Vengerova and pedagogy with Frances Clark. She is a founding member of the Board of Trustees of the Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy for which she serves as Vice President. She has presented recitals and workshops in over forty states plus Canada, the Republic of China, and Australia, and is also a nationally recognized composer.

What do students have to say about their lessons and practice?

by Elvina Pearce

Every year I solicit my students' opinions about their piano study and practice via one or two questionnaires. Sometimes I distribute these at the start of a new season, and sometimes again at the end of a school year. Last year, about a third of the way through the first term, I gave students (ages 8-17) such a questionnaire. Below are some of the questions and student answers.

Why are you studying piano?

Michael, age 8: "Because I like the piano."

Annie, age 10: "I want to be able to play in school and I like the instrument."

(*Teacher*: Both Michael and Annie also take violin lessons, play in a school instrumental ensemble, and perform in school talent shows.)

Kathy, age 11: "I want to learn how to play an instrument and to learn how to play music."

(*Teacher:* Kathy also takes oboe and swimming lessons. Although she is very involved with extra-curricular activities, she maintains a daily 45-minute practice average, and is almost always well prepared for her lessons.)

Ellie, age 12: "I've been studying for a long time. I think I started for fun, but I can't really remember. And since I don't like quitting, I am still playing."

(*Teacher*: Ellie seldom smiles at her lesson and never volunteers any information about herself or what's going on in her life. When I ask how she is, she is always just "O.K." If I ask, "What's new?" her response is always "Nothing." The only question I ever ask which receives a genuinely enthusiastic reply is, "How's your bunny rabbit?" [She has a black Netherlands Dwarf rabbit.])

Daniel, age 13: "I'm taking lessons because my parents want me to."

(*Teacher*: Dan would probably quit lessons in a heartbeat if his parents would agree. Fortunately for him, they think that "piano" is part of his overall basic education and insist that he continue. Even though he has lots of homework, he manages to maintain a daily practice average of 45 minutes and plays reasonably well.)

Michelle, age 13: "Because I like playing the piano."

(*Teacher*: Michelle transferred to me two years ago, having had three years of previous study. Because of poor practice habits and rhythm problems [particularly involving the relationships of dotted rhythms and sixteenth notes to a basic quarter note pulse], her first year and a half of study with me was probably not conducive to her enjoyment of "playing the piano." Happily however, during the past six months, she has made so much progress in both of these areas, that lessons can now be devoted primarily to the "good stuff"—music-making—rather than to mechanical issues.)

> Lessons can now be devoted primarily to the "good stuff"—music-making—rather than to mechanical issues.

Susan, age 14: "I enjoy music in all forms. I sing and also play clarinet. Being able to play also allows me to play accompaniments and songs for my own enjoyment."

(*Teacher*: Susan is an ideal student who, up until this year, has possibly felt overshadowed by the pianistic success of her older sister. Recently, Susan entered her first "important" competition and won second place [a $75 award!]. I'm sure that this recognition of her diligence in regular practice will boost her enjoyment of music to even greater heights.)

Steven, age 15: "For enjoyment mostly, now that I've come to appreciate it more."

(*Teacher*: Steven was an enormously gifted teenage student. I say "was" because his music study came to a screeching halt mid-year as the result of homework which forced him to burn the midnight oil to such an extent that he had little time to practice and consequently, he came to lessons without much to show in the way of achievement. Finding him on several occasions in the waiting area before his lesson with his head down on a desk, asleep, resulted in my recommendation to him and his parents that he discontinue study for the time being and use whatever time he might have had for practice and lessons for taking a nap or indulging in some recreational activity requiring less discipline than practice. I am sure that his "enjoyment" of music will be resuscitated at some point down the road as he matures and is able to establish a better balance between work and relaxation. But I **do** miss him!)

Bonnie, age 15: "Because I like it; it's a way for me to express those feelings that can't be expressed in words."

(*Teacher*: Another highly gifted teenager, Bonnie [who is home-schooled] is shy and reserved in verbal expression, but is indeed finding ways to express herself with much more authority at the piano. I anticipate that she will elect to major in piano [and **pedagogy** at my suggestion!] in college.)

Brittany, age 16: "To hold on to something I've done since I was very young and because I love music."

(*Teacher*: Brittany has studied piano with me since the age of eight. Because her parents have emphasized the importance of her following through with something once it's begun, this attitude is clearly reflected in the first part of her answer. Second academically in her high school class, she has become increasingly involved in school work and related

extra-curricular activities [math and science teams, etc.]. She recently was selected for a special six-week summer study program at MIT in Boston. Because her previously excellent practice average and achievement have been greatly eroded by her academic pursuits, I have urged her parents to allow her to discontinue lessons during her senior year, but to continue to encourage her to go to the piano and just play "for fun" whenever she has a little time for some recreation. They have reluctantly agreed. I'll miss Brittany as I do Steven, but I truly think that under the circumstances, their discontinuing lessons at this time is in both of their best interests.)

What are your goals for yourself in piano this year?

Michael: "To get very good."
Annie: "To practice enough and to become a better pianist."
Kathy: "I would like to play more challenging music well this year."
Ellie: "None, really. Just to have fun."
Daniel: "Trying to practice at least 30 minutes a day."
(*Teacher*: Dan, at your age and level, it should be at least 45 minutes!)

Michelle: "Play more songs. Work on better counting, fingering, and dynamics."
Susan: "... to have an average practice time of one hour, and to play with more expression, including dynamics."
Steven: "I really don't have any goals for this coming year except to play those pieces that I've always liked when I heard them."
Bonnie: "To just in general improve in every way possible, and to gain more insight into pieces."
Brittany: "To play well at the Sonata/Sonatina Festival ... and any other competitions and recitals." (She received a gold medal for her performance in the Festival.) "To do a better job of practicing on a regular basis ... consistency."

What do you like about coming to the lesson?

Michael: "It's fun."
Annie: "Mrs. Pearce is very nice."
Kathy: "I get to learn what I'm doing wrong in my songs. Example: rhythm, notes, etc."
(*Teacher*: I wish she had also said, "I get to learn what I'm doing **right** ...")

Ellie: "On lesson days, I let myself have a break from practice."
Daniel: "I get away from homework for a while."
Michelle: "I get feedback on how I'm playing a piece."
Susan: "I like coming to lessons because sometimes I feel that I've improved a lot on a piece and I want to play it in front of an audience. Also, because I always love getting new pieces."
Steven: "Just coming to play. I'm so busy that I really don't get a lot of time to even practice so playing is good for me."
(*Teacher*: Even though Steven has discontinued lessons, I hope he is still "playing.")

Bonnie: "Hearing about the ways in which I need to improve. Learning about different styles of pieces and composers."
Brittany: "The regularity and structure it gives to my piano playing."

What do you *not* like about coming to lessons?

Michael: "It's in the middle of the week."
(*Teacher*: Actually, Michael, it's on Tuesday.)

Annie: "It's very far away from our house and takes a while to get there."
(*Teacher*: It probably takes 20-30 minutes.)

Kathy: "Sometimes I am doing something with my friends and it

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interrupts, or I can't do something with them because of the lesson."

Ellie: "When I have a lot of homework, I get less time to work on it."

Daniel: "Sometimes I have a 'lotta' homework that day."

Michelle: "Playing a memorized piece."

Susan: "I don't like having to take time away from my school work. Also, I don't like playing memory pieces because I'm always nervous."

Steven: "I'm always tired."

Bonnie: "Just the drive."

(*Teacher*: Bonnie lives about fifty miles away and the roundtrip to lessons takes over two hours.)

Brittany: "... not being prepared, but that's always my fault."

What do you enjoy about practicing?

Michael: "I get to learn differently."

Annie: "I enjoy spending time with my Mom. She helps me."

Kathy: "I can fix the mistakes I am making."

Ellie: "I feel better that way."

(*Teacher*: This answer was **really** a surprise!)

Daniel: "Getting a break from homework."

Jennifer: "Playing songs that I've worked hard on."

Susan: "I enjoy the result . . . a well-polished piece with good technique and expression."

Steven: "Nothing really, just playing and hearing what I'm playing."

Bonnie: "It's my own private time to take something, work on it, and hopefully make it so that in the end, it turns out beautiful."

Brittany: "Hearing improvements, getting my mind off of homework, and other things."

What do you *not* enjoy about practicing?

Michael: "It's not always fun."

Annie: "Sometimes I have to practice for a long time."

Kathy: "It is time consuming and can sometimes be boring."

Ellie: "Again, the homework idea, and less time to do other things."

Daniel: "Takes a lot of time."

Michelle: "Playing super-slow is boring."

Susan: "I don't enjoy playing the pieces over and over again even though I know that it's necessary."

Steven: "Practicing pieces I don't exactly enjoy."

Bonnie: "I think I pretty much enjoy practicing."

Brittany: "Frustrating pieces or ones I don't enjoy (until I can play them 'well,' at least.); scales, etc., keeping really old pieces 'alive' for contests and recitals."

What pieces that you are now working on do you like the best?

Michael: "All pieces."

Annie: "'Pagoda' (Olson), 'Try and Catch Me' (Robinson), 'Duet' from *Op. 100* (Diabelli)."

Kathy: "Kuhlau's 'Duet Sonatina, Op. 17,' Gurlitt's 'Sonatina in A Minor.'"

Ellie: "None. I don't like choosing favorites."

Daniel: "'*Masterpieces*'—all of them."

Michelle: "'Fluttering Leaves' (Kolling) and 'Mazurka in C Minor' (Chopin)."

Susan: "I like the 'Little White Donkey' (Ibert)."

Steven: "Beethoven's 'Concerto No. 3.'"

Bonnie: "I am finding that I really enjoy Chopin nocturnes."

Brittany: "'The Maid With the Flaxen Hair' (Debussy), and the Chopin 'Mazurka.'"

> "I would like to play more challenging music well this year."

What pieces that you are now working on do you *not* like?

Michael: "None."

Annie: " 'Sonatina in C Major' (Latour)."

Kathy: "... 'Prelude in G' (Pearce)."

(*Teacher*: Well, so much for my composing career!)

Ellie: "None in particular."

Daniel: "'Lament' (Allen), 'Phrygian Toccata' (Verne), and memorizing sonatinas."

(*Teacher*: Dan ended up choosing the "Lament" and the "Toccata" as **favorites** to play in recitals this year.)

Michelle: "None."

Susan: "I don't like the Beethoven 'Sonata' (*Op. 49, No. 2*), the Handel 'Gigue,' or the MacDowell 'Sea Piece.'"

(*Teacher*: After Susan won a gold medal for her performance of the Beethoven sonata in the Sonata/Sonatina Festival, she liked it a **lot** more!)

Steven: "'Gardens in the Rain' (Debussy)."

Bonnie: "Some pieces like the Tcherepnin (*Bagatelles, Op. 5*) ... I don't like at first but by the time I have them ready for performance level, I've changed my mind and really like them."

Brittany: "Haydn 'Sonata in G Major,' and 'Marche Militaire' (Schubert: 1 piano/4 hands)."

Name some pieces or kinds of music you wish you could be studying

instead of some of the ones you don't enjoy.

Michael: "Some more jazzy instead of 99% classical."

(*Teacher*: He asked for "jazzy" and now he's got it!)

Annie: "Classical music, Bach (my friend and I started at the same time and he plays this kind of music)."

Kathy: "Jazz."

(*Teacher*: I subsequently assigned Kathy the *Swing With Jazz* book by O'Hearn [Kjos] which she really enjoyed.)

Ellie: (Ellie did not answer this question.)

Daniel: "Maybe more modern music."

(*Teacher*: I later discovered that by "modern" Dan meant jazz and so I assigned *Cool Jazz* [by Kocour; CPP/Belwin].)

Michelle: "Fast songs like 'Fluttering Leaves' (Kolling), slow, calm songs like the 'Preludes' (Vandall, book 2)."

Susan: "I wish I was playing challenging pieces by Chopin or Grieg instead of pieces by Mozart or Beethoven."

(*Teacher*: Shortly thereafter, I assigned Susan the Grieg 'Nocturne' and 'Butterfly.')

Steven: "Grieg's 'Concerto.'"

(*Teacher*: Steven, this is not the piece for a very tired boy with too much homework and no time to practice!)

Bonnie: "I like the kind of music I play. If something later comes into mind, I'll let you know."

Brittany: "Impressionistic, romantic pieces, Rachmaninoff 'Preludes.'"

If your parents would allow you to stop lessons now, would you do it?

Michael: "Yes, because I would have more time, and no, because it's fun."

Annie and Kathy: "No."

Ellie: "I don't know."

Daniel: "Yes."

Michelle and Susan: "No."

Steven: "Maybe, depending on how much work I have to do at school and if I think I could use the time off."

Bonnie and Brittany: "No."

How many of your friends take piano lessons?

Michael: "I don't know."

Annie: "Four."

Kathy: "About three or four, but many have already quit."

Ellie: "About one-third to one-half."

Daniel: "Some."

Michelle: "All 16 of them."

Susan: "Practically all of them"

Steven: "One."

Bonnie: "Since I just moved here, I don't yet have many friends, but one is in college majoring in piano, and maybe two more still play."

Brittany: "Not too many any more."

The information gained from (student questionnaires) helps me better understand each individual as a person.

If you have friends who used to take piano lessons but have dropped out, why do you think they quit?

Michael: "I don't know."

Annie: They didn't have time. They didn't like their teacher.

Kathy: "They didn't like it, they thought it was boring."

Daniel: "Some of them don't have the time. They stay up until 11:00 or 12:00 doing their homework and have to get up at 6:00."

Michelle: "None dropped out."

Susan: "Because of too much school work and not having enough time to practice."

Steven: (He didn't answer this question.)

Bonnie: "Lack of commitment, not enough time, some have gone and taken other instruments."

Brittany: "Too much homework/other activities, went to college, not 'good enough.'"

If you had only group lessons, would you enjoy piano more?

(*Teacher*: Six students said "No," one said "Not really," one said "Yes," one said "Yeah," and one said "I'm not sure. I like group lessons a lot.")

What do you like about group lessons?

(*Teacher*: Here are the answers I got: "They have more games;" "I like people and there are fun activities;" "I can see how other people are doing in piano and I can meet more people;" "Listening to other pieces instead of mine;" "... get to interact with other people;" "It allows me to hear other people my age perform, and it lets me practice at playing a song with an audience;" "Getting student feedback;" "Nothing!;" "Input from other students about my playing and hearing others;" "Playing for others and listening to them.")

What do you *not* like about group lessons?

(*Teacher*: The two youngest students said that they didn't get as much "help" in the group as in their private lessons. Two students said, "Nothing." One said, "Being in front of an audience when I make mistakes." Other comments were: "Doing my composing-a-piece assignment;" "Playing memorized songs;" "The extra time it takes;" "Having a shorter private lesson that week but I think that all of the good things about group lessons offset that;" "Any time I'm unprepared.") ▲

Back to the Editor (Teacher)

I always learn a lot about my teaching and my students from questionnaires such as this and find that the information gained from this source helps me better understand each individual as a person and not just as a piano student. The information also greatly assists me in making a long-range lesson plan for each of them at the beginning of the new school year—particularly in choosing the repertoire to be assigned.

If you distribute similar questionnaires to your students, won't you please share them as well as their results with us? ▲

***In the next issue:* What do teachers have to say about their students' lessons and practice?**

Independence Day:
Music Reading

Craig Sale, Editor

Craig Sale is Director of the Preparatory and Community Piano Program at Concordia University in River Forest, Illinois where he also teaches courses in piano pedagogy. He holds degrees from Northwestern University and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, as well as a Professional Teaching Certificate from The New School for Music Study where he received his pedagogical training from Frances Clark.

Editor's Note: KEYBOARD COMPANION is pleased to welcome Craig Sale as the new Associate Editor of the "Music Reading" Department. We are confident that Craig's long-standing experience teaching students of all ages and levels will enable him to bring to our readers significant topics related to the development of reading skills, along with competent writers who are able to effectively address them. As always, we welcome your participation in this ongoing dialogue, and invite you to submit your questions and/or comments to Craig via the "Music Reading" PostBox.

Why Do You Prefer an "Off-Staff" Rather Than a "Grand Staff" Approach to Beginning Reading?

by Craig Sale

This issue's question is an important one for all of us to answer who use an "off-staff" reading approach with our beginning students. Most likely, the vast majority of "off-staff" teachers began their piano studies with a "grand staff" approach. However, a glance at most methods currently available shows that many successful methods begin with some amount of off-staff experiences.

As a teacher who uses an extensive "off-staff" approach with my beginners, I find it essential to have an answer to this month's question. Most parents of prospective beginners have only encountered a "grand staff" approach in their varied musical experiences. In order for them to be supportive and to help at home, it is essential that I communicate to them the reasoning behind my choice of this foreign-looking off-staff material.

