

Michigan Music Teacher

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From the Desk of Lia Jensen-Abbott, President
February 14, 2019

Greetings Colleagues! I hope this finds you, your families, and your students warm, well, and happily practicing! This is a busy, stressful time for any music teacher, with achievement tests looming, recitals and auditions to prepare, etc. etc. If you are like me, you tried to avoid the recent polar vortex by putting your head down and working, working, working. And I know we all hope our students were, too! ☺

The work that any musician does is not unlike the work that athletes put in for their training—it must be consistent and intentional. I am always telling my students you can't "cram" for music theory exams or performances. This is counterintuitive to most collegiate majors—you often have a few papers a semester, some reading, and some tests, but usually the work comes in fits and spurts. Our world, as we all know, is very different. As with athletics, musicians must always practice to stay in shape and to progress. My son is taking swimming lessons from our college swim team members. Their championship meet is in just over a week. They have been training very hard for many months, and that work, combined with their studying, has now led to them near exhaustion. Fortunately, they are tapering their workouts. But this type of burnout can happen across athletic disciplines as well as music. I am a member of several running and triathlon training groups on Facebook. We are a very supportive (and funny) community. Sometimes people will write in saying they "just can't do their workout today" but they're feeling guilty. And, without hesitation, hundreds of people say, "take your mental break and get back into it tomorrow." I find this very helpful—it's hard in our society to balance everything, and to admit/allow ourselves to rest and recuperate. My

little boy sometimes needs breaks—I will occasionally not take him to his gymnastics practice or his swim lessons when I sense that he's overtired.

So, this leads me to say, as your president, I give you permission to take time to recover and find joy during these stressful months and weeks, and most importantly, impart this knowledge on to your students. Smile ☺

In my times of rest and recuperation these past months due to infections and a biking injury, I found myself wanting to read for simple pleasure. For me, that meant mysteries of all kinds, and what better place to re-visit my love of mysteries than with Agatha Christie's *Murder On the Orient Express*. I have read four more of her novels since then. Teaching is not unlike detective work in many regards—finding and diagnosing the exact problem and communicating that to our students and finding the right solution. As I look forward to the National Conference in Spokane, I am excited to hear Alan Walker's talk and to finally read his new book on Chopin. For those of you who have not read some of his prior works, Walker's three-volume works on the life of Franz Liszt are unparalleled in their scholarship. But, an even better read by Walker, in my opinion, is his book on Hans von Bülow, Liszt's beloved son-in-law and pupil. Bülow's life, after his wife Cosima left him for Richard Wagner, was nothing but an essay in morality and fortitude. He spent the rest of his years playing concerts and conducting to support the children (who were most likely not biologically his own), and bringing the Berlin Philharmonic to its greatness by insisting that the orchestra play all nine Beethoven Symphonies from memory, as he conducted from memory. If I remember right, Bülow in one year traveled to America and played something like 52 DIFFERENT piano recital programs in over 80 concerts from memory. The man was a genius and an inspiration. Walker's writing is engaging and so well documented that it reads like a movie. I expect nothing less with his newest endeavor.

If you are attending the National Conference, please drop me an email. Finally, I wish you all a wonderful teaching semester and hopefully, a beautiful spring!

Warmly,

Lia

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DEADLINE

FOR THE
JUNE 2019

MMT:
May 24

All materials must be
received by this date

CHANGE OF ADDRESS OR E-MAIL

Send to
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State Finals Day

The location for State Finals Day has been confirmed and will be held at Michigan State University School of Music on Saturday, May 4th, 2019.

Michelle Mitchum, SAT Auditions Chair

Remembrances

The Ann Arbor Area Piano Teachers Guild has lost two dear friends and colleagues this past December, Gail Davis Barnes (May 22, 1950 - December 8, 2018) and Natalie Matovinovic (June 14, 1922 - December 6, 2018). Both Gail and Natalie were respected teachers and music leaders in our community. They were inspiring to their students and to their fellow colleagues. Gail championed the music of African-American composers. Her recording, "Magnolias", features the music of Robert Nathaniel Dett and Samuel Coleridge Taylor. She was a very active member of MMTA and was a major contributor to the new SAT handbook. Natalie was born in Croatia and came to the United States in 1956. She was active in many levels of MTNA and MMTA, with a focus on cultivating competitions and excellence in competitive performance. Both of these members shared very strong bonds with their students and their families. Our Guild is currently working on ways to commemorate their contributions to our community. Please look for future announcements in this newsletter and on our website a2pianoteachers.com.

Michigan Music Teacher Association no longer has an active State Certification program, however the MNTA has a National Certification program that remains active. In the past few years we have had a few members pursue this program. Katie Williams of Southfield became Nationally Certified in Violin, as well as Lia Jensen-Abbott our MMTA President certified in Piano along with Sookkyung Cho of Allendale, in Piano. I have included some information from the MTNA website. Congratulations to our members.

