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President's Letter

Dear MMTA Members,

Greetings members of the Michigan Music Teachers Association! It is my honor to fill you in on some of the things that have transpired since the fall newsletter—and some really great news!

First of all: Adrienne made a mistake! (You have to understand that her mother thinks she is “perfect”... so don't fill her in on THIS one!?) At any rate, in the last newsletter I stated that the new SAT Handbook would make its appearance in 2018: that was a typo. The Handbook is scheduled to come out after the SAT Auditions this spring. My apologies to the membership and the Handbook Revision Committee.

I was pleased that Central Michigan University could host the East Central Division Competitions January 14-15. A special thanks to I-Chen for coordinating the competitions, and thanks to Lia Jensen-Abbott for her work in and on the competitions as well. We had a good representation of competitors from Michigan:

Junior Piano: Richard Shao (Teacher: Arthur Greene)

Senior Piano: Heather Gu (Teacher: Logan Skelton)

Senior String: Kathy Zhang (Teacher: Stephen Shipp)

Senior Wind: Ian Mahoney (Teacher: Jeff Heisler)

Senior Voice: Nathanael Mitchell (Teacher: Laurie Marshall)

Young Artist Piano: Ji Hyang Gwak (Teacher: Christopher Harding)

Young Artist Brass: Joshua Tobias (Teacher: Kenneth Kroesche)

Young Artist Woodwind: Russell Kerns (Teacher: Timothy McAllister)

Young Artist Chamber: Adamas Saxophone Quartet (Coach: Timothy McAllister)

Congratulations to all of the participants and their teachers for their hard work and preparation for this event!

Congratulations to the following students who were winners and will go on to the National Competitions:

Senior Piano: Heather Gu

Senior Woodwind: Ian Mahoney

Young Artist Chamber: Adamas Saxophone Quartet

And speaking of the National Competitions..... Don't forget that the MTNA National Conference is in Baltimore, Maryland, March 18-22, 2017. I hope that any and all of you can attend this wonderful event! I am super-excited to see the internationally acclaimed performers/entertainers Igudesmann and Joo! If you don't know who they are, you HAVE to google them up! It's a “must see.”

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JUNE 2017

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March 2017

President, cont. from p. 1

Our local associations are gearing up for the spring SAT's that will carry up forward through to the Finals in May. And don't forget that MMTA still supports the Concerto Competition (May 13) as well.

FYI: I receive reports from the National office frequently, the most current being the run-down of states and the number of members who are certified. Michigan has 648 members of which 57 are certified. That puts us at 8.8% and ranks us 46 in the nation. Getting certified is really not difficult, so why not consider taking the leap of faith and getting certified? Just a thought.....

We welcome... Karen Feilla as she steps in her new role for the MMTA/MTNA Competitions as the Junior Coordinator.

We look to forward to spring in our house BIG TIME. It's almost as if we have our noses pressed to the windows in anticipation, and of course, having a son who is a golfer, we are all anxious for the winter to pass into spring. Cameron just competed in his first golf tournament in San Diego in early February. He played fairly well considering the conditions were not the most favorable: rough winds and rain on both days, and the temperature was 50 degrees, if that. They played 36 holes the first day and 18 the next..... He remarked that he could not remember playing in a tournament where the weather was so awful....

May your spring be filled with continued energy and your student's successes!

Warmly,

Adrienne Wiley, President

2017 MMTA State Conference in Holland

The 2017 MMTA State Conference will be held October 8-10, 2017, in Holland, MI at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel.

Headliners are Dr. Timothy Shafer (The Pennsylvania State University), and Dr. Jody Graves (Eastern Washington University).

Stay tuned for more information regarding our 2017 Conference in the next MMT! I look forward to seeing all of you at the 132nd state conference!

Lia Jensen-Abbott, Vice President and Conference Planner

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March 2017

Nagel, cont. from p. 6

Pathetique or Moonlight Sonatas. Most people find what we do on the stage quite remarkable. And even though we might not consider the Clementi C Major Sonata (everyone's favorite) as difficult, for a large segment of the population this would be challenging. Let's not even factor in the Pathetique or Moonlight!

I have the pleasure of teaching some adult students. Their skill levels allow us to work on shorter works by Bach, Mendelssohn, an occasional venture into Kabalevsky or Debussy, music we might classify as early intermediate. For those students, the Two-part Inventions are challenging, and I try to bring the same approach to those students and that repertoire as she brought to my cataract. Difficulty is in the hands and mind of the beholder, not some arbitrary concept apart from the music. I have always asked students to know the meaning of every word on the page, (in the case of Bach that's easy enough, but Debussy makes it a bit more demanding!) I have always discussed something of the history of the music with a student and of course, so far as we can do so usefully, analyzed the score. To me this is analogous to the holistic way my ophthalmologist dealt with me the human being, not cataract surgery number three that January morning. She did her best to teach me about what she could do with consummate skill. And when we teach we try to do the same with our students.