Parents, especially those who have had some musical training, are unaware of how many concepts are presented all at once with the "grand staff" approach: treble, bass and grand staves; up and down; time signatures and measure bars; rhythmic pulse and note values; finger numbers; pitch notation and note names. When using an "off-staff" approach with a careful sequence of concept presentations, students build, for themselves, the grand staff. The result is a grand staff understanding that has come from "within," from their own experiences, rather than having one superimposed on them from "the outside."

The freedom at the keyboard that is often nurtured by an "off-staff" approach is another basic reason which I share with parents. The piano is a BIG instrument to a young child. Off-staff notation allows a student to experience all registers of the keyboard and to explore motion when moving between these registers. Such freedom is not developed with the restrictions of early grand staff reading.

Even with my best efforts, there are occasionally parents who still do not understand. One parent watched her son's interview where he easily responded to off-staff notation. Despite his success at playing pieces on groups of two black keys, his mother kept insisting, "But what notes does he play?" How could he know to play C# and D# without "real" notes telling him? Although off-staff notation made perfect sense to the student, it remained incomprehensible to his mother. In this case, parental support was not going to be a possibility for a teacher using off-staff notation.

In this issue we hear three teachers' responses concerning the "off-staff" approach. Meg Gray addresses the many educational benefits to be found in an "off-staff" introduction to the piano. Kathleen Rountree shares a personal story, one to which many of us can relate, as the basis for her choice. Ted Cooper discusses a child's world and learning processes, and how they are best served with off-staff materials.

For those unfamiliar with this approach, these contributions will provide much information. For those who already use "off-staff" beginnings, they give us even more thoughts to share with parents of our prospective beginners. ▲

by Meg Gray *Off-staff notation . . . gives students opportunities to play motivating yet complicated melodies.*

Off-staff notation, which can be found at the beginning of the Alfred, Bastien, Faber, Hal Leonard, and many other piano methods, is an effective way to introduce beginning piano students to music reading. It allows the student to move from the familiar to the unfamiliar, simplifying the reading process. It lets the teacher introduce basic reading concepts that can be reinforced in grand staff reading, and it gives students the opportunity to be successful by playing motivating pieces that use more complex intervals.

Educators agree that students learn more fluently when spiraling new concepts off of already-learned ideas. Most beginning piano students know the alphabet. While they do have to learn that forward in the alphabet is the same as higher on the keyboard and vice-versa, off-staff notation allows them to use their familiarity with the alphabet to read more fluently. They reinforce their ability to think forward and backwards in the alphabet, and up and down on the keyboard without the visual distraction of staff lines and spaces. Because this type of reading activity quickly becomes comfortable, students can focus on other musical areas including physical coordination, dynamics, and fingering. These piano students who are successful at making beautiful music from the beginning are more likely to continue their piano study.

The ease of reading off-staff notation

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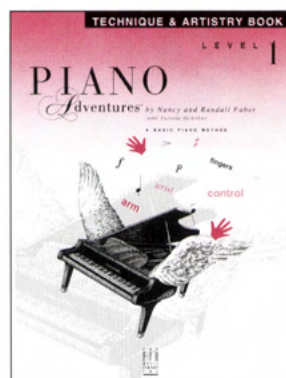

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allows the student to strengthen several other basic musical concepts before tackling grand staff notation. Students can concentrate on counting note values, and on keeping a steady beat. Because they are not struggling to comprehend the grand staff, beginners can more easily build a habit of playing with a steady beat that will carry over into their grand staff reading.

Good music-readers look at the large picture of melodic shape and use it to predict what will occur in the phrase. Because of the visual simplicity of off-staff notation, students can easily identify the contour of the melody. Teachers may take the opportunity during off-staff reading to begin the habit of reading melodic contours. Effective reading skills can be developed in this way and then transferred to grand staff reading.

Teachers may also introduce intervals through off-staff notation. Interval-reading measures distances from finger to finger, and key to key, as well as motion on the staff. By introducing steps, skips and repeats through off-staff notation, the student and teacher can focus first on distances between fingers and between keys. These important concepts will be reinforced during grand staff reading, and motion on the staff can then be easily introduced. Finding and marking steps, skips, and repeats in off-staff music builds a habit of intervallic reading that will produce excellent results.

Even after learning the grand staff, off-staff notation can continue to reinforce students' fluency in reading. It can be used as a motivational tool by allowing students to play complicated yet familiar patriotic, holiday, folk, and popular tunes. Many of the familiar melodies that students want to play contain complex interval patterns involving quick changes of direction and wide leaps. They can be difficult for beginners to read and comprehend smoothly. Examples can be found in "The Star Spangled Banner." The opening phrase alone contains three changes of direction and intervals ranging from a 2nd to a 6th. Although they can be challenging, students are very motivated to play these tunes. Off-staff notation provides them an opportunity to do so with more ease.

Off-staff notation makes the musical life of a beginning piano student more rewarding and less frustrating. It gives students opportunities to play motivating yet complicated melodies. Teachers can introduce concepts such as intervals and melodic contours in a visually simple and clear fashion. Students can easily read off-staff notation, and therefore can focus on other skills such as playing with a steady beat, mastering fingering and physical coordination, and playing with dynamic contrast. They then can make a smooth and relatively effortless transition to grand staff reading, and can confidently build their musical and technical skills on a solid foundation. ▲

Meg Gray is Assistant Professor of Piano at Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri. She holds a Ph.D. in piano pedagogy/music education from the University of Oklahoma. Dr. Gray is active as an adjudicator, performer and workshop presenter throughout the Midwest.

by Kathleen Rountree

Off-staff reading speeds the student's "time to the tune."

On the day of my first piano lesson, I climbed the stairs of Mrs. Howell's porch with great excitement. I was going to play the piano! My sister and brother both played and now I, too, would be able to play exciting "songs" like "Indian Dance" and "Chipmunk's Minuet." I knew exactly what was going to occur at my first lesson, because I had watched my siblings have their lessons on many occasions. As I walked through the doors into Mrs. Howell's living room, I had one goal—to play a great "song." Maybe she would let me play that "Heart and Soul" song my brother had taught me!

Almost immediately I discovered not only that Mrs. Howell had plans of her own for the lesson but that playing "Heart and Soul" was not even on the agenda. She intercepted the beeline I was making toward the piano, and steered me instead to a folding card table in the corner. We spent the entire lesson at this table drawing notes and learning about lines and spaces. Not until the second lesson was I allowed to sit at the piano and play single notes as I identified them off flash cards. It was lesson three or four before I finally played something vaguely resembling a "song."

> Playing a tune is, after all, the student's goal when he or she comes to any lesson, especially the first.

My study with Mrs. Howell got much better as time went on, and I learned a great deal. But, my overwhelming memory of those first lessons can only be described by one word—disappointment. It simply took too long to play a tune.

In considering the value of off-staff reading as an introductory exercise, there are many factors to consider, such as cognitive

ability, psychology, and physical motor-skill development. One must evaluate the student's developing skill at interpreting symbols, differentiating between "same and different," and translating a labeled symbol into a named key on the piano. Off-staff reading provides a unique possibility to gradually introduce reading skills without preventing the student from making music while the reading skills are being mastered. For me, though, the most important reason to incorporate off-staff reading (and, for that matter, rote playing), is that incorporating off-staff reading speeds the student's "time to the tune." Playing a tune is, after all, the student's goal when he or she comes to any lesson, especially the first.

The most effective learning environment is one in which the goals of both student and teacher are as closely aligned as possible. Unfortunately, we teachers are seldom flexible enough to give strong consideration to student goals when planning their repertoire. (We want them to learn "Sonatina in C," they want to learn the theme song from "Friends;" they want to learn "Für Elise," we want them to learn an Invention, etc.) The first lessons of an average-age beginner provide a wonderful moment when the goal of student and teacher can be identical—to play a "song."

For me, and for my students, off-staff reading makes first lessons memorable for reasons that are very different from my own first piano lessons. When playing from off-staff notation, students make music in a satisfying manner within minutes of sitting down at the piano. And, occasionally, I even let them play "Heart and Soul" for me, too! ▲

Kathleen Rountree is Associate Dean and Professor of Piano at the Louisiana State University School of Music, where she combines duties of teaching and administration. During the past year, she was a Fellow of the American Council on Education.

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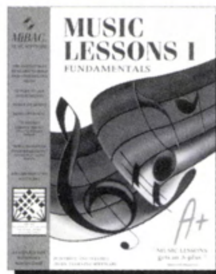

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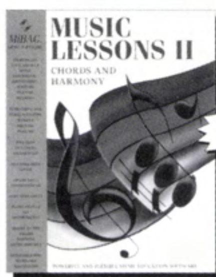

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by Ted Cooper

Off-staff notation is ideally suited to express multi-octave music.

A first piano lesson is not unlike a child's first day of school. Each is an important event in a child's life and often filled with both excitement and apprehension. Students wonder if they will succeed. Teachers plan carefully for their success because we understand that the attitudes that shape the future are formed early. The use of off-staff notation helps to make the most of the first few lessons by helping students to succeed and to develop a positive attitude about music study.

Children think, talk, move and explore the world in big, exaggerated ways. Because off-staff notation exaggerates the fundamental and essential properties of music reading, it provides the perfect first step for young children—with one foot in a child's world of big experiences and one foot in the new world of music reading. Pre-reading notation has much in common with children's picture books which are written in short sentences, large print and evocative illustrations. The very same content of a child's book could be printed traditionally using smaller, adult-size type and single spaced, but would it communicate as well to its young audience? Would it be as approachable and liberating?

> Off-staff notation . . . provides the perfect first step for young children—with one foot in a child's world of big experiences and one foot in the new world of music reading.

Many teachers want their beginning piano students to experience and use the entire keyboard at the first lesson, instead of being limited to a few keys in the middle of the piano. Using the full expanse of the keyboard has many technical benefits in addition to making the music more exciting and dramatic. Off-staff notation is ideally suited to express multi-octave music. Notating beginning music that moves over multiple octaves on the grand staff would present a reading challenge inappropriate for the first lesson. If, in addition, black keys are used, a layer of complication is added that nearly defies explanation during the first lesson. To illustrate this, the same pre-reading piece has been notated using off-staff notation (example 1, next page) and on the staff (example 2, next page).

A standard format has not yet been codified for off-staff notation, unlike traditional grand staff notation. Consequently, there are subtle and important differences

in layout and style that ultimately shape the habits of our young readers. Each type of pre-reading notation must be evaluated in terms of how it communicates keyboard position, rhythm, pitch, and octave movement to the student. Worthwhile beginning notation involves the same essential processes needed to read traditional notation, but simplified in a way that will lead naturally to reading on the grand staff.

Ideally, any skill or habit that we teach our students should not need to be "unlearned" as a student progresses. Therefore, all habits formed while reading off-staff should help students transition easily to the grand staff. One common problem found in many off-staff notation systems is the overuse of finger numbers as a substitute for reading the actual pitch relationships. Reading finger numbers trains students to look not at the notehead to get pitch/interval information, but at a number just above or below the note. Clearly, this habit has no long-term use in terms of reading on the grand staff and its absence will certainly frustrate many students who found success reading off-staff notation. How a student processes pitch/interval information is the very cornerstone of the reading process. If an off-staff notation system does not encourage the building of this life-long habit, it undermines our students' overall development.

Off-staff notation liberates students from the unessential complications of music notation, but it also frees the teacher to accomplish more in each lesson. By simplifying the score and therefore a child's reading experience, pre-reading frees up valuable lesson time that would normally be devoted to teaching the intricacies of traditional music notation. This valuable time can be used to focus on the development of the student's aural, rhythmic and technical skills that are so central to a piano student's early success and enjoyment.

I use off-staff notation because it communicates to children and their world of experience in a way that music written on the grand staff cannot. It also allows children to achieve a sense of total understanding and mastery of the score from the very first lesson. Can students who begin reading music on the grand staff become fluent readers? There is no question they can, but are they launched into the new world of music with the skills, attitudes and sense of ownership that will last a lifetime? ▲

Ted Cooper is the Educational Director of the New School for Music Study in Kingston, New Jersey. He is the co-author of Side by Side*, an elementary duet series published by Summy-Birchard.*

Example 1

Jumbo

f

3 2 3

Here comes Jum - bo

up the street with

heav - y steps and

great big feet!

"Jumbo" is reprinted from *Side by Side* by Cooper/Glennon, Summy-Birchard/Warner Bros., p. 4.

Example 2

8va

f

Here comes Jum - bo up the street with heav - y steps and great big feet!

***In the next issue:* Why do you prefer a "Grand Staff" rather than an "Off-Staff" approach to beginning reading?**

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Let's Get Physical:
Technique

Scott McBride Smith, Editor

Scott McBride Smith is Executive Director of the International Institute for Young Musicians *in which capacity he directs summer programs involving some of the nation's top artist-teachers and students. He is a contributing editor of* Piano & Keyboard *magazine and has recovered from his early bad practice habits to become a well-known clinician and private teacher in Southern California.*

How Do You Teach Early Level Students to Play with Good Tone?

by Scott McBride Smith

The piano is capable of so many marvelous tonal effects, and yet one must admit that the basic sound itself lacks a certain richness and variety. The autumnal warmth of a viola, the melancholy charm of an English horn—these are beyond the reach of the instrument, but can be suggested by an artist with sufficient imagination. How to begin this process with young students? It isn't easy.

That you can expect the best and even more in the schooling of good tone is the premise of the three articles in this issue. Each author offers musical examples and practice techniques leavened with a good bit of practical psychology. Humor, too, plays an important role in the presentation of these expert teachers. Their ingenuity will help any pedagogue improve his or her work in this important, but sometimes neglected, area. ▲

by Maryen Herrett *Images are a wonderful help in teaching touch . . .*

You have to be kidding! Right? I have this small person with fingers the consistency of al dente pasta, a tendency—no, a compulsion—to avoid counting, who thinks two-times-through-the-piece (not counting, of course,) is "practice," and considers reading notes to be one of the mysteries of the universe. I am supposed to worry about getting a good tone? Yes. The development of tone quality is inseparable from the things we teach from the very beginning. Can there be any kind of tone production without the body being placed correctly? Can we think of any way to produce a good sound without a good hand position supported by firm fingers? I don't think so. Sitting too close so that the arms are cramped, sitting too far back on the bench so the weight is pulling us backward instead of forward into the keys, allowing the hand to roll over the fifth finger side of the hand, allowing the wrist to pop up or pull down, producing tension, making sound by thrusting the arm forward or bouncing the hand up and down—all of this will prevent the beautiful tone from developing. A curved finger is important but with the beginning student, I think the other factors are more important and, with the *young* beginner, the finger strength will often develop very slowly. All of this takes time, sometimes a *long* time, and requires a real "never-give-up" attitude from the teacher. Once these things are in place, it will be time to think about the other movements that allow the variety in attack that widens the tonal palate.

Repertoire is the easiest entry into learning how to produce a variety of sounds. There are wonderful small pieces for even the most elementary students that offer opportunities for shaping a phrase with the use of weight and rotation, developing the ability to play really softly, and learning to produce a loud but pleasing sound.

> With the basics of good posture and hand position, a lot of imagination, and good teaching, I believe that every student has the potential for creating good tone right from the start.

I try to always choose music that will function as an etude. An example would be the "Waltz in d minor" from *Beginners Pieces, Op. 39* of Kabalevsky. It is written in such a way as to make the use of a weighted drop into the keyboard and a rotation of the hand to carry the weight to the next note an easy and uncomplicated act. The melody is based on a thumb to fourth or fifth finger movement that allows a most natural drop into the first note, rotating the hand up to the higher finger, circling around and then returning to a drop on the thumb. Thus at a very early stage the basis is set for the kind of weight transfer that will lead to truly lyrical playing at a more advanced level later on.

In this same waltz, the left hand accompaniment must have a delicate, pianissimo sound which requires a light touch. Images are a wonderful help in teaching touch. For example, ask the child to imagine picking up a piece of down, or better yet, have a piece of down so that the student can try to pick it up. One cannot descend with any speed into a piece of down—it blows away. We know that different sounds are produced by the speed of the hammer-strike on the string, but this is a very hard concept to think about when we are playing. Picking up a piece of down or thinking of squeezing the key down—like pushing into a piece of clay or coming down from above the key are both easier to understand than fast or slow key descent. I will often "play" on the student's shoulder so he/she can feel the difference. Compare playing a loud chord with jumping. We do not start in the air, we push off from the ground.

The hardest thing of all is learning to listen to one's own sound. Even very early, we should encourage students to criticize the sound they have just created. Discuss the character of the piece—sweet, sad, march-like—and what kind of sound

would be suitable. Look for pieces that will develop the imagination—pieces that float like clouds, or dance, sound angry, sad, funny, or that imitate different instruments. Trying to project this means trying to get different sounds that produce a variety of tonal effects. Our voice and body language can help project the sound we want. If we want the student to play softly and gently, we should speak softly and gently and use flowing movements. If we want loud, strong playing, we can talk, gesture and sing with great enthusiasm.