The MTNA Professional Certification Program exists to improve the level of professionalism within the field of music teaching. It benefits the members of the profession itself, as well as the public who interacts with the professional. For the music teaching professional, certification provides prestige, recognition and the potential for student recruitment and increased earning power. For the public, certification helps readily identify competent music teachers in their communities.

The program is based upon a set of five standards defining what a competent music teacher should know and be able to do. Upon fulfillment of these standards, applicants are granted the MTNA Professional Certification credential with the designation, Nationally Certified Teacher of Music (NCTM). All music teachers actively engaged in the profession are eligible for MTNA Professional Certification.

I encourage our members to investigate the Certification program to enhance your credentials and fine tune your skill set. If you are interested contact Melissa Curtis the National Certification Chair at mcurtice@mtna.org or Janice Derian the MMTA Certification Chair janice@derian-toth.us.

Janice Derian
MMTA Certification Chair

Music Teachers National Association
East Central Division Competition Results: Michigan

Junior Composition

Winner **Aaron Wang**, Piano Student of Catherine Rollin

Junior Performance Piano

Winner **Roger Wang**, Piano Student of Arthur Greene

Junior Performance String

Alternate **Madeline Cha**, Violin Student of Stephen Shipps

Senior Performance Piano

Alternate **Sophia Guan**, Piano Student of Arthur Greene

Senior Performance Woodwind

Winner **Dylan Taipalus**, Saxophone Student of Matthew Younglove

Young Artist Brass

Representative **Brandon Thibault**, Tuba Student of Kenneth Kroesche

Young Artist Piano

Alternate **Xiaoya Liu**, Piano Student of Christopher Harding

Young Artist Woodwind

Winner **Connor O'Toole**, Saxophone Student of Timothy McAllister

Chamber Ensemble Wind:

Alternate **Kairos Saxophone Quartet** Students of John Nichol
 Kaylee Bernard, Alto Saxophone
 Kyle Pokropowicz, Baritone Saxophone
 Aaron Rajewski, Tenor Saxophone
 Emmet Harris, Soprano Saxophone

Congratulations to each of you! I look forward to seeing and hearing you in Spokane!

Laurie M. Marshall
MTNA Michigan Performance Competition Chair

Mary Ann Aschutz
MTNA Michigan Composition Coordinator

Local Association Meetings and Topics

Within the state of Michigan, MMTA has 17 local associations and listed below are some of the program dates and topics of these associations. To find out more information about these programs, go to the local association's website.

Ann Arbor Area Piano Teachers Guild: a2pianoteachers.com

March 21: "Mozart and the Modern Piano", Arthur Greene, Kerrytown Concert House, 10:00am

April 18: The Beginning of Beethoven's Stylistic Changes, Anthony Bonamici, Kerrytown Concert House, 10:00am

April 22: Teacher Share: Studio Business Topics, Grizzly Peak, 8:00pm

Holland Piano Teachers Forum: hptf.org

Meetings held at First Reformed Church, 630 State St., Holland, MI

March 15, 2019: Book Discussion of "Beethoven's Hair" by Russell Martin, 10:00 am

Livonia Area Piano Teachers Forum: laptf.org

March 13, 2019: The Complete Character Work of Johannes Brahms, Dr. Joel Schoenhals, Eastern Michigan University, Evola Music, 9:30 am

April 3, 2019: Touch, Tone, and the Piano Response, Tim Hoy, Steinway Piano Gallery, 9:30 am

Piano Teachers' Forum of Grand Rapids: ptfgr.org

March 8, 2019: More than "Just a Game!"-Sherry VanOveren

April 12, 2018: Members' Round Table Discussion, "Studio Organization"

Metropolitan Detroit Musicians League: mdmlonline.org

March 25, 2019: Sookyung Cho

April 29, 2019: Arthur Greene

Capital Area Music Teachers Association: capitalareamta.org

Meetings held at Marshall Music, Lansing unless otherwise stated

April 16, 2019: “Creating Summer Income” and Showcase Tour of REACH Facilities, REACH Art Studio, 9:00 am

Mid-Michigan Chapter:

April 16, 2019: Autism and Piano with Dr. Derek Polischuk, The Lecture Room, Midland Center for the Arts.

Nagel, cont. from p. 8

Learning one fast movement or virtuoso piece like the Winter Wind Etude or Mephisto Waltz is wonderful, but it does not in and of itself make a musician out of the competitor. Fast playing must always be measured by musicality—can the listener hear every note and does the performer understand the purpose behind everything the composer asks him/her to do? Does it matter that the final movement of the Moonlight, like the first movement, is a marvelously STRUCTURED Sonata movement which points of greater and lesser intensity, opportunities for astonishing dynamic change, (check out where the sFz is in an otherwise “piano” opening gesture) and a need for serious attention to shaping of phrases? Is the “presto agitato” just a command to play fast? Does the word “AGITATO” tell us something about the nature of that fastness? How does Beethoven mark that pedal in the opening and generally how does one pedal a piece of music that is marked “presto agitato” but that every note is in a very real sense melodic? These and other questions arise when tackling a virtuoso piece, for virtuosity includes far more than just “break the sound barrier” speed.

