

National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy

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Hyatt Regency Oak Brook

Oak Brook, Illinois

“Toward A Pedagogy for the New Millennium”  
Samuel S. Holland

This is a great moment. Can I just look at you for a minute? “Toward a pedagogy for the new millennium.” I hated that name as soon as it came out. What this is really about is how we got here today and where I think we ought to go tomorrow. That’s all. But, if anyone here is not a pedagogy teacher or student, you might want to leave while you still can. The group here just before us was the FBI, and their topic was “crimes against children.”

I would like to begin with some thank yous. You’ll want to applaud, but I insist that you to hold it until I reach the end of the list.

First to Louise Goss—my friend, colleague, mentor, who has worked endlessly and beyond the call of all reasonable duty to guide the vision of this conference and be sure we were doing it right.

Marvin Blickenstaff--our president who has served brilliantly and tirelessly to get us here today. I know that many of you are here because of him. Marvin, before we cut your check, I’d like to know one thing—the total count of email messages on your computer since you took this job.

Steve Betts, our executive director who has served selflessly and often thanklessly in following through with the millions of details. If you followed him for an hour yesterday, then and only then, you’d have a sense of what I mean.

The other board members—Barbara English Maris, Sue West Medford, Elvina Trumann Pearce, Nelita True, and Robert Duke who you will encounter, enjoy, and learn from throughout this auspicious event.

To the piano industry--Mike Bates of Yamaha for supporting us from day one, Brian Chung of Kawai, Sallie Covalesskie and Arlo Diebler of Steinway, Ken Ambrose of Baldwin. There is a half million dollars worth of pianos here thanks to these people. We would not be here without them.

To advertisers--in the program and mailings without whose support, we couldn't have made it.

To two who are no longer with us, but I'm sure are smiling down upon us—Richard Chronister and Frances Clark.

And of course to you for being here.

That's it. Thank you. You may applaud.

Most days I feel lucky to be in piano pedagogy. I can't believe that I get paid to go to work. I hope that you feel that way too. Sure, you can find something to complain about and something to wish for, but we've got a great job.

Music is \$50+ billion industry. Studies prove that making music has intellectual, psychological, emotional, and even physiological value. It's good for you. You know the feeling that Isaac Stern expressed--“To be part of something as wonderful as music is a privilege. We are blessed by nature and God to recognize that in sound is a moment of vision that takes the whole of humanity one small step further.”

Even in this soulless, consumerist, market-driven, MTV America, you people would support James DePreist of the Oregon Symphony when he said—“all I ask is that we raise our gaze from the books long enough to listen to the music of our enterprise. Words cannot capture its meaning, nor money measure its value . . . the fragile substance of this business, vanishing particles of sound made coherent by memory and expectation. What a deal!”

A few years ago, 15,047,058 people attended an NFL game, but 30,923,959 people attended an orchestra concert.

Hollywood knows that people are interested in music. In the last five years, we have seen movies about a troubled concert pianist that resulted in more sales of the Rach 3<sup>rd</sup> that any classical record in history, a red violin, the inspirational story of an elementary string teacher in New York City, and another one about the “opus” of some fool band director in Oregon.

My point is that—people want music in their lives. Life is better with music than without it. And we hold the keys. It’s a great job.

This fall something very sad will happen. I will turn 49 years old. I can’t believe that I am staring a half century in the face.

Things I have noticed:

A year or so ago, I started to receive mail from the AARP. At first I wrote it off as a mistake or a weird joke. Then it hit me. It wasn’t a mistake. It wasn’t a joke. They’re prepping me.

You know when you’re a kid, you get discounts on everything. Now it won’t be long

until I get senior discounts. But along with the senior discounts come senior moments. On the road to today, I've had a few of those. I might have one any minute now.

I went through a frightening period just last month when my chiropractor became the single most important person in my life.

My wife, Beth, who is normally a clear-eyed realist, staunchly insists that times are different than they were for our parents. Middle age now begins at 60. Yeah, right.

When I began teaching, I was much younger than my young students' parents. This past semester I realized with a shock that I am generally twice as old as my graduate students. Worse still, I am now older than my college students' parents.