With the basics of good posture and hand position, a lot of imagination, *and* good teaching, I believe that every student has the potential for creating good tone right from the start. ▲

Maryen Herrett has taught piano forever and specialized in working with gifted children. She is technically retired but still enjoys teaching small groups of delightful children, and will probably go on doing it until she falls over. She does a bit of playing and quite a few workshops for teachers, and is having a lot of fun running her small bed and breakfast on the beautiful Eastern Shore of Maryland.

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by Adrienne Wiley *Quality of tone is more important than quantity . . .*

I remember when I was just learning to play the piano. I was eager and attentive. A little restless, too. I remember being tired of playing exercises and scales—SLOWLY. I was impatient with all the details—notes, rhythm, dynamics, phrasing (the basic stuff!). I just wanted to play—and fast! (Doesn't that sound familiar?!) Little did I realize that my teacher was striving to teach me not only the rudiments of playing the piano, but also to develop my tonal control through various carefully planned exercises—to be played SLOWLY! Heinrich Neuhaus was right: students "sometimes (place) their focus on speed or velocity, rather than on good tonal control," and "mastery of tone is the first and most important task of all the problems of technique." (*The Art of Piano Playing*, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973). I now "see the light."

As a teacher, I believe that playing with good tone requires effort by the entire body—the fingers alone can't accomplish it, and that quality of tone is more important than quantity. I stress the importance of developing a good "body posture" to achieve this goal. With my beginners, we discuss and determine a good posture at the piano, distance of the arms to the piano and in relation to the body, bench height, and a good hand posture. I do not use the term "hand position" any more. My younger students relate better to the idea of a "hand shape" or "hand posture," and they are less likely to "fix" their hand in a position.

Producing a good tone also depends on the relationship of the arms to the hand itself. Arm weight is necessary to produce sound: more arm weight equals more sound. Even in the first lesson, after discussing body posture, we begin with dropping exercises, "dropping" the hand onto the white keys as a cluster. We vary the dynamic level with the application of more arm weight, and conclude each "drop" with a follow-through by the wrist—some might call it a "wrist roll." Although this type of exercise does not produce a beautiful sound, it is a step towards tonal control and tone production. (Personal note: I have had only one parent call to complain about the "crashing noises," as she put it. Evidently, her daughter spent considerable time practicing this exercise with great determination and dynamic energy, probably a little more *forte* than necessary—and at 6:30 a.m.!)

I have found several exercise books helpful in developing tonal control. One useful work is Lynn Freeman Olson's *Finger Starters* (Carl Fischer). While all of the exercises are excellent, I have enjoyed using the studies featuring chords. In many cases, these exercises require the student to use a variety of dynamics. This helps me focus on the role of the arm and arm weight, which is essential in achieving not only the dynamic range, but a good sound as well. Tied into all of this is the aspect of choreography—moving from one place to the next. I always insist that my students approach and conclude a pattern with "finesse." That means approaching the passage to be played with a good hand posture and arm weight to execute the sound, and leaving with a release of the hands that completes a "rounded" sound. I have seen so many students striking each finger as if it were a small hammer, and then removing the "hammer-action" with a jerk! The sound, of course, is not pleasant. As teachers, we have to know what type of choreography best fits each piece, how much or little to do, and how it will affect the overall sound.

Producing a good tone while playing legato is also important. Using simple five-finger patterns is another way to work on tone production. One of my students, Mitra, age 8, is thrilled to play her five-finger patterns! At each lesson, she dives for the bench and rips right in—yes, FAST. After slowing her down, we arrive at a successful performance of her routine. We make it a routine with a designated rhythm pattern, shaping each scale dynamically,

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ascending and descending, so that it is always musical. I have found that selected exercises in Edna Mae Burnam's *Dozen a Day* (Willis) and the *Technical Studies*, compiled and edited by Jane Magrath (Alfred) provide wonderful exercises to develop tonal control in legato playing.

Probably the most challenging aspect of developing a student's tone production is getting him or her to hear it. Listening for and recognizing good tone production is essential. We can help instill this by playing for our students (using good tone, of course!), and having them listen to quality recordings of selected literature and performers that exemplify our standards of good tonal control. I often ask my students to close their eyes and listen to the sound they are producing, purely as sound and good tone. We do not select a great length of the music, sometimes just a few measures, but the results can be very revealing. Rarely do our students listen to the sounds that they produce! I suggest this activity for all students, but also dictate that you shouldn't do it when really tired, and not for great lengths of time!

My motto is and will always be: QUALITY VS. QUANTITY! ▲

Dr. Adrienne Wiley is Professor of Piano Pedagogy at Central Michigan University, where she teaches piano pedagogy, applied piano, and class piano. She also coordinates and teaches in the Piano Preparatory Program at CMU. Dr. Wiley is a frequent clinician, adjudicator, and performer, and has written several articles that are currently at press.

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by Scott McBride Smith *Teachers who neglect the development of good tone ... are underestimating their students.*

I believe that teaching elementary students the rudiments of good tone is closely related to their understanding of the principles of interpretation and their ability to listen carefully and creatively. There is no reason that young students shouldn't play expressively. Timing and tempo control can be taught, as can correct accentuation. But most important in the early stages of developing good tone is helping each student develop his or her imagination, refined in tandem with dynamic control.

The latter, though basic, is by no means easy. One out of ten students can produce *forte* and *piano* easily and without too much effort. Of the rest, most aren't paying that much attention. They count themselves lucky to hit a majority of the right notes and consider the learning process complete once they have done so. Those of the minority who do attempt to include dynamic markings in performance are often physically unable to control the sound. The result is a lot of banging, or, at the other extreme, a multitude of notes that don't sound, even though the keys are depressed.

Frequently the problem lies even deeper than a lack of physical coordination. Many students have little conception of what strong contrasts of feeling, reflected in louds and softs, actually sound and feel like. This lack of awareness has its roots in their way of being in the world, related perhaps to cultural and ethnic background, position in the family (oldest, middle or youngest), or even to an exaggerated respect for the teacher. Be that as it may—it will not be fixed by a too-narrow focus on pianism. In fact, I believe that it is best to begin tackling this problem away from the piano altogether.

How to start? I watch them walk into the studio. I look into their eyes and listen to them describe their favorite activities, talk about pets, and tell me about their weekend. A shy, introverted student, for example, will move tentatively and speak softly, or little. Her fingers gasp and stutter as they descend into the keys. So, we start over. "Walk into the room again," I gently tell her. "Put your feet down heavily, like you are stomping, then gently, like tiptoeing. Let's make up a story: if you were in your own house, what might cause you to walk so softly or so heavily? Sneaking up on your brother? Good. Walking like an elephant on the African veldt? Excellent. What does it feel like inside your body when you walk like this?" It is a blessing that my studio has wooden floors. Students can easily hear the sound their feet make as they step. A fast, heavy stroke with lots of leg-weight will thud; a quicker, lighter step, with a quick release, will sound sharper but softer. Plank floors allow students to "ice skate" in their stocking feet, feeling a smooth transfer of weight from limb to limb, akin to the weight shift from finger to finger that takes place while playing legato.

Having experienced these various motions in the large muscle groups and related them to an imaginative process, we go to the piano. *Tip-Toeing*, by Janet Vogt, from the new *Piano Discoveries: Young Beginner* (Heritage Music Press, The Lorenz Corporation) is a fun piece, with a cutely traditional drawing (see next page). Both give us a framework for interpretive and dynamic variation.

We start by making our fingers and arms tiptoe, like the animals in the drawing,

pushing off the quarter notes in the first measure, and using a sideways rotation gesture for the longer motifs. Even when tiptoeing, a talented student can vary the release of key quarter notes, coming off the key slowly for the word "shhh" in measure five, and lifting more sharply on the word "quick" in measure seven.

"How would the piece sound different if that were you in front?" I ask my student, "and behind you was your brother, chasing you because he wanted some cookies? The interpretive marking wouldn't read 'cautiously,' would it, and the piece wouldn't be soft. How about if the drawing showed two elephants dressed like soldiers, and we change the words in the first line to 'Stomp, stomp, here we go, marching very loudly.' How would it feel to play reflecting these words, and how would it sound?" It goes without saying, but should be voiced anyway, that listening and evaluating take place for every variation. Elephants don't sound harsh and bangy, merely big, and broad. Tiptoeing still makes a sound, though faint. Constant refinement and demonstration by the teacher should be a given.

Teachers who neglect the development of good tone and tonal variety are underestimating their students. With proper guidance, creative tonal thinking and listening can become part of every piano student's working process. ▲

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Moments of measured silence are called rests. The quarter rest, like the quarter note, receives one beat.

Quarter Rest

= 1 beat or 1 count

Say: one (or any beat)
or say: ta
or say: rest

Before You Play – Count and Say:

Say 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4
or 1 rest 3 rest 1 2 3 rest

Tip-Toeing

Cautiously

Janet Vogt

Tip - toe, tip - toe - ing, walk - ing ver - y soft - ly.

Shhh, stop! Here we are. Quick! Let's grab the cook - ie jar!

CHECK OFF! Every melody note is taking you somewhere – up, down, or even staying the same. Try this idea: as you move up, try making each note a little louder; as you come down, see if you can make each note a little softer.

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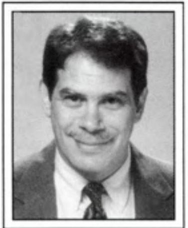
Workbook p. 36

***In the next issue:* How do you supplement Method Book technique?**

The Heart of the Matter: Rhythm



Bruce Berr, Editor

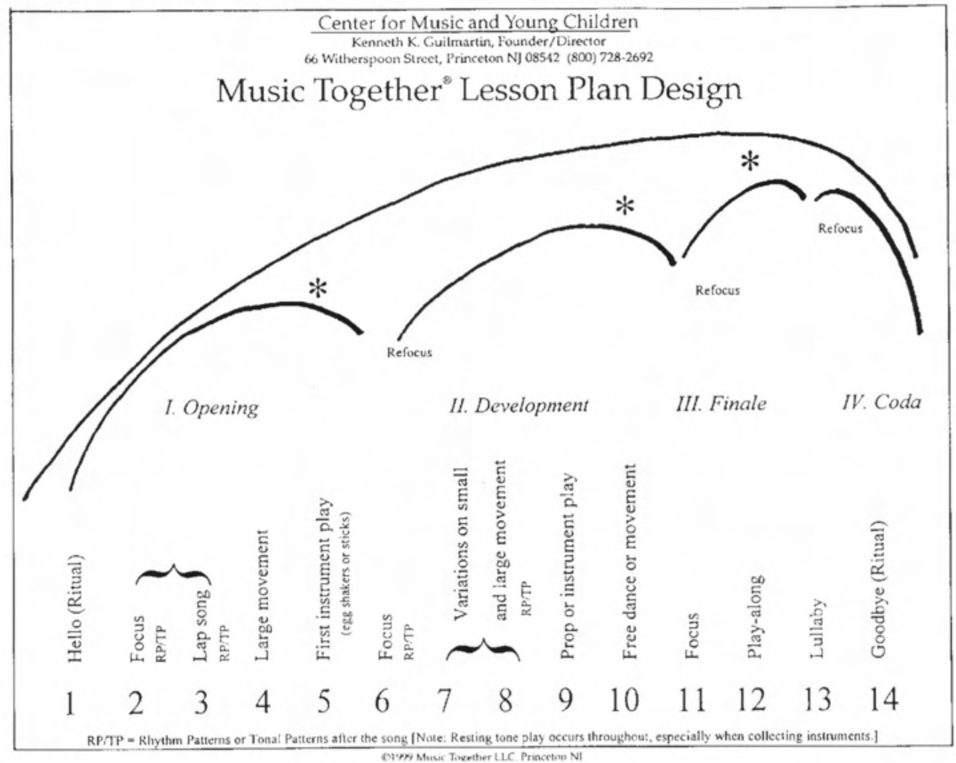
Bruce Berr is an associate professor of piano and Coordinator of Piano Pedagogy at the Chicago Musical College of Roosevelt University. He is an educational composer, has written articles for the major keyboard journals, and frequently presents workshops on various topics important to piano teachers. He is currently involved in creating a library of pedagogical videotapes for instructional purposes.

How does your experience with rhythm help you in the process of teaching?

by Bruce Berr

Music teachers have an advantage over teachers of many other subjects. As musicians, we continually experience how the large or small rhythms of an event affect our perception of that event. We are also well acquainted with the fact that an event in time can have structure due to, among other things, its various rhythms. Effective teachers of *any* subject, by necessity, display a sensitivity to these temporal aspects of human experience, some more overtly than others.

I still remember my geometry teacher from eighth grade, Mr. Solly. He was a large, large man who always sat very quietly at his desk when the students were filing into the room. When he would lecture, he would solemnly stand behind his lectern, appearing to be the proverbial immovable object. But when it was time to get to the most difficult part of the course, the line-by-line logical proofs of the theorems, rhythmic hell broke loose in that classroom! While at the blackboard pointing with a baton, Solly's rotund figure suddenly became a bouncing, dancing conductor as he "rapped" his way through the thicket of logic—part singing, part speaking, bristling with rhythm all the way. (He may very well have been the very first rap artist back in 1964 as his incantations bubbled from the front of that classroom.) At first, we roared in shock at the sight of this burly man presumably making a fool of himself in front of a classroom of teenagers (*outside* of class, we ended up calling him "Jolly Solly"). But I can tell you assuredly that all of that year, whenever it was time to understand a new proof, the rhythm and music of his presentation not only seduced us into paying special attention, but it also somehow helped make us aware of the rhythm and beauty of a geometric proof. Quite an accomplishment for a middle school teacher!



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Many skills of teaching can be deduced and enhanced by what music teaches us. For instance, one effective way to pace a lesson or class is to emulate the slow-fast-slow-fast tempo scheme of a Baroque concerto grosso. On a more sophisticated level, admire the elegance of the lesson plan design above; with its ups and downs and clear single climax, it takes into account our understanding of the satisfaction provided by the dramatic structure of a sonata movement.

Our two authors this issue, Steve Betts and Kathleen Murray, delve further into this question and provide us with insightful and fascinating ideas that will undoubtedly spur your own thinking on this subject. ▲

by Steve Betts *The rhythm of our curricula can cause lessons to soar . . . or bog down . . .*

A piece of music played with secure rhythm is a joy to experience. When steadiness of pulse combines with the elasticity of *rubato,* when harmonic rhythms multiply, creating the architecture of form, and when details coalesce into an organic, cohesive musical whole, performances can truly communicate what words cannot express. Just as rhythm brings life to musical performance, it can also empower our teaching as well. The rhythms of our speech, lessons, and

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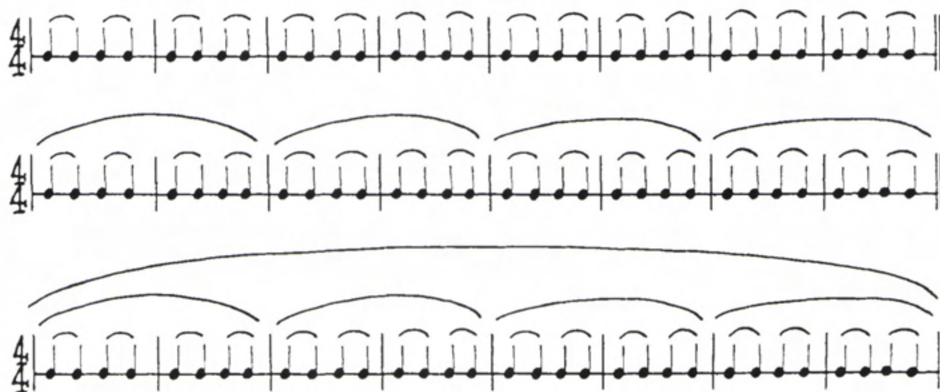
curricula can help propel our teaching, thereby lifting our students to new heights of progress.

A steady pulse played with attention to the accents of meter and contours of phrase shapes as illustrated in the three notational examples at right, provides a solid foundation on which to build a musical performance. In the lesson, our speech provides this basic pulse to the lesson's rhythm. This brings to mind several questions. Because skillful teaching is a journey, not a destination, I write these questions in first person:



From *Developing Piano Performance*, Max. C. Camp, Hinshaw Music, Inc., Chapel Hill, 1981. p. 68. These examples first appeared in *The Rhythmic Structure of Music*, Grosvenor Cooper and Leonard B. Meyer, The University of Chicago Press, 1960, p. 2.

Does the rate and inflection of my speech contribute life to the lesson or does it sap the energy and enthusiasm this young mind and heart brought through the door? Am I convinced of music's value to this group of students sitting in front of me and does my face communicate my belief to them? (This assumes, of course, that the students can see my face.) Am I aware, moment by moment, of the psychological and motivational "acoustics" of this student on this particular day? Does the dryness of the student's school day require a more defined rhythm on my part? Conversely, do I allow the excitement of finally getting to play "Für Elise" carry the lesson, allowing me the luxury of saving energy for later, more difficult parts of the lesson? How long has it been since I videotaped or audiotaped my teaching to determine the vitality of my teaching performance?