Guilty of this as I was (and perhaps, as old habits can be hard to break, still am) I have devised a couple of practice strategies for myself I’d like to share. They are simple but I believe effective. One: play a section—not the entire piece, but a significant part, such as the opening fourteen measures, up to the fermata, at half tempo. GIVE SCRUPULOUS ATTENTION TO THE SCORE! NO PEDAL. HEAR EVERY NOTE both as an entity and part of a chain leading to the goal of the fermata, a sort of musical “follow the dots” game. And then ask if it was exciting and informative to hear it that way, and does hearing it that way help to justify the fermata so early in the piece? Are you aware of the left hand—not great melody but pretty important as rhythm and harmony. And then how long does that fermata need to be after such an explosion of bravura? Two, and this is more difficult: practice that section in your mind away from the piano. Don’t move your fingers. Hear it without the tactile stimulation. What do you hear when you do that? (This by the way is a favorite thing for me to do when I am working out on a treadmill! What the heck else am I going to do anyway?) It is demanding mentally, but then all playing, fast, slow, or in between is--MUST BE--demanding mentally if beautiful music is to be made.

I love to hear and to perform virtuosity, providing it is truly VIRTUOSIC—ALL the elements in the totality of a composition have been considered. Our interpretations change as we age and live with the music but the thought process and understanding will deepen if we admit our responsibility for every note and instruction on the score. Fast is but one such instruction, always in collaboration with the many others.

Musical Musings

How Fast is Fast?

By Louis Nagel

Most people own a car whose speedometer can measure up to 120 MPH. I suspect that none who owns such a car has actually driven it at that speed. (Just let me know when you plan to be on what roads if you do drive that way so I can judiciously avoid you.) Similarly on YouTube there is a visual recording of Richter playing the Opus 10/4 Chopin Etude at HALF NOTE equals 108. The next video is of Lisitsa playing the last movement of the Moonlight at about the same rate. And a recording I heard on February 13, the birthday of the pianist Ignaz Friedman, he was playing the Black Key Etude of Chopin. I think since then this historic document seems to have been taken down or disabled in some way but it was truly the fastest playing I have ever heard—it broke the sound barrier shortly before the end I think. And all of this playing is mind-boggling, jaw-dropping, and affective of other parts of the human anatomy.

Richter dazzled us when he came to America in (I believe) 1960 or 1961. He played and recorded the Brahms B-flat Concerto with the Chicago Symphony orchestra, and the octaves/double note section of the Scherzo was just not to be believed. At my next lesson, when I told Mr. Raieff about it he simply said “too fast”. I believed at the time that he probably could not play it at that speed. And a couple of years later when I undertook Islamey, Mr. Raieff invited me to his apartment to listen to the Islamey recording one of the most phenomenal wizards of the century, Simon Barere. This too broke sound barriers, and I, determined to learn this monster, just knew that was the tempo it needed to go. And I played it at that tempo. There was, however, a significant difference, in that Barere got most if not all of the notes, sounded in command and played it beautifully. He “owned” the piece! And his recording remains for me today, a glowing dazzling performance of a piece I love dearly, played often and ONCE got a good performance out of my efforts!

In my teens and twenties, “fast” simply meant playing more dazzlingly and (hopefully) accurately than the person in the next practice room playing the same piece. It was necessary to hone one’s fast technique through etudes and other fabulously difficult pieces. And that was the aesthetic in that stage of artistic development. I merrily joined in, playing the coda of the F Minor Ballade, the peroration of the Barcarolle, the finale of the Moonlight and other such pieces at breakneck speed. But something was missing. I came to realize that such speed was unnecessary and unmusical. And it took me (and I imagine others) years to come to terms with the simple fact that the listener must hear every note the performer plays clearly and the performer—alone—is responsible for this experience. That Richter’s octaves are the fastest has little bearing on how beautifully the performer can play the music. If the performer is not listening to every note and creating that space IN BETWEEN THE NOTES he/she is not searching for the music’s full intent.

Of course competitions play a significant role in this sort of playing. One would not enter a concerto competition with the SLOW movement of the Emperor Concerto (ending on the B natural before it slides down to B-flat and connects to the last movement). And no matter how beautifully a student plays the Brahms Intermezzo in A Major Opus 118/2, this is not the only competition piece a teacher would suggest. Nor is it likely that Mozart’s wonderful Sonata in F Major K.332 (particularly the last movement) would overcome the sheer accomplishment of a fellow competitor playing the Waldstein. Being realistic, a large demanding piece is more competitive. But today, competitions have proliferated to such an extent that their value is somewhat deflated. A student can win the 2019 TEDDY BEAR COMPETITION in Podunk but next year another student will be there to render the 2019 winner a has-been! And all that practice to master the virtuosic passages in the last movement of (name your concerto or sonata) could either be forgotten or no longer of interest.

Nagel, cont. on p. 7