

Michigan Music Teacher

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From the Desk of Lia Jensen-Abbott, President

Greetings Colleagues!

I would like to begin this address with a quote from a USA Today Article from January 21, 2020: Adam Schupak wrote an piece entitled, “At 80, Nicklaus As Relevant As Ever.” Nicklaus refers to Jack Nicklaus, perhaps the greatest golfer of all time, who recently turned 80. (As a personal aside, if you’ve been a lifelong fan of Jack’s as I grew up watching him play, this is kind of hard to believe). Schupak wrote, “How many 22-year-olds come to an 80 year-old for advice? Not many. . . They happen to listen to me,” Nicklaus says. ‘I impart my experience that you have to play within yourself. The whole idea is don’t beat yourself. . . ‘The common denominator for him and Tiger is that they are the best thinkers in the game. Just to pick Jack’s brain about that, and about preparation, and how he got himself around a golf course, that’s the best advice you can get.”

This passage in this article struck me, as I believe it resonates with our lives as music teachers. One of the messages we discuss frequently at division and national board meetings is how to engage the younger generation. Perhaps your local association has felt some of this growing gulf. Yet, as the above quoted example proves, in some activities, young professionals understand the power of relating with older generations and their vast knowledge and experience. It is these intangible relationships created by face-to-face interactions between new and seasoned teachers, which creates meaningful intersections. And this is what we do for a living, right?

We teach one on one, and we want parents and students to value that time that a child (or adult) has together with their teacher.

Beyond that, however, it is also about what new professionals can learn by engaging with the people who have been teaching for many years, and also what the seasoned professional can learn from the young professional. I came to this thought after reading this article back in January, and have been mulling it over in my head for several weeks. Since then, we have lost some giants in our field—Ashkenazy has retired from concertizing, and Peter Serkin has passed away. On a more local level, since I have become president, we have lost several teaching giants in our state. Those holes will never be filled. Time takes away the ability to have lunch with the Jack Nicklaus’s of our profession and to find out how they practiced, taught a particular rhythm, or what repertoire they used to teach a particular technical issue. And for them, it’s a chance to hear from younger people how social media impacts their students’ lives, for instance. In a phrase, interaction with one another creates meaningful experiences—always has, always will.

We are all stressed by not having enough time to do everything we need/want/should do in a day. My son is growing up much faster than I would like. As you and your local associations work through this issue of bridging the gap between experienced and non-experienced professional music teachers, I suggest we take a page from the golfing world, and try to focus on how finding innovative ways to be together enables us all to become better teachers, performers, and innovators in our daily musical interactions, both with students, and with one another. In short, we all have a great deal to give and to learn.

Happy Teaching,
Lia Jensen-Abbott
President, MMTA

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Submit ads to the MMT editor with a check payable to MMTA. Fees are for one issue only. For multiple issue pricing, please contact the editor.

DEADLINE

FOR THE
 JUNE 2020

MMT:
 May 22

All materials must be received by this date

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Send to
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Save the Date!

The next MMTA conference is October 18-20, 2020, at the Kensington Hotel in Ann Arbor.

Check the website next month for details!

MMTA Website

Please note that michiganmusicteachers.org is going through a revision this Spring! If you need to log into the website or having a hard time finding the right website materials, please contact Yelena Wells or email yelenawells@gmail.com.

Music Teachers National Association Composition Competition.

Music Teachers National Association is pleased to announce the final results of the national competition.

Elementary:

Winner: Elizabeth Liu, Student of Su-Shing Chiu, CA, Southwest

Second Place: Calvin Brey, Student of Gyuli Kambarova, KY, Southern

Third Place: Sabina Sandrasagra, Student of David Ibbett, MA, Eastern

Junior:

Winner: Malcolm Xiellie, Student of John Syzygy, CA, Southwest

Second Place: Jonathan Hartanto, Student of Kaori Tanioka, NJ, Eastern

Third Place: Benjamin Who, Student of Ann Witherspoon, TX, South Central

Senior:

Winner: Jason Zhang, Student of Amalia Kazaryan, MI, East Central

Second Place: Spencer Cha, Student of John Syzygy, CA, Southwest

Third Place: Jackson Hunt, Student of Yeeha Chiu, PA, Eastern

Young Artist:

Winner: Clelland Reynolds, Student of April Clayton, UT, Southwest

Second Place: Jacob Zaring, Student of Caroline Ahn, IN, East Central

Third Place: Longfei Sun, Student of Whitman Brown, MA, Eastern

Nagel, cont. from p. 6

larity in our performances we negotiated the same score. It remains to this day, in my mind and soul, special beyond any words I may attribute to it.

Along those same lines, why go to concerts? After all the role of a concert is vastly different from the days when in 1756 Johann Christian Bach and Friedrich Abel “invented” the idea of a concert in London. There was no other way to hear music except to be on site when it was being performed. Today of course I could simply abandon this column for the moment and access any of a few dozen Appassionata performances on my computer. Or, in my case, go play it for myself—(I can still do that though it might be a hair rusty, as I’ve not played it in a couple of years!) Sort of the same question, why go to a live football game? You can see it on TV or wait a little while and it will be replayed on a sports channel! Why get dressed in a suit and tie and pay high prices to go hear Emanuel Ax, Leonidas Kavakos and Yo-Yo Ma play Beethoven Trios at Hill Auditorium as I eagerly plan to do tomorrow night? I know these pieces, have played all the Beethoven trios myself, and have loved learning and studying them. Why do I need to attend? Simple: I love hearing great music played LIVE—for me performance is a spectator sport, and hearing it is as exciting as doing it. The immediacy of a performance is special and of course unique. No matter what these three artists do tomorrow night it is a one of a kind experience for everyone in the hall. It is also wonderful to connect with the beauty or the eccentricity or the humor or the pathos or the unfathomable, all that abound in the music of Beethoven. His works mirror life as he experienced it and often as we also know it. Nothing recorded replaces a live performance.