Not only does the rhythm of our speech effect the quality of our teaching, but the rhythm of each lesson's activities can either enhance or detract from the lesson's effectiveness. A composition of only quarter notes would quickly become boring. But taken to the extreme, a piece with no meter or organization creates chaos. Do the lessons I teach benefit from a balance of unity and variety? Do I always start with technique, progressing to old repertoire, rushing to introduce the new piece, leaving no time for sightplaying? Do I have at least ten different ways to start a lesson, creating a spark of interest in a lethargic student? Are the activities in the lessons I teach arranged to provide a balance between activities done sitting on the bench and those accomplished away from the piano?

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the rhythm of our curricula can cause

lessons to soar with grace and ease, or bog down in the mire of frustration and confusion (for both the students *and* the teacher). The order, pace, and skill with which we introduce and review concepts needs to match the competency of each student or class we teach.

I love to watch tennis. The finals of grand slam events such as Wimbledon or the U.S. Open often produce exciting matches—ones in which the skill levels of the two players are closely aligned. This close concurrence of challenge and possibility often draws the best performance from the contestants, raising the overall level of play and excitement. The rhythm of these matches literally draws me to the edge of the sofa in my living room at times. This level of play could be considered a "flow" experience described by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*[1]—one in which the challenge of the task matches the skill level of the person involved.

Whether or not this flow experience happens in music lessons depends greatly on the teacher and the curricula prescribed for a student. The tasks assigned should provide enough of a challenge, yet not overwhelm the student. Determining the correct level of challenge for students requires an investment of time and energy during the planning process. Through experimentation and experience, our ability to assign the most appropriate challenge for a student can increase. Additionally, our practice directions should provide enough detail so the student can begin to achieve flow experiences at home.

There are a variety of disciplines that can help us improve our ability to assign music and concepts. While I'm sure you will think of more, the following two have proven useful in my teaching.

The first is to keep a journal of each lesson. Shearon Horton, an independent teacher in New Orleans, recommended this idea to our pedagogy students at Louisiana State University and I have found it most helpful. Shearon summarizes each lesson the morning after the lesson. The lesson is fresh in her mind and she makes notes to help her as she prepares for the student's next lesson. This discipline not only provides a written record of what occurred, but the process of writing what happened can sharpen the thinking concerning a student. New revelations prompted by the mental energy required to compose sentences can help in determining the best assignment for a student. Whether done on computer or with paper and pen, I highly recommend this activity. (See the sample entry from my own journal concerning a student of mine.)

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MELODY FOR NEXT WEEK
I NEED TO CHANGE WHERE I AM IN
THE ROOM (PERHAPS FARTHER AWAY) TO
GET A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE.

The second discipline I have found helpful is the careful grading of repertoire. Repertoire assignments that stretch students too far beyond their skill level often result in anxiety, while an assignment that is too easy creates boredom. This delicate balance is a tightrope we all walk. New reference guides and series of anthologies in the past few years have helped our profession greatly in this area. However, the teacher is still the critical factor in this most important part of keeping the rhythm of the student's progress moving at a steady pulse.

The pursuit of lessons that move with ease and effectiveness is an exciting one. My goal is to enjoy the journey and cherish the moments when the pieces all fit together and the lesson time is over before we know it! ▲

[1] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1990), 74.

Steve Betts is the Coordinator of Piano Pedagogy and Class Piano at Louisiana State University. He is the Executive Director of the National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy and an Educational Consultant for the Frances Clark Library for Piano Students.

by Kathleen Murray ***Our very existence is organized in time . . .***

Let me explain how I got stuck when I made my initial attempt at answering this question. Many would argue that the most fundamental element of music is its organization in time—its *rhythm* in the broadest sense of that word. As living beings, our very existence is organized in time. Our hearts beat and we breathe rhythmically. There is rhythm in our speech patterns, our walking, our daily cycles of sleeping and waking, our weekly cycles of work and leisure, and our lifelong progression from youth to old age. In that sense my "experience with rhythm" is inseparable from the process of teaching. I quickly found myself headed toward what might prove to be an interesting philosophical knot, but away from anything that would prove particularly useful to piano teachers. I found, however, a valuable insight in all of this: *We are rhythmic beings working with a rhythmic art form. We should use that to our advantage, enhance it, build on it, while never taking it for granted.* We should trust our own rhythmic nature and pay attention to the rhythms of our students. Like a fine composer, we should work to refine and make ever more artful the rhythms of our interactions.

Practically speaking, when we think of rhythmically interesting pieces of music, what works come to mind? Some pieces that immediately pop into my head include Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring," Beethoven's "Fifth Symphony" and his Opus 109 piano sonata, the Chopin *Mazurkas,* the third movement of the Schumann "Piano Concerto," and Tania

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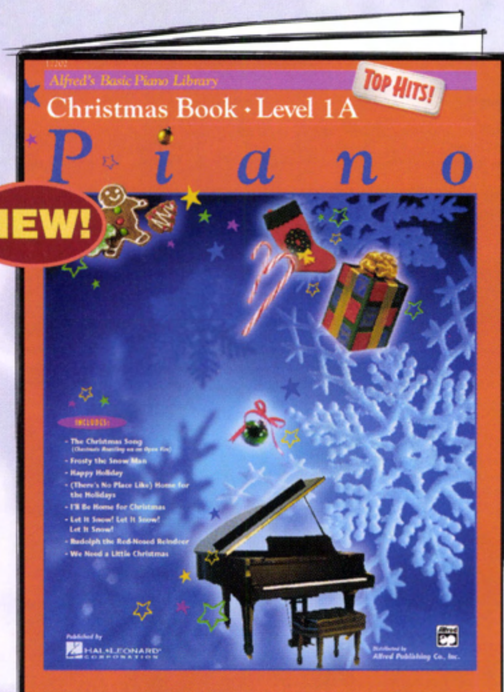

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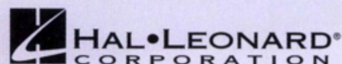

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The Christmas Song
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The Chipmunk Song
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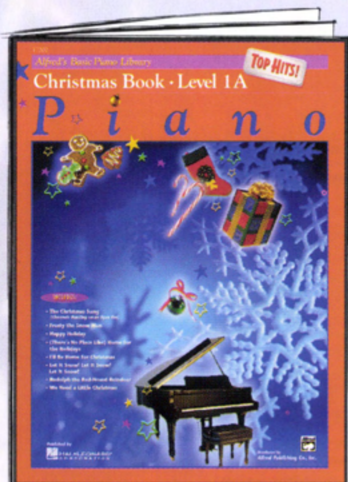

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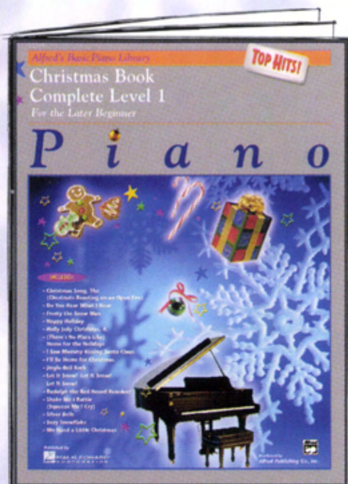

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Leon's "A La Par." The list could go on and on. What are the characteristics of those pieces that generate this rhythmic interest? They are probably as numerous as the pieces that could be included on the list, but let me suggest a few.

- There is an appropriate balance between:
  unity and variety;
  predictability and surprise;
  energy and relaxation.
- The rhythmic units are simple enough to be comprehensible and complex enough to invite development.
- There is a meaningful structure, with a carefully placed climax.

The rhythmic structure and character of the music that we love can help guide and inform our teaching. We need to mirror the ideas of unity and variety, predictability and surprise within the lesson format. For example, I am conscientious about giving my students a variety of repertoire for which they are prepared by studying a wide variety of technical exercises. But I do wish I could genuinely surprise them more often either with the materials or with my presentation of them. I think it is important to begin each lesson with some sort of technical warm-up because it provides a model for the student's practice routine and offers a useful element of predictability in the lesson format. I find I can surprise my students a bit by isolating a specific portion of a piece they have been practicing and using that for the warm-up. We can move seamlessly into their repertoire and they have an important reminder about the need to work through technical challenges by turning them into creative technical exercises. Another variant on this idea is to start by sightplaying a simple etude-like piece that prepares or reinforces a technical concept in one of their pieces. It is especially effective if that piece is a duet that I can play along with the student.

Finding an appropriate balance between energy and relaxation requires as much attention from the teacher in the lesson situation as it does from a composer who considers the rhythmic character of a new composition. I deal with the ebb and flow of my own energy level, but I have to remind myself that my teaching must respond to each student's need to be energized or relaxed. At the end of a long day of teaching, I may feel the urge to talk faster and move around more in order to keep my energy from sagging. That may be exactly the wrong approach for a young student who has been sedentary in school for seven hours and arrives at the lesson ready to burst with pent-up energy. If I learn that one of my high school students has had a full day of final exams, I may choose to delay by a week the introduction of the intricate slow movement of a Mozart sonata. On the other hand, all of us remember times when our teacher's high energy level was so contagious that it carried us through an entire week of practicing.

Given the limited weekly contact time afforded most private piano study, my principle concern relevant to pacing is to get as much done as possible to allow the student to practice successfully until the next lesson. I have to remind myself that thirty or forty-five minutes of *so rasch wie möglich* (as fast as possible) will wipe out both student *and* teacher. All of us need the release provided by the second theme of a rhythmically intense sonata-form movement. We count on the charm of a minuet movement following an angst-ridden slow movement. Our students require those same contrasts.

This question of how my experience with rhythm helps me in the process of teaching has offered me a valuable opportunity to reflect on how my understanding of a key element of music informs my ideas about teaching music. My thoughts on the broader context in which we consider things to be rhythmic have caused me to be more conscious of balance and pacing in all facets of my life. This year, because of a temporary administrative assignment, I find myself employed full-time in the summer months for the first time since my student days. The pace of the entire year has been frenetic (a phenomenon with which all of us are too familiar) and I am craving the extended change of pace that the summer usually affords. I am reminded that all of us must work to protect precious moments of relaxation in otherwise highly energized lives and pace ourselves so that we don't face burn-out at the very point that should be the "rhythmic" climax in our teaching careers. ▲

Kathleen M. Murray, NCTM, is Acting Dean of the Conservatory and Associate Professor of Piano at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin. Dr. Murray has appeared as soloist and chamber musician in recitals throughout the Midwest and is a frequent adjudicator and clinician. She is the president of the East Central Division of the Music Teachers National Association.

In the next issue: **How do you teach dance rhythms to early level students?**

From the Inside Out:
Motivation

How can we link pedagogy, performance, and a cognitive approach to coping with performance anxiety?

by Phyllis Alpert Lehrer

Applying the principles of *The Inner Game of Music* to the piano gives us opportunities to link pedagogy, performance, and a cognitive approach to coping with performance anxiety.

As teachers we want our students to learn in a natural and relaxed way, gaining confidence and ultimately feeling capable of making musical decisions independently. Part of our job is to help students connect to the music they study and perform. Often the key to making these connections is in the degree of focus and concentration during practice and performance. *Inner Game* strategies can aid in the development of this focus and relaxed concentration, substituting non-judgmental awareness and self-generated learning for more conventional "shoulds" and "should-nots." By eliminating the obstacles that cause distraction and self-doubt, pianists can realize their potential in committed, convincing performances.

In Joseph O'Connor's excellent book, *Not Pulling Strings*, he says, "The key to teaching and learning is where to place your attention." Frances Clark has admonished many a fledgling teacher that "teaching is not telling." Finally, a Chinese proverb imparts this wisdom:

"Tell me, I'll forget.
Show me, I may remember.
Involve me, I'll understand."

Consider the acronym "FEAR—False Expectations About Reality," also from *Not Pulling Strings*. Do students sometimes assume they will enjoy performing only to find they are terrified because of a lack of focus at some level of their preparation? On the other hand, the well-prepared confident and relaxed pianist often finds things go so well that the details of being on stage and performing are a blur. Barry Green, author of *The Inner Game of Music*, suggests that "our best performances somehow all seem to occur while we are so involved in what we are doing that we don't have time to think about it—to doubt our abilities, or become anxious and tense up, or even to praise ourselves for a job well done ..." Sports Psychologist, Ken Ravizza, who works with Olympic athletes, describes a similar feeling for an athlete. In "Qualities of the Peak Experience in Sport," Ravizza describes peak experience as "the fusion between the perfect nature of the movement and the willingness to dispense with the usual caution of not making an error. The athlete is in charge of the situation.... comments or congratulations from a coach, another player, or spectators become unnecessary because the perfect quality of the experience is irrefutable."

The Inner Game of Music Piano Workbook is designed to help pianists find a way to be conscious of what happens when things go well with their playing, when their full musical potential is expressed, when they just know it "felt good" or "happened without even trying." In the early 1970's, educator, coach, and tennis professional, Timothy Gallwey developed *The Inner Game* approach to learning and performing. The philosophy has actually been around for thousands of years as part of oriental thinking. According to Gallwey, we can find two games being played in everything we do: the outer game, where we overcome obstacles outside ourselves to reach an outer goal, e.g. winning a tennis match, or a piano competition, running a mile faster than last week, playing better octaves than ever before, or just "playing well." In other words, playing the outer game means succeeding in ways that we want to succeed. The inner game requires us to let go of inner obstacles such as fear, self-doubt, worry, poor concentration, memory difficulties, and, in general, self-consciousness.

As a professional tennis coach, Gallwey noticed that the most secure students were those he had taught with a non-judgmental approach to coaching. These students were able to access their potential and their experience, thus benefiting by a more confident and open approach to learning.

Barry Green first explored *Inner Game* ideas while he was principal double bassist in the Cincinnati Symphony and a faculty member at the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. Green found Gallwey's principles of concentration and natural learning could apply as much to making music as to playing tennis. With Gallwey, Barry Green wrote *The Inner Game of Music*.

Among psychologists there is general agreement that any situation a person deems as self-evaluative can be a source of stage fright or performance anxiety. For a musician that can mean a lesson, master class, jury, audition, competition, recital, or even remarks before a performance. I have a strong memory of my first public performance. At the age of six I was to play the Beethoven "Sonatina in G" for a school assembly. While standing in the wings just before I was to go on, my well-meaning first-grade teacher asked me to please announce my piece and composer. I went out on stage and began to cry. When she joined me, put her arm around me and asked why I was crying, I answered that I had not known I had to speak to the audience. After she announced my solo, I confidently went to the piano. Despite starting in the wrong octave, I continued, without hesitation, playing the next phrase in the correct octave. I was prepared to play my piece, but not to talk about it!

In my own work, I find it useful for students to understand the three manifestations of performance anxiety: physiological, cognitive, and behavioral. There is comfort in knowing that uncomfortable reactions which seem to be personal and unique are widespread enough to have been studied and catalogued. Moreover, there are techniques that can be learned to overcome or at least manage each of these reactions individually.

Shaking hands, nausea, faintness, fast heartbeat, and other symptoms are among the physiological manifestations of performance anxiety. These originate with the "fight or flight" response that may have been adaptive for mobilizing the bodies of cave men to fight the threats of wild animals. They do not, however, facilitate piano performance. Breathing techniques, progressive relaxation, autogenic training,

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the Alexander Technique, the Feldenkrais method, and various meditation practices can be learned to help cope with physiological manifestations of stage fright.

Behavioral manifestations of performance anxiety include inappropriate rehearsal strategies, avoiding performance experience, poor time management, and many other variations of these behaviors. They are often considered together with cognitive manifestations such as inability to focus or concentrate, negative thinking, worry about memory or distractions, catastrophising, and holding unrealistic expectations. Cognitive restructuring techniques and many ideas culled from cognitive therapy and educational psychology have been used to deal with these cognitive manifestations. *Inner Game* techniques are an ideal way to deal with problems of focus and concentration.

Three *Inner Game* skills that help us connect to the music and move away from distracting inner voices are the skills of **awareness**, **will**, and **trust**. Gallwey found that developing and practicing these skills could help athletes and musicians reach a state of relaxed concentration.

Awareness exercises for musicians put them in touch with what is happening in the music, without any judgments about what is right or wrong. The player focuses on the sights, sounds, feelings, and understandings about the music being played. For example, a pianist might be practicing a passage marked *mp* and engage in self-criticism for playing too loudly. A teacher might say to a student, "Please remember that *good forte* does not involve banging." An *Inner Game* awareness instruction would ask the student to "notice the difference between your softest and loudest sounds." This instruction involves no judgment for either student or teacher, yet it empowers the student to listen to the sound she/he is making.

