

From the Desk of Béatrice Ellis, President

During the pandemic, the notion of time has become fuzzy for me: it seems that I have much more time on my hands than before and yet, at the end of the day, I find myself frustrated to be far from having achieved what I had planned. On a walk this weekend, it occurred to me that writing this article for our newsletter meant that I had already done almost a quarter of my term as MMTA President. One of my duties is to write for the quarterly newsletter, which boils down to 8 articles in 2 years. With the realization that I had to write my second article, a bit of panic set in: how much did I accomplish since the December Newsletter?

I will start with the part that does not show, which is my continuing training for the job. I am still absorbing as much as I can muster about Robert's Rules, Bylaws and Procedure Manuals! I hope that a better understanding of MMTA's foundational documents will ultimately ensure that MMTA keeps growing, adapting and becoming more present on the overall musical stage of the State of Michigan. In an effort to understand better what MMTA could expect from its national office - MTNA - and vice versa, I had several conversations with MTNA's current President, Martha Hilley. What a thoughtful and warm leader who surely knows how to listen.

For the tip of the iceberg, there are several promising initiatives that I would like to highlight:

- * MMTA has produced three very successful webinars since January. With so many webinars offered on similar topics by national organizations such as MTNA and NCKP, we were not sure if MMTA's tailor-made webinars would garner enough interest. So far, we have had between 50 and 115 registrations per webinar, stemming from seven different chapters. Though not everyone signed in on the day, many have requested access to a recording instead. After attending these webinars, I felt a keener sense of community.

- * I am pleased to announce that Joy Morin, Education Chair, is currently leading a committee whose goal is to propose the inclusion of a professional development webinar series as part of MMTA programs. Emily Suszko and Stephanie Thompson from MDML, and Michele Wells, current President of the PTFGR, have accepted to be on the committee. Joy will welcome your suggestions; you can email her at: joymorinpiano@gmail.com.

- * Dr. Yelena Wells, MMTA Webmaster, is heading a committee whose mission is to optimize media communication. Michael Zutis, Arts Awareness & Advocacy chair, is assisting in managing

Continued on pg. 3

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All materials must be
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 St., Dexter, MI 48130



President's message, continued from pg. 1

MMTA's Facebook page. In homage to Black History month, Michael has been posting about some of his favorite African American musicians. March is Women's History month, and Michael will be featuring the tremendous accomplishments of women in music, as performers, composers, and educators. Alisha Snyder, Newsletter Editor, and Emily Suszko, Communication Coordinator are both serving on this committee as well.

* Lora Kolean, Assistant Professor at Hope College, has accepted the position of MTNA Michigan Young Artists Performance Competition Coordinator. Her bio will reveal how lucky we are to have her on board.

* SAT string tests got a make over this year, thanks to former President, Dr. Gerardo Ascheri.

Speaking of the notion of time and never ending to do lists...

After String Chair, Erin Thomas, informed me she was unfortunately unable to secure technical help for engraving the string tests, I decided on a whim to contact Dr. Ascheri, who has been engraving the SAT Piano tests for many years. I just wanted to get a sense of how many hours he thought the engraving of the string tests would take. He responded generously that, when he was President (2004-2006), he had always wished to do this for the string and voice SAT but never found the time to do it, and that he would really like to help out this time around.

Despite my frustration at rarely achieving what I set out to do in a day, I take heart that not only the engraving of the string tests will surely give a boost to the SAT String program, but also that Dr. Ascheri's wishes from years past were revived by a mere email inquiry. As many of us are preparing students for SATD and other events while trying to overcome the limitations of online teaching, let's remember that what cannot be accomplished now might be accomplished later and possibly with an unexpected nudge from someone else. And that is, in the end, what counts.