College students can be ruthless without even knowing it. The name Paul McCartney floated up in pedagogy class. One of my students looked around kind of hazily and said, "Paul McCartney . . . wasn't he in . . . Wings?" (We'll come back to Paul in a little bit.)

The reason I am belaboring this point (beside its black humor) is that piano pedagogy is also middle-aged. There were "normal courses in piano" a century ago, but as a field of degree-oriented study--piano pedagogy came into being in the 50s and early 60s. So, our profession is between 40 and 50 years old.

In the heyday of Frances Clark and Louise Bianchi, pedagogy was a brilliant, precocious youth. It grew to adulthood with them and others who are here (or should be here) today—Louise Goss, Fran Larimer, Jim Lyke, Dick Chronister, and more. In middle age, piano pedagogy already knows the pain of losing some of its most cherished individuals—Sinichi Suzuki, Frances Clark, Amanda Vick Lethco, and others.

With middle age, certain rights and privileges have accrued. In middle age, one also slips a little.

The promise that piano pedagogy held in the academy a decade ago remains unfulfilled and, unless we act, I predict that it will slip further. Key positions vacated by retirement or a step into administration have not been filled by a person of comparable stature. Positions have disappeared or been redefined--often to an artist teacher who, despite lip service, is neither interested in nor qualified to teach pedagogy.

I believe that the absence of leadership and advocacy that this conference provided between 1979 and 1994 has led to the slippage.

You all know that between those years, the original NCPP accomplished amazing things for our field. And that in 1995, its board reached a difficult decision to shut down. Into that vacuum flowed the NPPC, unilaterally renamed WPPC a year later. If you want to ask my opinion about that, do it later. We have more important things to talk about.

Something else was afoot. Following the death of FC, a small group met to discuss how to manage her legacy—in broad strokes and in detail. Richard Chronister brought the idea of establishing a non-profit Center for piano pedagogy in her name. The Center's mission is to serve the keyboard music teaching community—independent music teachers, institutional keyboard teachers, students, parents, schools, manufacturers. Richard hoped that the Center could provide the wherewithal for the return of the NCPP.

And so for three board meetings and a year, we explored that possibility in every serious way possible. In March 1999, the board approved a conference for summer 2000. Richard, being who he was, had already planned it in detail. It's theme was “the pianist sings and dances.”

A strategic planning meeting was held in September of 1999. 80 committed people (or people who should be committed) came to Chicago on short notice at their own expense

and a huge amount of feedback was generated. This week is a direct outcome of those meetings. The atmosphere was electric. And the stage was set.

Then something happened for which no one was prepared. When Richard left the planning meeting, we knew he was not well. What we didn't know was that he was terminally ill and that he would be gone in three months.

Of course, our world was devastated. Certain that the conference couldn't proceed in less than a year without Richard, the Center tried to buy time. We met in March of 2000 and weighed the conference and the existence of the Center itself. Every option was on the table. Could either go on without Richard? Again, we studied the data and reports generated by the planning meeting and sought input from everyone we could nab in the field.

In essence they—that is you--would not let it go. The conference had to proceed. And so, armed with the verbal support of many people, we engaged a new President—Marvin Blickenstaff and an Executive Director—Steve Betts—and went back to work.

You can be thankful that none of us was bold enough or crazy enough to try to pull off “the pianist sings and dances.” Without Richard (who could have done it), that seemed like a recipe for disaster.

Instead, based on the Chicago feedback, we tried to get back to basics. Some teachers are effective; others are not. Some teachers have students who study for years; other have students who drop after a few lessons. Some teacher's students always seem to perform well in contests and festivals; others' do not. Some teachers' students make music after lessons end. Others' don't. And so on down the line. What is the difference? Whatever it is should be the core of what piano pedagogy should be all about.

Richard Chronister wrote an article called “The NCPP: Whither and wherefore?” In this article, he issued two charges. 1) to decide what is really essential to the training of both playing and teaching. 2) to decide how, most effectively, to do the essential.

I submit that we are once again that same crossroads again—that, 15 years later, we should revisit those same questions in light of what has changed since then.

The music curriculum in general suffers from a century of adding things without ever removing anything. Now the wind of change may be blowing. CMS has begun to reexamine curriculum and published several articles including one by Bob Weirich called “Deconstructing the Curriculum.” Stewart Gordon delivered a talk on curriculum change at MTNA this year called “The Bold and the Dutiful.” Our students--at least mine--are telling us we need change.