Will exercises teach the pianist to think in advance about the ways in which direction and intensity will be created. This is an area of musical interpretation that depends upon information gleaned from teachers, concert-going, CDs, books, intuition, and more. Decisions are made about technique and clarify how technique is to aid interpretation. For example, a pianist might begin to play a minuet from the *Notebook for Anna Magdalena*, or a more advanced dance from a partita. Everything about the performance can be correct, yet the pianist feels detached and unable to connect to the music. The pianist can plan and practice in advance that a Bach minuet evokes a feeling of nobility, an atmosphere of prescribed manners and formal dress; this can be reflected in choice of tempo, rhythmic emphasis, and articulation. In similar ways, pianists at any level can practice clarifying the intention and meaning of their repertoire in advance. This strengthens their commitment and their confidence when they are performing.

Trust exercises help pianists explore the image, quality, or idea that is being expressed in the music by focusing attention on becoming the essence of that image, quality, or idea. For example, in Jon George's "Tiger Stalking," the teacher and elementary piano student might want to identify and picture which animal the tiger is stalking: a colt, calf, baby deer? How can the music create that scary atmosphere of the pacing tiger: dynamics, accelerandi, letting out the "roar," putting one's "all" into the cluster ending? At an advanced level, in the "Andantino" from Schumann's *Sonata in G minor*, Op. 22, how does a pianist establish the melancholy wistfulness of this gorgeous movement? Trusting to the experience of those feelings and recreating them through choice of tone, dynamics, rubato, and harmonic coloration can enable the pianist to get in touch with the feelings expressed in Schumann's music.

In a typical *Inner Game* workshop for pianists, I like to define performance anxiety to help establish the context for the focusing and relaxed concentration the *Inner Game* techniques help achieve in both practicing and in performing such as has been described above. The next stage is to do some of the funny and informative "UnMusical" exercises detailed in the *Inner Game Workbooks*. These enable musicians to become accustomed to the *Inner Game* skills of awareness, will, and trust. Favorites among these are the awareness exercises where pianists choose a partner and contrast greeting that person with a conventional visual acknowledgment only (a bow, a nod of the head, a smile) vs. making a ridiculous face at their partner. A second favorite and important "UnMusical" exercise is the simultaneous reading exercise where both partners read aloud to one another, reading completely different paragraphs with the instruction to "listen intently to everything that is being read at the same time carefully noting what he or she is reading." The analogy of simultaneously reading and listening to playing the piano and listening to the music at the same time as listening to a series of instructions inside your head ("don't rush ... great trill ... careful ... here comes the hard part ...") is a powerful one. Perhaps the great favorite among the exercises is the trust exercise where pianists give one another a massage, feeling for tense muscles and giving their best as amateur masseuses to release the tension in their partners. Then, the instruction changes to an *Inner Game* instruction to give one another massages while imagining that they are working with pizza dough.

The final stage of a workshop is to have participants play an excerpt from a piece of music they want to perform. The pianist then decides what in the piece did not feel convincing or where they themselves felt uninvolved or uncomfortable.

Serving as the pianist's guide, I choose the master skill that may enable the pianist to focus and connect to the music. From the dialogue that emerges at workshops, and from the suggested dialogues that accompany each of the exercises in the *Workbook*, it becomes clear that there are no

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right or wrong answers as to how one should or should not feel while doing them.

In developing the exercises and dialogue for the *Inner Game of Music Piano Workbook*, Barry Green and I sought to enable pianists and their teachers to get to the heart of musical and pianistic focus, enabling them do justice to Timothy Gallwey's formula P=p-i: P (Performance) equals p (potential) minus i (interference). In choosing and recording the seventy musical examples from elementary, intermediate, and advanced piano repertoire, I wanted pianists to have a variety of musical models and styles to use for exploring the skills of awareness, will, and trust in their home practice and/or at lessons.

P=p-i
P (Performance)
equals p
(potential)
minus i
(interference)

Having used the *Inner Game* techniques in my own teaching, practicing, and performing, and having conducted numerous teacher and student workshops, I remain excited by the positive impact they continue to make on me, my students, and my colleagues in music. Eliminating traditional "shoulds" and negative judgments from our teaching and learning lead us to those states of "relaxed concentration" that free us to listen well and to make confident and creative musical decisions. ▲

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Phyllis Alpert Lehrer is Professor of Piano at Westminster Choir College of Rider University. She appears internationally in lectures, master classes, and recitals, and is an active solo, duo and chamber musician. She is the co-author with Barry Green of The Inner Game of Music Solo Workbook for Piano *published by GIA. She has recently edited for Carl Fischer, Inc.,* Chopin: An Album, *and co-edited an anthology with Paul Sheftel:* More Beginning Piano Solos *(also published by Carl Fischer). Her articles on technique, memorization and performance anxiety have appeared in major professional journals.*

Editor's Note: The above article appeared in the December 1997 issue of **PIANO LIFE Magazine** (Vol. 2, No. 1), and is reprinted with permission.

In the next issue: **What are the benefits of developing and updating your philosophy of teaching?**

Have you heard...?

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It's Never Too Late:

Adult Piano Study

Brenda Dillon, Editor

Brenda Dillon continues to hang out on that bridge between music industry and academia. Currently educational consultant for Roland Corporation U.S., this bridge led her previously into the music educator world on behalf of Coda Music Technology, the piano world on behalf of the National Piano Foundation, and the materials development world as a consultant to various companies. She enjoys the diversity of this bridge and hopes to never fall off it.

What advice do you have for adults who plan to begin taking piano lessons?

by Brenda Dillon

You know you are asking a worthy question when you are inundated with writers wanting to answer it and give you their personal experiences. A previous issue of KEYBOARD COMPANION asked for answers from the perspective of adult students and another asked for answers from the perspective of teachers of adult students. Having received more copy than those issues could print, I am now repeating the question for this and a future issue.

It's gratifying to me as a pedagogue that adult piano study can be an equally rewarding endeavor for both the student and the teacher. We hear teacher complaints that adult students miss too many lessons, fall behind in their practice, become increasingly discouraged, and ultimately drop the lessons. In fact many teachers prefer not to teach adults for those reasons.

However, when it works—it really works, as verified by three adult students in this issue. It's obvious that all three have had nurturing teachers who are knowledgeable about teaching adults. Any adult who lives in the proximity of the Montgomery County Public School Adult Education Program in Bethesda, Maryland, will want to get to know Anne Maysak, the instructor of two of our authors. They definitely credit her as being the ideal partner in their learning ventures. Although it wasn't for publication, one author sent me an arrangement of "Edelweiss" with all new words that her piano class had prepared for Anne. I especially appreciated their caveat at the top of the page: *With apologies to Richard Rogers, Oscar Hammerstein, II, and poets-in-general.* That humor reminds me once again why teaching adult students can be so much fun.

In a planning meeting held in the fall of 1999 in Chicago, a group of pedagogues met to discuss content and direction of a future pedagogy conference under the auspices of the *Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy*. As a discussion leader for students age 50 through retirement, we articulated the following:

- A baby boomer turns 50 every 8 seconds.
- The population (50 and above) controls 80% of discretionary spending.
- This age group is generally in better health than their parents were, although some have arthritis and vision problems.
- They can be divided into three categories: retired, retired but still working, and non-retired who have time for leisure activities.
- After a certain age (which varies widely), adults want a "Cheers" environment: where it's safe, fun, and everybody knows your name.
- Although some may not want traditional piano instruction, they do not want to be patronized or treated with less dignity because they want another kind of instruction (e.g. EZ Play).
- In many cases their goals are often emotional rather than physical, and social rather than musical.

Stay tuned for further developments on the pedagogy conference (it's the *National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy* now scheduled for July 19-21, 2001, at the Hyatt Regency Oak Brook Hotel in Oakbrook, IL), and read on for even more reasons why teaching adult students is so rewarding. ▲

---

by Patricia Bulko

Attitude and practice are the essential ingredients for success.

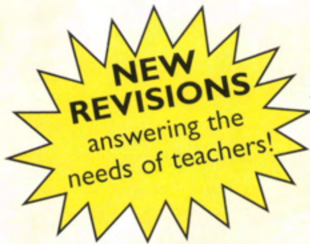
If you're an adult thinking of taking piano lessons, call a piano teacher this week! My story begins sixteen years ago when my thyroid gland malfunctioned, causing a dramatic rise in my blood pressure. An ambulance transported me to a nearby hospital, and I woke up the next day in the intensive care unit. I was only forty-seven years old.

When I was able to return to work at our city library, I noticed my left hand was very weak. I learned from my doctor that there was a possibility of a stroke. As I needed strong hands for my library job and my volunteer work with an ambulance service as an emergency medical technician, I decided to exercise my left hand. Nothing I could think of had any appeal until I read an article about a child playing the piano. I contacted a piano teacher, purchased a keyboard, and declared to my husband I was ready. I had a mission. This was something I could do.

Before my first lesson, I gathered my wavering courage and dragged my feet to my teacher's house three blocks away. My confidence fled when I sat at her piano. The keys looked more like teeth than black and white rectangles. She saw my apprehension, assured me the keys wouldn't bite, and neither would she. I relaxed just a bit.

In the beginning, I struggled with each piano lesson, and practice sessions at home were very stressful. I expected perfection. During one practice session, I was so frustrated that I threw my lesson books on the floor, jumped up and down on them, and then sat down at the keyboard. I didn't play right away because I was too busy laughing at myself and the dirty footprints I had left on my books. (I hadn't removed my garden shoes!)

From then on, I decided to control my frustration and adopt a new attitude. I became like a kid enjoying a lollipop. I sat and played easy songs in my books and had a great time planning an explanation of the dirty footprints on the books. Thereafter, I was a changed person with each new assignment. I even invented silly mistakes just for fun. Anxiety left when I



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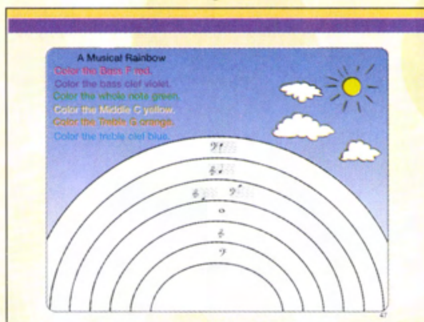

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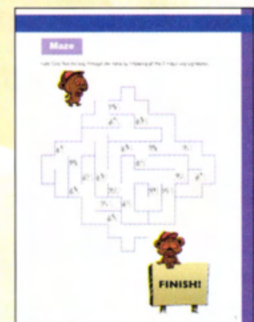

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gave up my perfectionist attitude. I was too relieved to ever allow it back. I no longer worried if I missed practicing during the week. My teacher noticed the change, as it was a good one.

Several years later, my teacher informed me she was moving and asked me to teach some of her beginning students. I was stunned and initially refused because I felt uncomfortable with the idea. My next teacher encouraged me to take these students and augmented my curriculum with scales, tons of exercises, methods, theory books, and supplementary music books. Although I worked part time at the library, I began teaching piano in the evening. It's been a busy schedule, but I've loved it. With this teacher as my mentor, I have now been teaching for ten years.

Some of my beginning adult students were more nervous than I ever was. One of them even vomited at the first lesson! And except for having beginning jitters, none of the students are alike. Some have never stopped being nervous and others have relaxed just short of falling asleep. Adults need the most reassurance and although my story helps them, they know their progress is literally in their own hands. Attitude and practice are the essential ingredients for success.

Although I was never well enough to resume my volunteer work with the ambulance service, my piano studies and my teaching have kept me going. I'm now sixty-three years old, have a lazy left hand, wear two hearing aids, and have cataracts on both eyes. Although I have reduced the number of students I teach and plan to retire soon, my piano, my lessons, and my students have been like a breath of fresh air, a galloping animal, a walk in the park, a babbling brook, and a vacation from the daily routine. *Music makes my soul sing. What a journey! Sign language may be my next one.* ▲

Patricia Bulko is married, has two sons, and three grandsons. She worked at the public library in Vassar, Michigan, helped start the Vassar Area Ambulance Service, and helped establish a new library in another town. After several years of piano lessons, her teachers encouraged her to begin teaching beginning piano students.

by Sybil Barnaby *This experience has impacted the developmental, emotional, and social aspects of my life.*

I am an adult piano student who started piano lessons at age 57 with no previous exposure to this activity. I chose this path because of my love for classical piano music and a long-held yearning to play. I was finally able to satisfy this yearning when I learned that Montgomery County Public Schools, Maryland, offered group piano lessons for adults as part of their adult education program.

My teacher, Anne Maysak, has a special gift for teaching adult learners in groups. Under her guidance we learn to analyze and explore music that at first appears to be impossible to intermediate students. Staying prepared for these lessons isn't easy, but I do find the process rewarding and I highly recommend piano lessons to anyone who is interested. This experience has impacted the developmental, emotional and social aspects of my life.

Learning to play the piano has given me first-hand proof that growth and development do not cease when one becomes an adult. As I practice my scales, learn a new piece, or play a more advanced piece, I can see my growth as I improve these skills (including sight reading, tempo and dynamic changes, and using the pedal). For example, at my first recital, my piece was two lines long and with no accidentals. At subsequent recitals I performed pieces that were two to three pages long, with multiple accidentals, sections that had to be repeated, and even pieces that required page turns!

I know that I will never be a concert pianist, but the growth and development that I experience from playing the piano brings me joy, as well as personal and emotional satisfaction. It connects me with a part of my being that rejoices when I spend time playing, and I am never bored or lonely, since I can always find a piece to keep me focused.

I have had several emotional moments with my piano playing, but one of the most memorable happened early in my piano-playing experience. As a registered nurse, I work full time on the evening shift. Occasionally I have a day off on the day I attend piano class. On one of these days, I returned home after Anne had introduced the class to pedaling and immediately attempted to get the feel of it. I knew adding the pedal to playing with both hands and counting would take increased concentration. After mastering the first two lines of this new piece without the pedal, I decided that it was time to introduce it. I played the two lines over and over, sometimes correctly, sometimes not. I was really pleased because I was playing with both hands, counting aloud and using the pedal, which was quite an achievement for me.

But I was unaware of the effect that the richness of the sound had on my emotions and I could hardly believe that I was producing it. Before I knew it, tears were flowing down my cheeks and I didn't know why. On reflection, I believe it was the joy of sensing something greater than myself, something intangible that poets write about or painters paint.

All I can say is that I got a message that this was a healthy activity. After reveling in the moment, I recorded the experience in my journal. A quote from that day reads, "From this point forward, I know that learning to play the piano is a life long path for me. My goal is not to arrive but to enjoy the journey as I learn and learn." Later that day I shared the experience with a friend

and with my sisters, who gave me much encouragement to continue to enjoy this activity.

I usually invite family members, friends and workmates to attend recitals and they do whenever they can. Some have watched my progress and wondered how I find the time to practice. When I perform for them, at recitals or at home, they are tolerant of my errors as well as of my abuse of the piece I am learning. However, I feel good not only because of my accomplishments, but also because my enthusiasm for the piano encouraged two of my colleagues to begin lessons. In addition I have a younger sister who is planning to begin classes.

This is my advice to potential piano students: ***You are never too old to start.*** Find and work with a teacher with whom you feel comfortable. Be consistent in your practice and persistent in your learning. *Do not measure your progress by the notes that you miss, but by the ones you play correctly. Laugh at yourself, be patient with yourself, and I promise you will discover that there is joy in this journey.*

Sybil Barnaby has a Masters Degree in nursing management and is a certified psychiatric nurse. She currently works in psychiatric research at the National Institute of Health in Bethesda, Maryland. She received her education in Jamaica, West Indies, and in England. She has also worked as an operating room nurse and as a midwife. Sybil enjoys playing the piano, the theatre, gardening, traveling, writing letters and spending time with her nieces and nephews.

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I don't really expect to perform at the Kennedy Center . . .

by Lucille Reifman

Because of financial reasons, I was unable to take piano lessons as a child. I enjoyed listening to others play and was probably jealous of those who did. As an adult, I never had time nor energy to pursue piano lessons because I was studying or teaching math at a university, raising small children, moving to foreign stations as the wife of a U.S. foreign service officer, or serving as an administrator of a number of multi-billion dollar federal programs.

Montgomery County's adult education program, an excellent piano teacher, and my retirement have made it possible for me to realize some of my ambitions. I don't really expect to perform at the Kennedy Center, because after all, I'm almost an octogenarian and would probably have difficulty climbing the steps to the stage. But that limitation does not decrease my enthusiasm for continuing my lessons and my enjoyment in the results.

An important consideration in my enjoyment is getting to know Anne Maysak, my teacher. I am impressed with her knowledge, her patience, her consideration of her students' weaknesses and strengths, and her ability and devotion to teaching. I am learning a new, interesting and lively skill, and enjoying both the experience and the results. There are, of course, some frustrations. My short memory (known as "senior moments") makes every piece seem like a new challenge, regardless of how many times I've practiced it. I envy my grandsons, who can play from memory, and can also improvise when their fingers or memory fail them. In my next life…

I am also enjoying the friendship of other students, both in class and in other activities. This is one of the reasons I prefer group rather than private lessons. Anne has managed to combine us into compatible groups where each of us has an opportunity to be challenged, as well as helping and learning from others in the group. Some individuals may go more slowly than they would if the teacher gave exclusive attention to them for an hour. However, the pace is thoroughly consistent with the amount of practice time and effort that I can devote to the lessons. I am confident that should I develop an unusual spurt of piano genius, Anne would promote me to a more advanced group.