A call to all chapter Presidents:

Thank you and your board of directors for helping us identify members of your chapter who would be interested in taking a more active role in the organization. Three positions are vacant:

- MTNA Michigan Junior Performance Competitions Coordinator – contact Laurie Marshall
- SAT Voice Chair – contact Michelle Mitchum
- MTNA Foundation Chair – contact Béatrice Ellis



Semi-finals and Finals Information for Spring 2021

We are fortunate this year that despite not being able to have in-person auditions, we will be having pre-recorded auditions for both semi-finals and finals. We will use the same recording for semifinals and finals as there is not enough time between the two auditions to record again.

Registration for Semi-finals: Registration will be online (MMTA Website) beginning Saturday, March 28th and closing Sunday, April 4th at 11:00 p.m. Teachers must fill out the application for semi-finals, not the student. Teachers will fill out one registration per student. There will be one link for each district of semi-finals (Western, Central, and Eastern).

Payment for Semi-finals: Payment will be on the MMTA website using Paypal. Teachers may make one payment for all students entered. The fee is \$30.00 per registration. There is an increase in registration fees this year. The registration fee covers semi-finals adjudicators, finals adjudicators and the cash awards given to the winners. The fee has not been raised in over 25 years. If you are unable to pay online, you may write a check and send it to our state treasurer Barbara DuRussel.

Recording Deadline: Student Recordings and PDF's of music are due Friday, April 16th at 5:00 p.m. Flipgrid is the platform that will be used for semi-finals and finals and a link will be sent to teachers of semifinalists. Note: a student may use the same recording used for the local testing or make a new one. Teachers will be notified April 24th if their student has been chosen for finals.

Finals: no registration or recordings or fees are required for finals. I will send the recordings and PDF's on to the finals adjudicators and winners will be announced Sunday, May 2nd. Teachers of student winners will be emailed and winners will be posted on the MMTA website along with repertoire sheets for each level.

Comment sheets will be mailed/emailed directly to the teacher, as well as certificates, ribbons and plaques.

Michelle Mitchum, SAT Auditions Chair



SAT TECHNIQUE AND SIGHT-READING WEBINAR

Student Achievement Testing is a program MMTA can be very proud of developing from the ground up. The 2017 Handbook revision has been a success and the tests are used widely throughout the MMTA community. I have taken a special interest in the Technique and Sight-Reading portion of the exam. At my local chapter, LAPTF, I provide yearly training sessions for our judges. Jacki Vander Slik, the SAT Handbook and Testing chair, Sarah Hamilton the SAT coordinator, and I have spent many hours discussing the exam and how to improve the guidelines for judging the Technique and Sight-Reading portions. I may have been a thorn in their side at times! Our goal has always been to fine tune the guidelines and provide consistency and clarity to teachers giving and correcting the tests and teachers preparing their students to take the tests. Jacki and I were invited to host a webinar on judging SAT Technique and Sight reading in January of 2021. We were delighted by the 75 members who actively participated in this event. In our first webinar Jacki and I demonstrated Technique, Sight-Reading, Harmonization, and melody playbacks examples from levels 1-7. The webinar generated excellent questions and potential scenarios that may be difficult to judge. We had some lively discussions. We were able to add some consistency and clarity to both judging and teaching to this portion of the exam. Jacki and I will work on an upper-level webinar covering the same material. If you have some SAT webinar ideas that you would like to see in the future, please reach out to Janice Derian or Jacki VanderSlik with your suggestions. This year is particularly challenging! Good luck with your virtual 2021 SAT exams!

Janice Derian and Jacki VanderSlik

Avoid Burnout Webinar with Michelle Steffes

We're excited to welcome Michelle L Steffes on April 17 at 10am for our next webinar. Michelle is the Founder of IPV Consulting and Grand Rapids Business Breakfast. She is the author of Reframe and Rewire: Greatness Through Daily Routine and will approach the topic of Avoiding Burn out with an understanding of Neuroscience and Physiology. In this webinar, you will learn how to take back control. Michelle will reveal the major causes of burn-out and help you to diagnose where you might fall in the 12 Stages of Burnout. She will also discuss 6 crucial Keys to Avoiding Burnout including insights and applications. You will feel empowered and equipped with specific ways to manage your stress, your time and your tasks more effectively. This webinar is free for MMTA members. Guests are welcome to attend with early bird pricing of \$10 through April 1, 2021.