Weirich starts by observing that “change within the academy occurs at the pace of continental drift.” He goes on “tectonic movement is slow, but every now and then, there’s an earthquake, and one is overdue in higher education.”

If this is true in music curriculum in general, it is even more true in pedagogy. If this upheaval is near, it may provide the opportunity of a lifetime to discard needless fragmentation and address basics that have been ignored—to decide what is really essential.

In Weirich’s post-cataclysmic curriculum there are four umbrella areas of study. I’d like to plug our six discussion topics for today into his model.

First are courses and experiences that foster one’s ability to make music—performance studies, ensemble, sight-singing, ear-training, improvisation, composition, etc. We need to re-examine our relationship with the artist teacher of piano. A discussion group is

planned for each of you with artist teachers for today.

You cannot teach what you cannot do. The now standard degree in Piano Performance and Pedagogy are a testament to this belief. Where we're wrong is in the value we unwittingly place on degree of difficulty—rather than quality of experience. No one would dispute that a future professional should be a skillful performer of advanced repertoire. Or that all us need to extend ourselves by coping with challenge. But more important than conquering difficulty is the quality that musical experience adds to life. To play easy pieces with great beauty is a worthwhile thing. And to experience this beauty in a world that is driven, packaged, and marketed may be the most important value that musical experience can add to life for those that do not become professionals.

Thus, we are beginning each part of each day with mini-recitals where “normal” students are playing “age-appropriate” repertoire “beautifully.” (I hope it works).

What I have heard from my own students is that the pedagogy curriculum must allow pedagogy students to become better music makers. It must allow them more time and space to practice music making. And in the process I will expect them to play the didactic repertoire with the attention to detail, the joy, and soul they aspire to bring to their own literature.

Weirich's second umbrella is courses that foster knowledge about music—history, theory, bibliography, etc. I won't dwell on this area other than the ongoing need for it to connect. In that respect we still haven't made it. Someone teaches all about music and then assumes that it will transfer into meaningful practice. The research will tell you that without explicit effort, this transfer does not take place—even at the graduate level.

The third umbrella is courses that foster our ability to teach music—psychology, learning theory, human development. This is where we come in. And where often try to do it all



of this in the pedagogy course. I think we should act our age. Admit that we can't do everything. Let's listen to Paul McCartney's advice and "get by a little help from our friends."

We are killing pedagogy with information and yet failing to turn out effective teachers. You may shoot me for saying this, but as much as we love it, piano pedagogy is not about learning style and temperament theory. It is not about learning to sequence or correlate pieces of music in order of difficulty. It is not about the history of the subject. Or the theory of the subject. It is not learning about entrepreneurship or about technology. It is not something we learn from a book. We don't even learn it from watching others do it.

Are these things important? Yes, of course. But, are they the thing itself? No. Any more than watching other people play the piano, reading about other people play the piano, learning about other people's feelings while playing the piano is the subject of playing the piano. The more we focus on these things, the more we're like a person playing darts who hits all around the target but always misses the bulls-eye.

What is the "thing" itself? What is it that Chronister referred to as "essential?" The part that can be taught is about developing the skills that result in effective teaching.

Effective teaching has very little to do with what the teacher knows or says. It has everything to do with the teacher's ability to create change. It has nothing to do with telling students what to do. It has everything to do with what the teacher has the students do in their presence.

To develop skill in teaching, it must be practiced regularly and often in the presence of experts. How often? How much? In what context? Well, that's what we have to decide because we have to leave room for music making and a few other things.

In short, I believe that the teaching internship must be brought more directly into the

pedagogy classroom.

But, to cover some these other areas, let's get a little help from our friends.

Why not learn fundamentals of educational psychology from an educational psychologist? Are they not the experts in understanding how children learn? Are they not the experts in how families operate? Many aspects are common to all learning. And so sometime, today, each of you will have a chance to participate in a discussion with an educational psychologist.

Music education. Pedagogy, especially piano, has largely been the child of the applied music area. Too often it has been an illegitimate child at that. In an ideal world, piano pedagogy would have one parent in the performance department and the other in the music education department and there would be no question of its legitimacy.