The tuition for a group piano course is affordable for each member, but the total for the group makes it possible to attract an exceptionally well-qualified teacher. Furthermore, paying in advance each semester deters me from giving up when a light and transient obstacle presents itself.

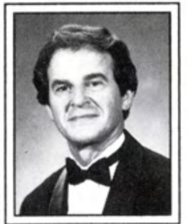
While I am reconciled to not having a concert tour, I do want to learn to play pieces familiar to my family. Accordingly, I have enjoyed *Alfred's Basic Adult All Time Favorites*. I am also pleased with the books that have CDs and disks that present both piano solos and accompaniments. It helps to have ready access to hearing how an expert thinks the piece should be played. Not only have my lessons been fun, but my family is relieved that I have learned to recognize when I play incorrect pitches.

The location of the piano in the home is probably another significant success factor. Our piano is located near our washer and dryer. I manage to do the laundry while I practice. The side benefits of my piano lessons and practice are the cleanest clothes my family has ever had! ▲

Lucille Reifman, Sc.D., has lectured on mathematics and statistics at American University in Washington and at the University of Paris in France. She was senior executive of the U.S. Federal Service, Associate Commissioner of the Federal/State Medicaid program and of the U.S. Department of Education (National Center for Education Statistics). Lucille happily retired a few years ago to begin her career with the piano.

In the next issue: **What do you do when an adult's self-criticism prevents normal progress?**

Putting It All Together: Repertoire



Marvin Blickenstaff, Editor

Marvin Blickenstaff, co-author of Music Pathways and Celebration Series: A Handbook for Teachers, teaches at the College of New Jersey (Ewing), The Westminster Choir College and Conservatory of Rider University (Princeton), and the New School for Music Study (Kingston, NJ). Each summer he is on the faculty of the International Workshops. Recently he has been named President of the Board of the Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy.

When you know that high school will be the end of a student's lessons, what repertoire should have been covered?

by Marvin Blickenstaff

A frequent comment heard from teachers runs something like this: "I don't expect my students to become concert pianists. I just want them to enjoy piano for the rest of their lives."

Although KEYBOARD COMPANION is focused primarily on elementary instruction, the question posed for this column penetrates to the core of our educational philosophy: How do we prepare our students for a lifetime of musical enjoyment? We face that issue most dramatically when planning a final year of instruction with high school students. What repertoire should they have covered? Why? And what skills are necessary for our students to be independent learners? Each of our four respondents faces that question annually in her studio. Interestingly, each teacher approaches the topic differently, and provides us with challenging thoughts and studio procedures. ▲

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by Jean Fox — *Repertoire covered in these precious high school years will enlarge their world . . .*

A good dentist works to reduce the need for his services. So does a good piano teacher. Since our success can be measured by the number of students who continue playing on their own, I place special emphasis on my students' repertoire during their final year of study.

Prior to the senior year, students study music of all periods and styles and acquire technical and theoretical skills. This foundation enables the student to embrace a more expansive repertoire. In addition to choosing compositions for a lifetime of pleasure, I use this final year to develop independent learning skills. When some of these students return for study years later, they often request to play these same classics.

Sarah, Phil and Lisa are three students who chose slightly different approaches to their final year of lessons. They all expressed the desire to play serious repertoire, but with differing objectives. Sarah loved the popular classics that made her feel like a "real" pianist. She was a born performer. Phil had a special appreciation for Bach fugues in addition to the well-known classical repertoire. Lisa loved Mozart above all. She was not a confident performer, but she wanted to learn as much Mozart and Bach as she could that final year.

Since each student's goals were different, I suggested four considerations to help us determine the choice of literature:

1. The students could propose pieces they had always wanted to play.
2. I offered a selection of compositions as expanded possibilities.
3. We evaluated the student's exposure to contrapuntal music, romantic music, sonata form, and master composers. If the student had not covered these areas, we did so that final year.
4. The student decided which pieces were to be memorized. Less memorizing enabled the student to learn more literature.

Because Sarah, Lisa and Phil were different in their needs, they were different in their choices. Sarah wanted to learn the Mozart "Fantasia in D Minor;" Beethoven's "Pathetique" sonata and "Moonlight" sonata, and a few showy MacDowell pieces. We expanded her repertoire by including Debussy's "Le Petit Nègre" and Brahms' "Rhapsody in G Minor." She loved these big, important pieces.

Lisa started serious practice for me when she began learning Mozart. In time, she developed an affinity for the contrapuntal works of Bach. The broad range of music she covered in junior and senior high school allowed her now to concentrate on her favorite composers.

Phil loved to perform. He gave a solo recital before entering a college of engineering. Some of his favorites included Chopin's "Raindrop" prelude, a Bach fugue, and Beethoven's "Moonlight" sonata.

For some of my students, I use arrangements and simplified versions of larger compositions in this final year. Even a student playing intermediate level repertoire can learn the simplified version of Liszt's "Hungarian Rhapsody" in John Thompson's Book 3. This arrangement captures the thrill of the larger work and is an exciting experience for the less advanced pianist.

Sometimes students choose a composition inappropriate for their current level of advancement. If a selected composition is easier than their repertoire level, we create an independent study project. If a composition seems too difficult, we discuss the practice strategy that will conquer the piece over a longer period of time.

Students love to choose the pieces they will perform on their graduation recital—be it a solo recital or one composition on our final studio recital. If the student prefers to perform in an ensemble, that adds yet another dimension to a senior year.

Whether students return to study in later years, or continue to play independently, the repertoire covered in these precious high school years will enlarge their world and lead them to a lifetime of involvement with music. ▲

Jean Fox teaches piano in her home in Allentown, PA. She has been President of the Pennsylvania State Music Teachers Association, of the Eastern Division of MTNA, and served on the MTNA Board of Directors from 1996-1998. She was selected 1988 PA Distinguished Teacher of the Year and in 1994 received the PA MTA Distinguished Service Award.

by Anita Renfroe *To sustain a lifetime of piano enjoyment, our grads must be able to sight-read fluently.*

When we send our graduating seniors off into the world, they should carry two bags. One is a suitcase filled with repertoire, each piece prepared with care.[1] The other is a toolbox filled with the skills to last for a lifetime of musical activity.

The toolbox

Every piano student needs the following gear to sustain a lifetime of music- making:

- A good grasp of music fundamentals;
- A sound technique;
- Sight-reading skill;
- Basic knowledge of music history, composers, style periods, and social context;
- Performance experience.

The fundamentals

The best way to learn music fundamentals—melody, harmony, and rhythm—is to analyze their roles in a composition. I want my graduating seniors to be able to define the melodic shape, determine where the music breathes, and identify repeated phrases and sequences that combine to produce longer sections in a composition.

Duets, accompaniments, and chamber ensembles challenge students to listen differently.

The next tool in the box is harmonic analysis. Our seniors should be able to identify keys and key relationships and recognize primary and secondary chords in root position and inversions. Seniors should be able to analyze and demonstrate macro and micro rhythms in a variety of meters.

I ask students to harmonize, improvise, and compose with melodies extracted from current repertoire or their own compositions. A student who improvises on "Three Blind Mice" or a pop tune is also harmonizing and composing. Tuck this creative drill into the toolbox.

Skill development

Students can develop two warm-up routines. The first limbers up the body and helps prevent injury before sitting at the piano. The second warm-up hones finger memory and helps tone mind and touch.

I teach my students that scales and arpeggios are the "keys to the kingdom." A student who can easily execute passage work is free to focus on the interpretation of the repertoire.

A beautiful sound is produced by the marriage of sensitive ears and sensitive fingers. Put the ability to create beautiful sound in the tool kit.

Sight-reading

Most piano drop-outs had difficulty reading their newly assigned pieces. To sustain a lifetime of piano enjoyment, our grads must be able to sight-read fluently. Daily reading of short musical segments helps reinforce the fundamentals of sight-reading.

Look before you leap. Sight-reading has two distinct elements: analysis and execution. In the sight-reading toolkit is a checklist for determining key, meter, form, phrase structure, accidentals, range for each hand, patterns, and shifts of positions.

Keep going, no matter what. My students are urged to keep a steady beat when sight-reading. This helps avoid "stutter play" while developing sight-reading proficiency.

Music history

Greater appreciation for music is achieved by walking in the steps of the composer. I ask my students to provide historical background for their pieces as part of their lesson preparation. This helps them associate composers and style periods. Access to the Internet has made information on composers and their milieu available immediately to everyone. The knowledge and research skills we put into our senior's tool kit will prove invaluable.

Public recognition

I encourage my students to perform both as soloists and in ensembles. Duets, accompaniments, and chamber ensembles challenge students to listen differently. They learn to breathe together, matching sounds and articulations. In the process, students develop an appreciation for ensemble and chamber music that will be useful in church and community for decades to come. Students need recitals, auditions, and festivals to gauge their progress and the success of their hard work. Put a competitive edge on the tools in your graduating senior's box.

Conclusion

We spend years helping each student fill a suitcase with delightful repertoire from across the keyboard landscape. If we give our grads the tools suggested above, they will be able to enjoy music-making for a lifetime. ▲

[1] See Jane McGrath's book, *The Pianist's Guide to Standard Teaching and Performance Literature* for an encyclopedia of early to intermediate piano repertoire. For upper intermediate to advanced literature see Maurice Hinson's *Guide to the Pianist's Repertoire*. Excellent sources such as the *Celebration Series* published by Frederick Harris Music or the *MTNA National Course of Study for Piano* provide lists of repertoire appropriate for each level.

See *Freeing the Caged Bird*, a video by Barbara Lister-Sink.

Dr. Anita Boyle Renfroe is Artist-Teacher and Associate Professor of Piano at the Millersville University of Pennsylvania. She holds degrees from Florida State University, Memphis State University, and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Her 2000-2001 schedule includes Mendelssohn research in the United Kingdom, performances in the Mid-Atlantic region, and a series of concerts as featured artist with orchestra in Stuttgart, Germany.

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by Gay Garard-Brewer *Have I given them the tools to continue their association with music?*

I had just turned out the light to go to sleep when the phone rang. "Mrs. 'B,' this is Carl," said the obviously excited voice. "You won't believe what I just did."

Knowing that Carl was calling from Washington, D.C. where he was a freshman in International Economics at Georgetown University, and knowing that time zones put him two hours ahead of me, my mind conjured a variety of possibilities. Before I could answer he sped ahead in his report. "Some of my friends and I went to the Kennedy Center tonight. You'll never guess what they played!"

Again I had no chance to reply before he informed me that the National Symphony Orchestra had played Ives' "Holiday Symphony" and he, Carl, was the only one of his companions that had heard and studied the composition. He became the "instructor" to his friends.

Where had Carl become familiar with the Ives symphony? He had been "subjected" to numerous contemporary compositions in the weekly theory/music appreciation classes required in my studio. It was obvious that Carl was excited to be in a city, armed with the background that allowed him to be comfortable in this cultural setting.

Assuming that my students will have their "last formal music lesson" the week after high school graduation, I need to ask myself a critical question: *have I given them the tools to continue their association with music?* I have the luxury of meeting with my students one and a half to two hours weekly and can offer them a wide variety of musical experiences. This allows me to re-assess continually each student's musical needs and what areas of concentration will benefit each most in *"Real Life 101."*

Technique: Our technique curriculum provides the students with an achievable goal of facility to maneuver around the keyboard comfortably and correctly. Included in this program is extended chordal experience that can be applied to an analysis of their classical pieces, playing "pop" music, and improvisation and composition.

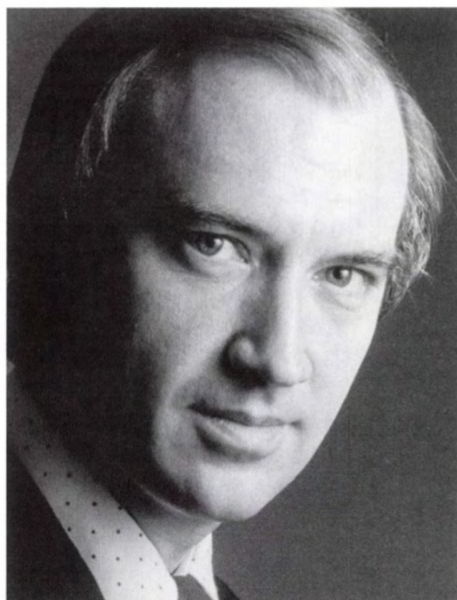
Sight-Reading: Although I have a large lending library of sight-reading music that encompasses all styles and levels, I am finding that the use of the digital piano orchestra disks works wonders in helping to teach looking ahead, steady counting and playing without stopping.

Repertoire: Selecting repertoire is a continual challenge. I find it especially important when dealing with what is euphemistically referred to as "intermediate level."

I divide my Baroque teaching repertoire into two types: dance and non-dance forms (e.g. preludes, fugues, arias, sonatas). My best sources are Bach's *Anna Magdalena Notebook*, the *Short Preludes and Fugues*, selected movements from both Bach and Handel suites, and the arias and sonatas of Scarlatti.

The Classical repertoire falls into three areas of study for my students: dance forms, sonatinas/sonatas and miscellaneous. Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven provide an infinite number of compositions using the same dance titles found also in the Baroque period. Material for the study of sonatinas and sonatas abounds. The miscellaneous forms (*e.g.* rondos, themes and variations, bagatelles) offer a delightful array of compositions.

While the Baroque and Classical periods



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offer an abundance of music accessible to the lower intermediate student, the easiest Romantic music caters to the upper intermediate/lower advanced student. The composers I find most accessible to my middle intermediate students are Gurlitt, Burgmüller and Heller. My middle to upper intermediate students find rewarding material in the first part of Schumann's *Album for the Young*, Tchaikovsky's *Album for the Young*, Grieg's *Lyric Pieces*, Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words* and Chopin's *Preludes* and *Mazurkas*.

I refer to 20th century literature as the "meat and potatoes" of my teaching. I teach much Kabalevsky and Bartók, but my favorite composers are Copland, Cowell, Tcherepnin, Tansman, Hanson, Persichetti, Dello Joio, Shostakovich, Khachaturian ... the list goes on. The quantity of contemporary repertoire my students learn truly prepares them to be open-minded and open-eared for hearing "new" sounds.

Finale: My students' private study comes full circle in their theory/music appreciation classes. Theory projects include computer/digital piano experiences ranging from score analysis to improvisation and composition. The music appreciation aspect of our classes involves listening to recordings while using scores, watching video performance of musical events, and conducting group "research" on a wide variety of topics.

In this world of technology which threatens our individuality, music lessons are one of the few disciplines where individual creativity can be expressed and developed on *a personal level.* No one is a non-entity. What do I wish to bequeath my students as they complete their lessons? Through repertoire study and musicianship classes, I wish to give them the ability to concentrate, a sense of self-esteem, and the skill which allows them to interact and communicate with people of all ages—anywhere in the world. It is an awesome goal. ▲

Gay Garard-Brewer is an independent piano teacher in Missoula, Montana, where she and her husband own B&B Music Studios. She is past-president of the Montana State MTA and is presently completing her DMA in Piano Pedagogy from The Catholic University of America.

by Avonne Higgins — *My goal is that each student becomes an intelligent music listener . . .*

My approach with a beginning student is based on the hope that I will be working with that young person for many years, ideally through his or her senior year. My choices of repertoire reflect a commitment to help the student develop an appreciation and understanding of all musical periods. My goal is that each student becomes an intelligent music listener.

Over the years I have become aware of the pieces my students respond to at the various stages of their development. Whenever possible I give them repertoire options. Letting a student choose repertoire creates a sense of ownership that often leads to a stronger performance.

It is difficult to cover music from all musical periods solely from the solo repertoire. I encourage my students to participate in school and community bands and orchestras. Ensemble playing builds musicianship and broadens the student's exposure to repertoire. Ensembles also provide variety to a student recital. There are many elementary two-piano pieces that can be expanded or edited by doubling parts to accommodate four, six or eight students. Two arrangements for acoustic pianos that are easily expanded are: "Storm Gods" by Ristad (Myklas) and the Pachelbel "Canon in D," arranged by Marion Verhaalen (Hal Leonard). The latter lends itself to multiple pianos as well as adding violins, celli, and a string bass. The music is easy to learn and younger students feel as if they are playing with an orchestra. For intermediate students, the minuets from Handel's *Music for the Royal Fireworks* arranged by Virginia Speiden Carpenter (Belwin) provide the opportunity to teach a bit of music history. Older students are fascinated with the duet arrangement of Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" (Warner Bros., #PS0157). I prefer to use two pianos for rehearsals/performance rather than one piano. And if you want to cap off your recital with a real crowd-pleaser, try the two-piano, eight-hand arrangement by Kleinmichel of Liszt's "Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2" (G. Schirmer) or Tchaikovsky's "Marche Slave," arranged by E. Langer (G. Schirmer).