From the Vice-President:

Save the date! Our 2021 MMTA Conference will be on October 8 and 9. While much is unknown about what kind of gatherings will be possible in the fall, we are hoping to have a “hybrid” conference with some combination of in-person and online presentations. This plan will be refined over the next few months.

Our conference will include two exceptional clinicians: Norman Krieger, Professor of Piano and Co-chair of the Department of Piano at Indiana University Bloomington, and William Chapman Nyaho, Concert Pianist and Teacher and editor of “Piano Music of Africa and the African Diaspora.”

Don't miss this opportunity to learn and be inspired!

Derek Polischuk, MMTA Vice President



Norman Krieger is professor of piano at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. A native of Los Angeles, he is one of the most acclaimed pianists of his generation and is highly regarded as an artist of depth, sensitivity, and virtuosic flair. He previously served as professor of keyboard studies at the University of Southern California's Thornton School of Music since 1997. Zubin Mehta, Marin Alsop, Myung-Whun Chung, Miguel Harth-Bedoya, Jo Ann Falletta, Jeffrey Kahane, Donald Runnicles, Leonard Slatkin, Michael Tilson Thomas, Keith Lockhart, Jaap van Zweden, and Carl St. Clair are just a few of the conductors with whom Krieger has collaborated.

Krieger regularly appears with the major orchestras of North America, among them the New York, Los Angeles, Buffalo, Dayton and Rochester philharmonics, the Minnesota Orchestra, Boston Pops Orchestra, National Symphony, Pacific Symphony, and the symphony orchestras of Austin, Baltimore, California, Chicago, Cincinnati, Columbus, El Paso, Florida, Grand Rapids, Hartford, Honolulu, Indianapolis, Jacksonville, Kansas City, Long Beach, Milwaukee, New Haven, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oregon, Phoenix, Pittsburgh, Richmond, Saint Louis, San Antonio, San Diego, San Luis Obispo, Santa Fe, Santa Rosa, Spokane, Stockton, Syracuse, and Virginia, among others, as well as Mexico's Orquesta Filarmónica de la Ciudad de México and Orquesta Sinfónica de Xalapa.

Abroad, he has been guest soloist with Germany's Philharmonisches Orchester Augsburg, Holland's Orkest van het Oosten, Prague's Czech National Symphony Orchestra, Turkey's Presidential Symphony Orchestra, New Zealand's Auckland Philharmonia, Taiwan's National



Symphony Orchestra, the Shanghai Symphony, and the Hong Kong Philharmonic. In September 2014, he recorded the Brahms Piano Concerto No. 2 with the London Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Philip Ryan Mann.

In recital, Krieger has appeared throughout the United States, Europe, Mexico, and Asia, while chamber music collaborations have included appearances with sopranos Beverly Hoch and Sheri Greenawald, cellists Jian Wang and Zuill Bailey, and the Tokyo and Manhattan string quartets. His debut at New York City's prestigious Carnegie Hall and Mostly Mozart Festival earned him an immediate invitation to Lincoln Center's 2005-06 Great Performers Series.

In 1987, Krieger made headlines by being named the Gold Medal Winner of the first Palm Beach Invitational Piano Competition. Earlier, in 1984, he earned selection to the distinguished roster of Affiliate Artists, where he participated in the Xerox Pianists Program from 1984 to 1986. He is also the recipient of the Paderewski Foundation Award, Bruce Hungerford Memorial Prize, Victor Herbert Memorial Prize, Buffalo Philharmonic Young Artists Competition Prize, and Saint Louis Symphony Prize.