At SMU, applied departments teach piano pedagogy, voice pedagogy, and instrumental music pedagogy. I bet if we look closely, we'll find that there's a lot of duplication. Shouldn't music education offer a basic pedagogy of music course that would become an umbrella for piano pedagogy or any of the others? It could go beyond general educational psychology to include acquisition of psychomotor skill and other things unique to music learning and teaching?

Then in piano pedagogy, we might just have time to deal with things that are uniquely our own—technique, tone production, repertoire, bilateral coordination and reading, keyboard technology--whatever we decide is essential. And most of all to wrestle with what it is to teach effectively. Today, you will have the opportunity to discuss these things with a music education specialist.

You might wonder, why have we included music therapy? Besides the fact that they're

nice people, I think therapeutic applications of music and teaching are much closer than they might seem at first glance. And, in my opinion, music therapists often have the best understanding of how music affects humans. I also believe that music therapists have the best-used empirical research base—in contrast to piano pedagogues and music educators. So today, let's see what we can learn.

The fourth umbrella is courses that provide knowledge about the world we live in. This includes liberal arts, sciences, business, technology.

Unless you live in a state of total denial, you must admit that technology has changed the way music is made and consumed. 10 years ago MIDI was the thing and I was doing a workshop with Louise in dark glasses called “technology doesn't byte!” 5 years ago it was becoming the www. Now we have MP3, Napster, terms like “ripping, burning, Toast and Jam.” How many of you have a any clue what I just said? Your students know. What are we going to do? Knowing that the only constant here is change itself, technology is incorporated into both a teaching demonstration (Sat) and today's discussions on web-based education and we will remain committed to pushing this envelope.

And technology is not the only area where piano pedagogues would benefit by being more savvy about the world we live in. If we are to regain the momentum of a decade ago and move forward again, we've got to stop complaining and find friends among the administrators—especially deans. And so we have discussion groups today with music administrators. We hope that you'll discuss how pedagogy instructors can better understand the concerns of administration at the Dean's level? How can pedagogy instructors effectively advocate their concerns amid the host of interests competing for the Dean's attention and support? Ask away. Today's your chance.

Just for today let's allow ourselves the luxury of dreaming. Imagine that continental drift

has accelerated, that tectonic plates of education have shifted, and the pedagogical cataclysm has occurred. Imagine the world if the walls between piano pedagogy and applied music had fallen. What would we see if the walls between music education and music performance were no longer? If there were no walls between academic music and the real practice of making and teaching music. If there were no walls between the departments of psychology and music. Imagine a world in which the Dean and the piano pedagogy professor had a hotline.

Let this afternoon fling open the doors. Tonight's continuation may help us examine more specifically how this new world could translate into pedagogy courses, curriculum, and degree plans. The work of the task force will carry it on from there. It won't end here. You've got to carry it on at home.

Richard Chronister's hallmark was to get people together, start them talking, ask provocative questions, lob occasional hand grenades . . . and then allow the discussion, the concerns, and the needs of the constituency to define the organization and the actions that ensued. We don't have Richard anymore, but I guarantee that we will pursue this course. Do we have any idea where this may lead? Are you kidding? That wouldn't even be the point. Yet. We may know more in 4 days. Or in two years.

But, I'd like to end with a charge. I tried to make it a 12-step plan, but fell short by a few steps—one of those senior things.

- Support each another (we are a rich community, most still around, delighted at the number of emerita that are with us. Please remain engaged. We need you badly. Middle age is supposed to be a great time of life.
- Get to know your colleagues in other departments in your own institutions. Start simple. One step across the hall. Or across the campus. One guest lecture.

Grow our research base, and then, more important, use it. No society in history has generated more educational research and proceeded to ignore it.

- Get over it about technology. Anybody that can be replaced by technology should be. Benefits and opportunities are unassailable. Let's not miss out.

- Get involved and help us figure out what to do with this organization. We need you. Remember what brought you to music in the first place. While you're here, come and enjoy the recitals—from little children, to brilliant national contest winners, to a seasoned concert artist.

- Go home and do what you always had to do to get to Carnegie Hall. Should I say it?  
“Practice.”

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