These are questions I have often been asked. I suspect there are many more out there. Let’s see if any of our readers have some questions to submit to this column!

Editor’s note: If you’d like to submit a question to Dr. Nagel, you can email him at julou@umich.edu.

SAT Updates

As we are in the middle of our busy Student Achievement Testing season, it seems like the perfect time to thank the testing committee. These teachers have put in many hours preparing all the tests that our students are taking this month. Those who wrote sections of theory, sight reading, technique, and aural tests are: Steven Mastrogiacomo, Holly Bolthouse, David Hussar, Janice Derian, Jacki VanderSlik, Lynn Zwinck, Diana Munch, and Amber Redoutey. They also proofed their own and others’ work several times. There are also several teachers who did multiple proofings: Ruth Fry, Alisha Snyder, Silvia Roederer, Sarah Hamilton, and Barb Marek. George Widiger made the aural cds and Gerardo Ascheri did the actual test production. I want to personally thank all of these people who gave so freely of their time and knowledge to help produce such high quality tests! If you know any of these teachers, please thank them.

Looking ahead, we could use 2-5 more test writers and proofers. If you are interested and would like more information about the process, contact me and I’d be glad to go over more details before you decide if this is a way you’d like to serve MMTA.

Submitted by Jacki VanderSlik, (jackivanderslik@att.net) SAT Piano Handbook

Musical Musings

QUESTIONS

By Louis Nagel

The legendary pianist Josef Hofmann wrote many articles on piano playing for the unlikely magazine *LADIES' HOME JOURNAL*. In those articles, the greatest pianist of the twentieth century (according to my teacher Josef Raieff) answers many questions about the art of playing the piano. These articles are collected in a book *PIANO PLAYING WITH PIANO QUESTIONS ANSWERED*. His comments are fascinating. I have often read this book; it sits on the table by my computer now and numerous passages are underlined and asterisked copiously. I recommend it for all teachers and pianists of whatever ability. You will be reading comments of a master.

While I make no claim through comparison to Josef Hofmann, I would like to pose a couple of questions that are frequently asked of me when I perform. One is the inevitable “How do you memorize all that music?” Since I have in recent years placed scores on the music rack, that question has become less frequently asked, but I want to assure all who see the scores there, that the music is memorized and in my head/soul. As one ages, the confidence in that function needs a little boost, so to speak. So in answering that question, I want to emphasize that a public performance should be given memorized, even if appearances suggest the contrary. Memorization begins with the first reading of a score, no matter how slowly and haltingly that reading might be. The function of reading must involve the skill of listening and trying to take in as much information about the music as is possible. By information I mean simple things such as time signature and key. (I did have a student once bring a new assignment in a totally wrong key and only one of us in the room knew it. I assure you that rather quickly two of us shared that information!) And as soon as possible one confronts more complex issues such as form and harmonic complexity, which may not be answered with early readings. **NEVER READ WITH ONLY THE EYES AND FINGERS**. One must involve the ear and the brain. It doesn't matter if the piece is short like the Schumann “Happy Farmer” or long like the Bach E Minor Partita. Understanding the form of a complex work such as the opening movement of that Partita goes a long way into eventually sealing it in the memory. And practicing it **WITH THE SCORE** before playing it through is critical to developing security. Don't try to memorize prematurely. Mistakes creep in, moments of uncertainty abound, and the logic of musical flow and form is compromised. Personally I will write a brief harmonic analysis of a knotty spot or write out the counts in a rhythmically complex section and say those words aloud as I play. And as with all study, learn music appropriate to your ability. The Liszt Sonata is **NOT** a stretch piece. Don't tackle it because of its undeniable beauty and glamor. Work up to it both technically and mentally.

Why listen to music before studying it? The common reason given is it will prevent you from developing your own interpretation. I do not accept that. Music is a language. One learns a language by **LISTENING** to it. At first one speaks it haltingly, especially English, unsure of the correct pronunciation in many of our curious words that don't look in print like they sound (pharmaceuticals, e.g., in the spirit of the Coronavirus scare these days!) One does not develop an interpretation until one has some intellectual understanding of what is to be interpreted. It is one thing to say “Bring out the left hand in the afore mentioned Happy Farmer, but hear the melody clearly without pounding it before turning to interpretive subtleties. Otherwise the Happy Farmer may sound more like the Happy Jackhammer. In my opinion, balancing the right hand accompaniment against the left hand melody is a technical issue first and takes guided listening with a teacher before the interpretive phase begins. Besides, for many pieces we want to play we have first **HEARD ARTISTS** perform them. I can remember clearly my epiphany hearing Rudolf Serkin play the Schubert B-flat Sonata in a recital in my home town of Louisville Kentucky when I was 13. I did not go out and buy a record to imitate him. Rather I got the score and began learning it—probably to the concern of my teacher who must have wondered what to do with a thirteen year old kid who is learning this kind of advanced repertoire. The point is, I **HEARD** Mr. Serkin play this heaven-sent composition, it made an indelible lifelong impression on me and I studied it from the score with a teacher. I did not intentionally imitate Mr. Serkin. I suspect there is some simi-

Nagel, cont. on p. 5