Krieger's first piano teacher was his uncle, Rudy Hadda. Later training began in Los Angeles under the tutelage of Esther Lipton. At age 15, he became a full-scholarship student of Adele Marcus at The Juilliard School, at which he earned both bachelor's and master's degrees. Subsequently, he studied with Alfred Brendel and Maria Curcio in London and earned an Artist Diploma from the New England Conservatory, where he worked with Russell Sherman.

A champion of contemporary music, he features the music of John Adams, Leonard Bernstein, John Corigliano, Daniel Brewbaker, Donald Crockett, Judith St. Croix, Lukas Foss, and Lowell Liebermann among his active repertoire.

Krieger's solo recordings include five albums available on the Artisie 4 label: Norman Krieger: Transformations, comprised of Liszt's two piano concertos and his Totentanz, with the Prague Radio Orchestra; Gershwin in Prague, including "Rhapsody in Blue" and Concerto in F, with the Prague National Symphony Orchestra, and Tomas Svoboda: Piano Concertos with the Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra, both under the baton of Neal Gittleman; Norman Krieger: Piano Recital, with music by Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and Chopin; and American Piano Concertos, featuring works by MacDowell and David Wiley with the Roanoke Symphony Orchestra conducted by Wiley.

Krieger's chamber music collaborations include Raising the Roof, an album of chamber music by Haydn, Bloch, Bruch, and Martinů (Artisie 4); The Prince Albert Chamber Music Festival, including works by Barber, Beethoven, Bizet, Chopin, Schubert, and Tchaikovsky (Artisie 4); Voices Through Time, works of Brahms and Schubert with flutist Emily Skala (Summit); and Summerdays, music of

Barber, Berg, Bernstein, Gershwin, Glazunov, Lehár, and Mozart, from the Musical Masterworks Festival at Old Lyme (Well-Tempered).

In 2013, he performed Gershwin's Piano Concerto with the New West Symphony, Beethoven's Concertos Nos. 4 and 5 with the Dayton Philharmonic and Ravel's Concerto for the Left Hand with the Brevard Music Center Orchestra. He regularly gives master classes around the world.

Krieger is the founding artistic director of The Prince Albert Music Festival in Hawaii. Since 2008, he has served on the summer faculty at the Brevard music festival in North Carolina.

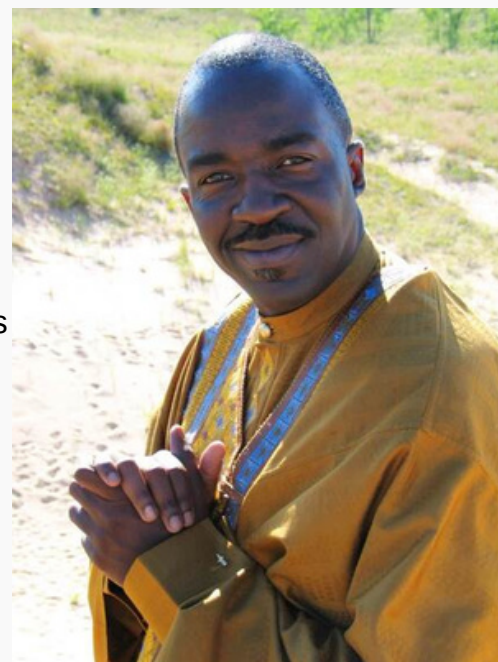
William H. Chapman Nyaho is a Ghanaian American concert pianist specializing in solo piano music by composers from Africa and the African diaspora.

He graduated from the Achimota School in Achimota, where he studied piano with John Barham. He holds B.A. and M.A. degrees in music from St Peter's College, Oxford University, an M.M. from the Eastman School of Music, and a D.M.A. from the University of Texas at Austin. He has also studied at the Conservatoire de Musique de Genève. He has taught at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, Colby College and Willamette University. He currently teaches privately and performs nationally and internationally giving recitals, masterclasses and workshops.