All of my students have some experience with chamber music. I assist local string and instrumental teachers by coaching sonatas, piano trios, quartets, etc. Chamber music develops listening skills, and sensitivity to balance, articulation and dynamics. I am grateful for the many easier chamber pieces which enable students at all levels to participate in this musically gratifying experience.

Most of my graduating students give a senior recital. I encourage a program that includes pieces from three periods. If the student suggests it, I allow him/her to choose a favorite semi-classical or jazz piece. Often by their senior year, students ask to learn pieces they have heard older students play on recitals.

This past May my four graduating seniors played their individual senior recitals. The four recitals took place on one (very busy!) weekend and each recital included repertoire from at least three musical periods. Three of the recitals included the duet version of "Rhapsody in Blue" (played on two pianos), and ended with the eight-hand arrangement of the "Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2." Two recitals featured chamber pieces: a Haydn trio (the string players were siblings of the senior), Beethoven's oboe/English horn trio, and the first movement of the Schubert "Trout Quintet." One recital opened with the senior entering the hall playing the bagpipe, kilt and all, and ended with Rachmaninoff's "Concerto No. 2." Another recital featured a marimba solo. The audiences that weekend were vocal in their appreciation of the repertoire variety. While the months preceding these recitals were hectic, I was exhilarated by the outcome. But the most gratifying aspect was what happened in the days following the recital weekend. Each student called or dropped by the studio expressing the desire to continue lessons through the summer and seeking suggestions for new repertoire. *These were tangible signs of "mission accomplished": the students' eagerness to continue their involvement with music.* ▲

Avonne Wilcox Higgins is an independent teacher in Boise, Idaho. She attended Boise State University and the University of Idaho and holds a degree in piano performance with a minor in music theory.

In the next issue: **What makes a piece too hard for a student?**

Tomorrow Today: Technology

Sandra Bowen, Editor

Sandra Bowen thinks of her piano studio as a playroom filled with favorite toys she shares with her students. A self-confessed electronic junkie, she has been trying to hook other teachers through her guidebook to technology, Electrify Your Studio. In spite of the foregoing, she holds degrees in Music History and Literature from Mills College and has done postgraduate work in music education at Stanford University.

How do you use notation software to improve your students' reading skills?

by Sandra Bowen

To be perfectly honest, I have never used any of my notation programs with my students. I assume that these programs which give me headaches will completely stump my students, but I forget . . . they're smarter than I am. After reading the articles written by Gail Fischler, Maura Hall, Linda Kennedy and Bobbie Rastall, I may use nothing but my notation programs this school year!

I've always heard that the best way to teach children to read music is to have them write it. We know that Bach copied reams of music to hone his skills—has music changed so much that we cannot benefit by doing the same? To the chagrin of many musicians, music notation has not changed at all since the time of Bach. We seem to be stuck with this very flawed system. The only thing that has changed is how we choose to enter the notes.

Yes, some notation programs might as well be in Urdu for the learning curves they have, but newer programs and new versions of older programs are much more user-friendly and accessible. I love Gail's idea of introducing students to notation programs through *Doodle Pad*, which comes with Harmonic Vision's *Music Ace* software. Very young children can use this program with wonderful results.

Maura and Linda use *Encore*, a veteran professional-level program with many loyal followers; Gail uses both *Music Writer* and *Cakewalk Professional*; Bobbie favors the newer *Sibelius*. Students will take a little more time to learn these programs (although not nearly as long as their teachers!), but their possibilities will be endless.

Other notation programs abound: *Music Time* (G-Vox) and *PrintMusic!* (Coda, www.codamusic.com) are entry level programs while *Finale* (also from Coda) is one of the most popular professional level programs.

In **Tech Tips**, read more about *NotationStation.net*—a new website where your students can publish their pieces on the Internet!

Read on ... ▲

by Linda Kennedy *Each piece is a letter from the composer telling (us) . . . how to bring it to life.*

Confident reading involves seeing, comprehending, and bringing to life the many signs and symbols of music notation. Teaching children to read music can be a challenge when dealing with their varied learning styles and the multitude of concepts they must master. Exercises using *Encore* (Gvox, www.gvox.com) during lab time in my multimedia center have added a new dimension to reading activities in my studio, widening the scope of what the students see and react to when reading music.

A good first exercise in notation is to have a student copy four to eight measures of a piece he or she is currently studying. Not only does this exercise give the student a chance to become comfortable with the notation program's contents and operation, it necessitates a close scrutiny of *every* detail in the score. It is quite interesting to note which symbols the student overlooks—this discovery can help pinpoint areas that need to be addressed in the private lesson.

I usually choose a newly assigned recital, festival, or competition piece for this exercise and follow up several weeks later with a memorization assignment: the student must write out the first few measures of "A," "B," Coda, and/or trouble spots. No peeking at the score is allowed until it is finished and the work is checked by comparison to the score.

Beginning readers often have trouble relating the inner ledger line notes to their identical pitches on the opposing staff. They need to view (and hear!) the grand staff as the unit it really is. Exercises in writing middle C-D-E or C-B-A in a variety of ways utilizing both clefs can help clarify this issue. Rewriting a short phrase or pattern an octave higher, lower, or at the same pitch in the other staff can serve as an extension of the note recognition activities you already have in place.

Transposition exercises can bolster the skill of intervallic recognition. Prepare a four-measure phrase for the student to transpose up or down a major second or third. Transposing short patterns helps students absorb notes in larger groups—a very valuable reading skill.

Some students focus so closely on notes and rhythm that they overlook articulation markings entirely. Try writing out a phrase three times and instruct the student to add different articulation markings to each phrase. Adding his/her own staccati, slurs, and accents cultivates a greater awareness of these markings in the repertoire. Have the student print the exercise and then perform the examples for you during the private lesson.

Creating and notating an original composition embodies all reading elements and helps develop a well-rounded understanding of the language in both notation and sound. Pitches are easily entered; the rhythm is the challenge. The ability to hear a playback is a real bonus. The students' listening skills are honed as they listen for errors in their work. After the basic pitches and rhythm are entered correctly, it is time to examine the sound of the student's creation for dynamics, articulation, phrasing, and all other directional markings to ensure an accurate interpretation in someone else's hands. I remind my students that each piece in their repertoire is a letter from that composer telling them exactly how to

bring it to life. They share this same responsibility in notating their own creations. This new awareness of the importance of everything on the page ultimately translates into solid reading skills.

Linda Kennedy, NCTM, has taught in her independent piano studio for 30 years. She holds a B.M. in piano performance and a M.M. in music theory and composition from Southeastern Louisiana University. Linda is an active member of MTNA state and local organizations (presently MusicLink chairperson for Arkansas and president of MTA of Central Arkansas), NFMC, and the National Guild of Piano Teachers.

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by Maura Hall *A notation program carefully integrated with a student's lessons can pay big dividends.*

My music notation program, *Encore*, motivates my students to improve their musical skills. They can hear right away if the song they just wrote "works," and when they're finished, they have a printed song that looks like it came out of a book. Parents are equally pleased to see their child's effort looking neat, crisp, and professional.

My students begin using the notation program almost right away, regardless of age. Once they have started to read notes on a staff, they are given a set rhythm, possibly something like that of "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star." They enter the pitches from the position/notes they already know, and as they do so, they tell me the names of those notes. We usually do this right after new notes are introduced in their music. Once finished, we listen to our melody and decide if it flows and has a satisfying ending. We also discuss whether it meets the goals we set—did we use the right time signature and the right clef? Did we follow the assigned rhythm? (See example 1.)

The notation project reinforces concepts from the regular lesson. If seven-year-old Adrian has trouble reading bass clef in G, then our song would be written in bass clef G. On the computer, he can hear his notes immediately—an exciting thing for a young child. If he's trying to put a "G" on the line and he gets it wrong, he can correct it easily. I try to have all students write within their playing ability so they can apply their sharpened skills to the lesson material.

As the student learns more notes, he/she begins to see how the same rhythms can have lots of different sounds depending on the notes used. Reading rhythms involves more than just being able to tell that a whole note gets four beats. To reinforce rhythms, I assign a melody with no rhythm, for example, c-d-e-d-g-f-e-f-g-e-d-f-e-d-c-c. Then we choose a time signature, and a number of measures. Students fill the measures using different combinations of rhythms, with the notes in the given order. (See example 2, next page.)

Early on, students start to create songs based on intervals. We choose a rhythmic pattern they have learned and use it as a motif throughout the song. The student then writes the melody, highlighting the interval he/she has learned.

Example 1, Given rhythms in F and C

Given rhythm in F

Given rhythm in C

C,D,E,D,G,F,E,F,G,E,D,F,E,D,C,C

Example 2, given pitches, different rhythmic requirements

Use only half and quarter notes

Once students have learned simple chord progressions—such as C, G7, C—I give them a melody on the computer. They decide where the chords should fit with the melody. I may ask students to write the accompaniment first in whole notes, then again as quarter notes with rests on beats 2 and 4, and then with rests on 1 and 3. This shows them how to change a song simply by changing the accompaniment style.

As students learn chords in their music, I assign a "mystery melody" as a way to introduce variations. This is a short melody with chordal accompaniment. They identify the chords, then make variations on the original. After a student decides that the piece is in F, I ask him/her to change the melody in certain ways—make all the Gs into B flats, or make 3rds into 5ths. We also explore rhythmic variations as a possibility for manipulation, such as turning all quarter notes into eighth notes.

A notation program carefully integrated with a student's lessons can pay big dividends. At our year-end recital last June, 18-year-old Kevin Partlow played a piece of his own. After years of composition, he demonstrated to a packed audience a mastery of creativity in his "Quartet," a perpetual motion piece with a repeating sixteenth note motif. In compositions like Kevin's, the potential of a notation program comes to its full fruition. ▲

Maura E. Hall NCTM, is director of Etudes, *a private music studio in Saratoga Springs, NY where she teaches independently. Maura is active in the Music Teacher's National Association and is currently chair of the New York State District Six non-competitive auditions.*

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by Gail Fischler

A notation program can be used as a tool for exploration.

Melissa burst through the door and announced, "I learned 'Ode to Joy' from Mom's old book—wanna hear it?" Her work so far had been characterized by thundering renditions containing grand effects and uncomplicated by such mundane details as correct pitches. "Ode to Joy" was no exception. "How would you like to copy this piece into the computer?" I asked. I was desperate for a way to slow her down and allow her to experience the trees as she galloped through the forest.

Each lesson that spring included some copying and gradually her practicing and playing became much more accurate. Through the use of a notation program, Melissa discovered an appreciation for details which led to a positive change in her work habits. The process of editing a piece strengthens the student's understanding of the relationship between the symbols on the page and the sound they make possible.

A notation program can be used as a tool for exploration. My less advanced students are most comfortable with a program that is easy to use and contains only enough bells and whistles to be fun. Too many options and clutter on the screen can distract young students from the task at hand.

The process of editing a piece strengthens the student's understanding of the relationship between the symbols on the page and the sound they make possible.

As soon as my beginning students are settled comfortably into their pre-reading activities, we begin discovery activities using the *Doodle Pad* in *Music Ace* (HarmonicVision, www.harmonicvision.com). Activities can include explorations of high-middle-low, alphabet relationships, or lines and spaces. These activities can be repeated (each "experiment" is different), are adaptable to partners or small groups, are easy to plan, and take up a small amount of lesson time.

In "High-Middle-Low," students place pitches on the staff and are asked to answer the same questions for each chosen pitch. They are then asked to change their pitches and answer the same series of questions. Discovery questions are essential for guidance and feedback as students explore; they may be answered either verbally or in writing.

Similarly, using a little more detailed notation program (at this point we use either *Music Writer*, part of the *Discovering Music Series* from Voyetra, www.voyetra.com, or *Score Writer* from Cakewalk, www.cakewalk.com), they can explore triads, intervals, etc. In "Snowmen," students create line and

space triads: "My first Snowman was made of Lines, Spaces / sounded Bright and Sparkling, Dark and Cloudy, Mysterious and Changing / sounded High, Middle, Low, looked High, Middle, Low." Students may very correctly say that their first snowman looked and sounded high, middle, and low. This allows them to imagine how a snowman might have a high head, a middle stomach, and low bottom while at the same time singing in a deep voice and sitting near the bottom of a mountain.

Another type of exploration allows students to compare a phrase against several variations of their own. Accidentals, rhythms, intervals, octave changes, angular/linear melodic shapes, orchestration, etc. can all be explored in this manner. Preparation for these activities includes entering a phrase, copying it as necessary, and saving it. For clarity, a measure or two of rest may be placed between each copy and the measure numbers specified for each change.

As a teacher I have found that one of the most difficult things I face is determining what is getting in the way of a student's progress. Using a notation program as part diagnostic tool and part discovery tool gives me new insight into a student's perceptions and opens the door of communication. ▲

Gail Fischler maintains an independent studio in Tucson, Arizona. She performs as accompanist and recitalist, presents workshops and master classes for teachers and students, and serves as an adjudicator. She is Immediate Past President of the Arizona State Music Teachers Association. Gail was named ASMTA's "Honored Teacher of the Year" in 1999.

by Bobbie Rastall — ***The kids . . . were paying attention to music notation! Hurrah!***

Last year I prepared a notation project for my middle school students. The activity was designed to have the students meet two goals: (1) learn to use notation software, and (2) learn to write music notation as a means to improving reading skills. They had six group lessons during the year to work on the project. They could also use their own time if they so desired. The first assignment was to write an eight-measure melody; the second was to compose an accompaniment part for the left hand.

I wrote out instructions for my notation program, *Sibelius* (Sibelius, www.sibelius.com). I included instructions for keyboard input, MIDI input, layering for the left hand, and editing. Using Sibelius made the students alert to the necessities of a time signature and equal number of beats in each measure, clef signs, and a key signature.

At the third group lesson each student played his/her piece. The new assignment was to write a variation on their melody. The students could change their tune to minor, add some passing tones, or change the key to the dominant. Again armed with my written instructions, the kids used their lab time to notate this new section of their music on *Sibelius*. Now my instructions covered "copy and paste" and "transpose." The kids were getting faster at inputting their music, they had a working knowledge of the software, and they were *PAYING ATTENTION* to details of music notation! Hurrah!

At Group Lesson 4 the themes and variations were played. The new task for Group Lessons 4 and 5 was to go back to the original eight-measure melody and write a B part, complete with left hand. This new section could be in the dominant key or in the relative minor. It could be a contrasting section or be similar to the A part, but in the different key; it could not be exactly the same. This was probably the hardest part of the project.

Group Lesson 6 consisted of listening to all of the themes and variations and the new AB pieces. We also played around with ABA form. Some of the more adventurous composers went on to write rondos.

The project turned out to be a very positive experience. It required more teeth-pulling on my part than I had anticipated, but each student produced something valuable. Now some of the students ask if they can use a few weeks of lab time to put their latest composition on *Sibelius*. They know how to use the software, they can edit their work, they realize (I hope) the value of paying attention to details, and they get a printout of their own composition to show for it all. ▲

Bobbie Rastall, NCTM, holds a B.M.E. from West Virginia Wesleyan and a M.A. in Piano Pedagogy from California State University at Fullerton. Over a 30 year period she has taught piano in West Virginia, California, Michigan, and Maryland. Bobbie developed and published various teaching materials for use in conjunction with the Michigan MTA Student Achievement Testing Program. She now resides in Frederick, Maryland.

KEYBOARD COMPANION TECH TIPS

A new web site may be the answer to your notation software needs. *NotationStation.net* debuted for Windows in May 2000; the Macintosh version followed in August.

NotationStation provides music teachers and their students mutual access to their own place on the Internet where they can exchange music, lessons, charts—any kind of music notation. The site is completely interactive and is MIDI optional—you can just click in your responses through the computer keyboard or mouse.

After you join the *NotationStation* community (there's no charge or obligation of any kind), you and your students can begin to exchange music. You download—for free—*MusicTime* software and you can immediately create lessons and post them for immediate online access for your students.

All this, and the only skill required is basic PC savvy and Internet access. Check it out! ▲

***In the next issue:* What is a "CD Burner" and why does my studio need one?**

The World Around Us:
News and Views

Helen Smith Tarchalski, Editor

Helen Smith Tarchalski is an independent teacher in Gaithersburg, Maryland and director of Annapolis School of Music. In addition to teaching, writing for publications, lecturing, and performing, she has published software through Electronic Courseware Systems. Helen holds the Master Teacher Certificate from MTNA and a Bachelor of Music degree from Peabody Conservatory, where she studied with Fernando Laires.