Towards that end, it is really important to consider difficulty from an educational standpoint. Is the student who CAN'T WAIT to play the Pathetique (we all have had that student, have we not?) really ready for its considerable demands? Can they understand the relationship between the opening French Overture (or indeed what the heck a French Overture is) and the rest of the movement? Can they do a clean chromatic scale? Can they manage the tremolo the "Allegro molto e con brio" tempo demand? How about accurate hand crossings? Do they have a sense, even if unformed, why this piece is called "Pathetique" It's not "pathetic" to be sure. And are they willing to practice it to the point of mastery? Maybe they ought to try Op.10/1 first? This is where the analogy with my doctor may sag a little, for I don't know if it is fair to say she was practicing on her previous patients to get ready for me, the concert! But each time we play a piece is actually a preparation for the next time and we become more in control of what the music demands and how we can honor those demands. And we do work up to greater difficulty in our study. Never should a performance be routine, neither on the operating table nor at the piano. And never should difficulty be the primary marker of our accomplishments. A beautiful performance Beethoven Opus 13 is far more meaningful to me than a digitally skillful but emotionally and intellectually sterile Opus 57. But it is true that the Appassionata is a lot harder to play than the Pathetique!

I was stunned to realize my admiration of the cataract surgery and the skill of my doctor and her staff. Unlike a beautiful Pathetique I would prefer not to do it again—once is gratifying enough. But the artistry of her work is so related to the artistry of ours, whether it be the simple beauty of a Clementi Sonata or the intricacies of Beethoven's monuments. It was an eloquent lesson for me, and all I had to do was lie on an operating table!

Musical Musings

DIFFICULTY!!!

By Louis Nagel

I would like to write about the concept of difficulty in this column. Less than a week ago, I had the second surgery on my eyes, for cataracts. I am happy to say the surgeries were (so far) both successful, and they caused me to spend some time thinking about what is hard, and for whom. Musicians, especially young ones are seduced by “difficulty” and will often reject a piece of music because it is not “hard enough to impress in a competition”. There follow some comments about “hard”.

For many years, my eyes have been developing cataract issues, and last fall it was decided “it is time”. We scheduled the first surgery for January 24th, the second, Valentine’s Day, February, 14th. Unlike the musical analogies I intend to make, I did no practicing for these “performances” unless you consider a couple of consultations with the appropriate MD’s/technicians, talking with friends who had experienced the surgeries, and reading articles on Wiki as practice. For the first operation, on my weaker right eye, I was more eager and curious, and I was also anesthetized pretty thoroughly. The second one, having “been there, done that” I was actually a bit nervous and edgy. For this one I was sedated but not out. I had a detached awareness of what was happening, and actually was able to converse with my ophthalmologist and her crew. I should stress that I never felt the slightest discomfort. And after both these amazing procedures, Julie and I went out for large and delicious breakfasts. Sort of the party or reception after the concert. As of this writing I can see distance very well. but for reading I still need correction for visual balance——my left one and right one don’t exactly see “eye-to-eye”. Writing this at the computer is in fact somewhat difficult. In time glasses will equalize my reading and near vision I am assured.

I cannot say with certainty that a cataract operation is easy for the doctor, but as it is not long (20 minutes) nor is the aftermath debilitating in any way—I was up and about the next day totally—I am going to assume that this procedure is analogous to playing a Clementi Sonatina or maybe a simpler Prelude from the WTC. It is certainly not comparable to playing the slow movement of the Hammerklavier Sonata. Maybe a detached retina is more “106ish”; interestingly it takes about the same amount of time! But when I think of the intricacy of removing the lens of an eye and replacing it with an implant that is measured to perfection and placed with precision, I am simply overwhelmed with admiration for my doctor’s knowledge and skill. And the knowledge transcends the procedure. She spoke with me at length about other medications I take——including a drug allergy situation that impacted post operative eyedrops. She asked me about family history. She made certain that she knew about any other problems I might have. In other words, she considered the totality of her patient.

But for some people the intricacies of a Clementi Sonatina or simpler Prelude from the WTC are similarly formidable, to say nothing of the Pathetique or Moonlight Sonatas.

I cannot imagine doing this operation on someone’s eye. My hand and brain skills are far from this kind of accomplishment. I am guessing this was more routine for her, like a Clementi Sonatina might be for me or those of you reading this column. And possibly she would be amazed at one of us playing Clementi or the

Nagel, cont. on p. 5