His repertoire includes music by Gamal Abdel-Rahim, Margaret Bonds, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Robert Nathaniel Dett, Halim El-Dabh, Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson, Gyimah Labi, and Joshua Uzoigwe. He has performed throughout the U.S., Canada, and Europe, as well as in China.

He has compiled and edited a five-volume anthology Piano Music of Africa and the African Diaspora published by Oxford University Press.

He lives in Seattle, Washington.



New MTNA Michigan Young Artists Performance Competition Coordinator- Lora Kolean

Lora Clark Kolean, Assistant Professor of Music, has been working at Hope College since 2001, and is currently head of the keyboard area. She teaches applied piano lessons and various classes, including Piano Pedagogy, Collaborative Piano, and Piano Literature. In recent years she taught beginning and intermediate piano classes for the college. Lora studied piano for three years at Accademia Musicale Umbra in Perugia, Italy, with Fabio Bidini. She received her Master of Music degree from Western Michigan University, where she studied with Lori Sims; and her Bachelor of Music degree from Hope College, where she studied with Joan Conway.



Lora has been a finalist or won several local competitions and has worked with numerous well-known artists in master classes and festivals, including performances at Festival Musicale Savinese in Monte San Savino, Italy.

She has also performed at Hope College's Faculty Recitals, Sundays at 2 and Brown Bag series and as a soloist with the college's Symphonette. Within the west Michigan community she has appeared with the Chamber Music Festival of Saugatuck, the First Reformed Church Free @ 3 Series, in the All Saints' Episcopal Church Recital Series in Saugatuck, and with piano trios. Besides teaching and performing, Kolean judges piano competitions in the state of Michigan. She serves on the Executive Board of Holland Piano Forum and is director of Holland Piano Club.

She also helps with the children's education program at her church. She resides in Holland with her husband, and their two children, who both play the piano.

Lora sees working with Music Teachers National Association Michigan Performance Competitions in the Young Artists Coordinator role as an opportunity to collaborate with colleagues across the country, to support musical growth of outstanding young artists, and to serve the music community in general.



Dear Colleagues,

The Metropolitan Detroit Musicians League (MDML) hopes you are all doing well and optimistic about the future! This year has been an unprecedented time for our world. Musicians and Music Educators of all types have been tested at their core. Learning new ways to quickly adapt in a moment of immediate change has challenged all of us mentally, emotionally, physically, in spirituality and financially.

Inspiring those around us and encouraging everyone to step out the box and get creative again is imperative to staying mentally healthy. I'd like to share with you the activities and technological ways the Metropolitan Detroit Musicians League has weathered the past seven months while thriving in what feels like a desert.

MDML has many Members who are piano teachers that have solely taught virtually, we have hosted monthly ZOOM General Meetings, held an incredible ZOOM Masterclass adding YouTube recordings of some performances into the mix, several MDML Members attended the MMTA State Conference via ZOOM, engaged in a creative and fun Virtual Holiday Party for our Members, learned something new from both the MMTA webinars: "Improving Online Visibility" and "Judging SAT Technique, Sight-Reading and Melody Playbacks," are currently conducting our MMTA-SAT exam for performance via YouTube and promoted our YouTube Student Recitals on Social Media. Below are the Student Recital links!
Turn obstacles into new opportunities!

Warmly,

The Metropolitan Detroit Musicians League and Sara Aylesworth, SCTM, NCTM,
MDML President

The Metropolitan Detroit Musicians League

Student Recitals of 2020-2021!

November, 2020

<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLgVFENKEOg2GdvebUfhHUoar2UcfZu2In>

December, 2020

<https://youtu.be/qNeH3-wUBww>

January, 2021

<https://youtu.be/hBIIzi7EJzE>

February

https://youtu.be/M3_tOp9qUKc



An Adventure with B.: An Adult Student's Perspective

I am 84 years old. We own a Steinway piano that was built in 1944 out of American walnut and is 5'7".