Editor's Note:

In the Autumn issue of KEYBOARD COMPANION, we ended Madeleine Crouch's final "You and Your Piano" column with this question: "*What do you do when a favorite Associate Editor leaves the staff?*"

Our answer to this question turned out to be the creation of this new department called "News and Views," and we are delighted that Helen Tarchalski has agreed to serve as its editor. Helen has great plans for the column's future, and we hope that you will enjoy this new addition to our magazine. We invite you to send Helen your ideas about topics and events that you would like to see covered in her department.

by Helen Smith Tarchalski

When Elvina proposed this new department, I found the possibilities so stimulating that my mind barely stopped racing long enough to hear all that she said. KEYBOARD COMPANION's format has always provided a forum for many kinds of lively discussions, but "News and Views" opens up an even more ecumenical venue.

I foresee the "Views" portion of this department as an opportunity for us to discuss editorial aspects of our profession, more psychological angles of our teaching, and relationships with our students. The "News" section, of course, will provide a place to keep us apprised of upcoming events for both teachers and students.

Views: How do you know when it's time to say "Goodbye" and how do you do it?

by Helen Smith Tarchalski

I recently read a review of a new book by the popular television personality, "Judge Judy." Discussing life perspectives in a chapter entitled "For Better, or Forget It," the author makes no secret that she has become jaded about marriage and demands a constant high level of performance, *or else*. Few teachers have the luxury or even the desire to issue such dire ultimatums during the course of a teacher-student relationship. Even the most dedicated students in the best possible relationships experience occasional slumps in progress and/or attitude conducive to productivity. But for a variety of reasons, occasionally the time comes when it is better for teacher and student to part company.

In cases when teachers must downsize a studio they may simply choose the "last-hired, first-fired" approach. Alternatively, they might elect to continue teaching only select students who best meet certain requirements. At other times teachers must dismiss students because of specific problems.

Whichever scenario is faced, teachers should have clearly established criteria that help arrive at the best possible decision for all concerned. Some teachers feel that a student's development is not complete without investigating all styles of music while others feel that diversifying dilutes results. Some teachers have hefty performance and competition requirements. Other teachers believe that performance should be optional and that competitions have no place in a young student's development. Some teachers believe that a serious, focused studio environment is a must while others think that a more casual, lively, bantering approach works better in their studios.

There is a teacher-student match that is appropriate for nearly every situation, and there is usually little reason to continue one that makes all parties miserable. Rather than making a student feel as though he/she has failed and been spurned, it is possible to end a relationship sensitively, in a positive manner, and to use the experience to illustrate a "life lesson."

As I say "hello" in my new position with KEYBOARD COMPANION, I ask our two authors to discuss the "goodbyes" we must sometimes face in our studios. In this issue, they describe how they handle the question: *"How do you know when it's time to say 'Goodbye' and how do you do it?"*

Joselyn Makowski operates a large independent studio, and describes how she cultivated and maintains the most advantageous working environment in her studio. Christine Mirabella recently downsized her large independent studio to fewer than ten students and writes about how she handled the predicament we sometimes have to face when a major professional or lifestyle change takes place. ▲

by Joselyn Cross Makowski *Partings can be handled professionally with little or no hard feelings . . .*

During discussions among teachers, this question comes up with as much regularity as questions regarding tuition plans, make-up lessons, and other studio policies: *Why is it so difficult to end a relationship with a student that clearly is not working out?* Often there is an element of guilt or insecurity involved in dropping a student. It took me a long time to recognize that a student's lack of progress or loss of interest was not necessarily *my* fault as a teacher. I was certain that somehow I should be able to reach and inspire that student—choose better, easier, shorter literature (or longer, more difficult and inspiring); be even more positive and understanding (or tougher and less wishy-washy); lower standards that *must* be too high ... *ad infinitum*. When I would finally muster up the nerve to drop a student, I waited until the summer and sent a letter stating that unfortunately, circumstances had come up that forced me to make major changes in

my teaching schedule and I could not accommodate that student in the fall. No other explanation. Then I left for vacation. *Chic-ken*!! The only cowardly thing I did not do was change my phone number, tempting as that might have been. Many more years of experience have brought a better perspective to these situations, and I realize now that partings can be handled professionally, with little or no hard feelings, and can even be *beneficial* for the student. When and how we say "Goodbye" depends largely on how well we have said "Hello."

The initial interview with a prospective student is the opportunity to establish the foundation for a long, mutually beneficial association. However, it is also a chance to discuss circumstances that may lead to dismissal from the studio. Giving prospective students an honest assessment of our expectations, goals, fees, and a good overview of what "life in the studio" will entail is helpful to everyone concerned in making the decision to work together (or not). Telling them what happens when things *do not work out* is also helpful. There is a wide range of expectations for students among teachers. One colleague requires three hours of practice per *week*—another has students sign a contract agreeing to practice a minimum of two hours per *day*. Some teachers cover enormous amounts of literature each year—others focus primarily on music needed for the annual competitions. The best advice my mentor gave me was to be very clear in my own mind about *what*, *why*, and *how* I want to teach, then present myself without apology. At the initial interview, I explain my teaching philosophy and policies as fully as possible, emphasizing details that are often factors in a decision to discontinue a student's lessons:

- I believe strongly that a teacher and student *must be walking on the same path* to have a viable partnership. My studio curriculum is comprehensive, involving lots of technical work, theory studies, music history, and performance requirements. There is no option to choose "one from Column A and two from Column B" on the curriculum chart—students are in for the entire program.
- Students are expected to be well prepared each week. *Habitually* unprepared students are dismissed from the studio.
- There is no *Wunderkind* requirement. A student's level of talent is not an issue. My insistence on commitment and working to full potential *is*.

When discussing my expectations, students are forewarned of potential consequences if they do not meet the requirements. Later, if circumstances deteriorate

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to the point of dismissal, it should come as no surprise. Once it is apparent that there are major problems, attempts to work through them are unsuccessful, and everyone is unhappy—it is then time for "goodbyes."

Teachers have asked how I define "habitually unprepared." That varies. A retired colleague—a much-respected, outstanding teacher in our area—gave her students three unprepared sessions per year before they were "out." That was harsh, in my opinion. Life does have a way of throwing occasional curve balls. The trick is learning to separate the legitimate excuses from the malingering. I worked with one student facing unusual difficulties that extended for nearly the whole year. We set smaller goals and I happily accepted very sporadic practice. In another instance, I dropped a student after only ten weeks of lessons that digressed from disappointment to agony. Following four weeks of lack of preparation and apparent lack of concern on the student's part, I quit writing in her assignment book for six weeks. She did not even notice. Numerous verbal suggestions and markings in her score were ignored. I helped the dismissed student to understand that her lack of progress resulted from lack of commitment and time management—not lack of talent.

Generally, I do *not* accept commitments to soccer, karate, ballet, and horseback riding as having priority over piano. When students choose to participate in too many activities and their practice sessions become hasty and unfocused, I suggest that it is time to prioritize their interests. I reiterate the numerous long-range benefits of music study. Fortunately, my ubiquitous students usually end up choosing piano lessons as a priority. Occasionally, piano loses, and we agree to at least a temporary hiatus.

Saying goodbye to a student need not be traumatic or necessarily permanent. I discontinued lessons for one of my most gifted students when she was very young. We eventually resumed lessons and worked together beautifully for eleven more years. Another student returned after we had parted company for one year. She is now working as an assistant in the studio. She plans to major in piano, and wants to be a teacher!

There are times when the wisest choice is to send a student who has developed a special interest to another teacher. I recall two former students who developed an all-consuming interest in jazz. I enjoy jazz, but it is neither my forte nor my first love to teach. Why do a disservice to these students by keeping them when there are several outstanding jazz specialists in the area? Some other former students' interests swayed primarily in favor of "pop" or electronic music. We were no longer going down the same path, so I helped find an appropriate teacher for these students as well. Mine is not the only path, nor the only correct one. Some of my most eager students were sent by other teachers who, for varying reasons, believed the program offered in my studio would be more beneficial to those students. A major benefit of belonging to local professional organizations is learning other teachers' areas of expertise and teaching styles. Students who are not working out for us might fit in perfectly elsewhere, and vice versa!

Of course, there are other reasons to drop a student. The most difficult of these is when the fault is with the parents, not the student. We all have a few horror stories of overbearing parents who want to orchestrate the entire learning process, non-paying parents, or ones who want to rewrite our studio policies, in spite of all those good efforts toward mutual understanding we made up front. A meddlesome or uncooperative parent can be one of the most detrimental elements to the learning process. If a conference does not produce immediate results, I end the relationship. I am always sad for the child.

Wanting to match a student to a teacher with more similar goals is a very positive reason to say goodbye. Saying goodbye properly when progress is at a standstill (with little or no hope for recovery) teaches a young person that success in any endeavor requires diligence, self-motivation, determination, commitment, and patience—a valuable life lesson he or she can carry from the dismissal.

"Goodbyes" are inevitable. To make them infrequent, but when necessary, as positive as possible, trust yourself—work with students *you* enjoy teaching, in the manner in which *both* of you are comfortable. Be clear about your expectations, and do not try to be all things to all people. ▲

Joselyn Makowski operates a large independent studio in Silver Spring, Maryland. She holds a Bachelor of Music degree from Oberlin Conservatory. She is Past President of her local MTA, and currently serves as its newsletter editor. She is a frequent lecturer.

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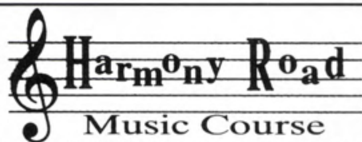

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by Christine Mirabella *It can be very beneficial to occasionally "weed the garden" . . .*

All teachers are faced with the dilemma of dropping students sometime during their teaching career. Dismissal of a student can become necessary when there are chronic problems with the student or parents, or when you need to downsize your studio. As I started dredging up memories of my past student dismissal experiences, I was surprised by how many trying times I have had. I remember the headache I got every week just before Paul arrived. Paul contested everything I said and even the composer's wishes. "Why should I finger it your way when I like it better my way?" "Why do I have to play it staccato?" "Why do I have to practice scales?" "I don't like any of these pieces!" A certain amount of questioning can be healthy and promote understanding, but Paul was more interested in challenging me than learning.

And then there was Allison. Allison rarely practiced and made little progress. I gave her numerous pep talks and discussed the situation with her parents, but nothing could induce her to spend more time at the piano. I finally told her that she was wasting her parents' money and my time and that I would have to stop her lessons. To my surprise, she burst into tears. I always attempt to remain calm and reassuring in a dismissal situation, so I comforted her and told her she could resume her lessons when she was ready to practice. She never did.

Garth was a student with two problems: he frequently arrived at the lesson without his music and he had only a small electronic keyboard to use for practice. His excuses for leaving the music at home included that it was in the other car, the maid put it somewhere, or that the dog had "used" it. His small electronic keyboard was useful for learning elementary skills at the very beginning of his study, but as soon as concepts such as dynamics, balance, and touches became necessary, he was lost. His lack of progress caused him to become discouraged. This, of course, led to a conference with his parents, and we decided to stop his lessons.

Other problem situations I have experienced that led to dismissals include parents who were always late paying tuition if they bothered to pay at all, students overloaded with so many other activities that they had no time or energy for practice, students who missed numerous lessons because of disorganization in the home, and students who were disrespectful.

The latter situation was recounted by a colleague. The student was rude and arrogant at the lesson and didn't follow her instructions about practicing. When she had had enough of this unproductive behavior, she quietly closed the music and explained that it was time to either stop lessons or find another teacher. The shock of her actions helped him become more serious about his music study, thus actually avoiding dismissal.

When these problems arise, I usually approach the student first to see if there can be an improvement without the parents' involvement. I help the student with various solutions and motivational goals. Sometimes I suggest a probationary period to see if the student is willing to make an effort to improve. I may also encourage students to pursue activities that would better suit their abilities and interests, or I might suggest that another teacher would work better with a particular student. Of course, if the parents are the problem, I speak to them first. Ideally, the teacher, student, and parent should have input into the outcome.

Dismissing a student is always a judgment call. It is a decision made after carefully weighing all of the circumstances. Sometimes the student is on a plateau and his/her interest perks up the next year. Also entering into the equation is whether the stress of teaching the student is worth the income to the teacher. Sometimes we have to keep problem students just to pay the bills. When the decision is made to terminate the relationship, it is always best for the student, parents, and teacher to end on a positive note.

Another reason to say goodbye—the need to reduce class size—became my problem recently when I was appointed as adjunct instructor in piano pedagogy at the University of Oregon as well as principal keyboardist with the Eugene Symphony Orchestra in the same year. Over a two-year period I reduced my class size from twenty-eight students to nine. This was agonizing for me. How was I to

Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation

(Required by 39 USC 3685)

1. Publication Title: Keyboard Companion. 2. Publication Number: 1086-0819. 3. Filing Date: October 26, 2000. 4. Issue Frequency: Quarterly. 5. Number of Issues Published Annually: Four. 6. Annual Subcription Price: $17.00. 7. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication: The Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy, Inc., 4543 Route 27, PO Box 651, Kingston, NJ 08528. 8. Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters: The Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy, Inc., 4543 Route 27, PO Box 651, Kingston, NJ 08528. 9. Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor: Publisher: The Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy, Inc., 4543 Route 27, PO Box 651, Kingston, NJ 08528. Editor: Elvina Truman Pearce, 827 Santa Maria Drive, Naperville, IL 60540. Managing Editor: Not Applicable. 10. Owner: The Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy, Inc., 4543 Route 27, PO Box 651, Kingston, NJ 08528. 11. Known Bondholder, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities: None. 13. Publication Title: Keyboard Companion. 14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below: Autumn 2000.

15. Extent and Nature of Circulation	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Total No. Copies *(Net Press Run)*	13,000	10,000
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(2) Return from News Agents		
i. Total *(Sum of 15g, 15h(1), and 15h(2))*	13,000	10,000
Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation *(15c/15g x 100)*	80%	73%

16. This Statement of Ownership will be printed in the Winter issue of this publication.

17. Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner: Louise L. Goss, Publisher, October 26, 2000.

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choose which students to let go? At first it seemed impossible because of the emotional bond I had with my students, but when I applied objective criteria it became easier. Did the student/teacher/parent relationship work? Did any of the problems I described from my earlier experiences exist? Did the student practice well and accomplish what was expected? Was the student enthusiastic about learning and performing?

After I made my decisions, I notified all the students and parents about my change of professional circumstances. I helped place the students whom I had to let go with appropriate teachers. My goal was to make the transition as smooth as possible. I ended up with a delightful class of highly motivated students with a passion for music. They inspire one another and me! I learned that it can be very beneficial to occasionally "weed the garden."

Christine Mirabella holds a Masters degree in piano performance from the Indiana University School of Music. She has taught piano and piano pedagogy at the University of Oregon. Currently, she is Principal Keyboard with the Eugene Symphony Orchestra and she maintains a piano studio in her home in Eugene.

Back to the editor

Regardless of the reasons for dismissing a student, being completely honest is the professional and thoughtful thing to do. Students and their parents have a right to know the truth about why they are the ones being chosen for dismissal. Anything less than the truth may unwittingly cause the student to continue down the same unproductive or destructive path in another studio, wasting precious years of music education.

Complete honesty, sensitivity, and a good working relationship with other teachers in our area helps turn those inevitable "goodbyes" into an opportunity—the opportunity to cultivate the best music education environment possible for all students, parents, and teachers involved. ▲

News

The Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C., in collaboration with other institutions and organizations, is currently presenting a large-scale project called **PIANO 300** which offers a large exhibition at the International Gallery of the *S. Dillon Ripley Center*, including publications, radio and television broadcasts, performances, and tours. The project celebrates the invention of the piano and its three hundred years of influence on and reflection of society, including cultural, technological, and social changes.

The Washington exhibit has been extended to June 3, 2001. For more information, check the project Web site at www.piano300.org or call 202-357-3129. ▲

In the next issue: How do you keep students and their parents apprised of the benefits of music study?

Advertiser Index

Accolade Press .46
Alfred Publishing Company .23-26
American-Russian Piano Institute .35
American School of Piano Tuning .46
Boston Piano Company .2
The FJH Music Company .11
Harmony Road Music .46
G. Henle USA Inc. .12
International Piano Workshop .30
Keyboard Companion Magazine .41
Kindermusik International .8
KITS .37
Mason & Hamlin Piano Company .Back Cover
MiBAC Music Software .13
MTNA .21
Music Educators Marketplace .19
Music Together .17
MusikGarten .7
Myklas Music Press .5
My Own Music History .48
National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy . .Front Inside Cover
National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy .31
National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy . .Back Inside Cover
National Federation of Music Clubs .38
Personal Composer .5
Roland Corporation USA .15
Schaum Publications, Inc. .27
Successful Music School for Sale .46
Suzuki Corporation .29
Warner Bros. Publications .33
Westminster Choir College .45
Wingsound .18
World Class Tapes .34

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