It is a beautiful instrument that was bought by my husband's parents when he was a child. The lessons he took lasted a couple of years. (In grade school music class he was told to be a "listener".) My background was modest and I took lessons for six years on an old, black, second hand upright. I would take the kitchen clock to the piano so I could watch the hand go around until my practice time was over. All that remained with me after I went off to college was the ability to read music. When we inherited the piano we swore we would not subject our children to similar fates unless they chose it. Each voluntarily tried but it never took. So, for many years that piano lorded it over our living room, rather accusingly, a magnificent piece of furniture that was never played.

But, I did love music as long as I did not have to be the one to make it. Midway in my career I began to wish I could indeed make music and feeling guilty about that presence in the living room I started to take lessons. That ended very soon when I was asked to take on a bigger and more demanding job.

Fast forward to when I decided to retire. I had grand plans about all the things I would do including taking piano lessons again. I did not know that when you retire you accomplish nothing and it takes you all day to do it. It was 14 years before I got around to acting on that plan. I was interested in learning more about, understanding and appreciating music at a deeper level.

Playing was secondary. I was motivated to finally act after we had built a house for us to "age in place in" and there was that piano in new surroundings, even more glorious than before, but still reproving me.

I found a teacher, had one lesson and COVID hit. For the past year I have been taking weekly lessons online. I love it! I practice 45 minutes to one and a half hours a day. Throughout the day I have the urge to go to the piano and practice more but I can't always do that. I listen to a lot of music and am listening in a totally different way. (Imagine, for me, the delight of being able to listen to a piano piece and not just respond to it but in the process to hear the two different hands playing! Something in your world that is taken for granted but so exciting for me.) I am also exploring music and composers (Mompou, Koechlin) I never knew about. I research things I am not familiar with or don't fully understand on the internet. The piano has become a comforting escape from this bizarre world (politics and pandemic) we are living in now.

Despite my late life assiduity about practicing, I have yet to play a piece, no matter how simple, through without a single mistake. I have trekked in the Himalayas to Everest Base Camp and that was an easy stroll compared this challenge. I have tried the cognitive enhancing strategy of



intermittent learning but I don't know if it really helped. I haven't done a clinical trial yet. It is frustrating but I have come to be accepting of my limitations, i.e. little ability and zero talent. As I really have no wish to play for anyone other than myself I have been able to accommodate to this blow to my ego.

A significant problem is the anxiety I experience prior to and during my lessons. This is a surprise as I do not have an anxiety diathesis. Suddenly I am struggling with a pounding heart and trembling fingers. My seniority, gray hair and wrinkles do not protect me from feeling like a second grader forced to answer the teacher's questions with the whole class looking on. I deal with the anxiety by becoming a somewhat self denigrating smart alec. I have the feeling that this silliness might be problematic for my teacher. On the other hand, I have no problem with the conversations we have, which I manage to stretch out so there is less time for playing. I do enjoy talking with her about music, just not my attempts at making music. Here, I am an adult on equal ground each with different areas of wisdom. I haven't figured this out yet. Figuring things out is usually a part of my nature and is why I wound up in my profession. When I continue to have a problem with a measure and make a mistakes on a note despite the technical strategies I am being taught, I can usually understand why that it is happening. The challenge has been to translate that insight from my head to my fingers.

I don't know if these problems would be any different if I were taking lessons in person. Online lessons have advantages with regard convenience and a barrier is there that can feel protective. However, it does make it harder to tune in (pun not intended) to the subtler dynamics in a relationship. This is something I miss.

I have been told that in the year I have been taking lesson I have improved. I hope that is true. Sometimes I think it is, but mostly not. Nevertheless, I will continue to trek up this mountain. I enjoy it; it keeps me fit as if I were back in the Himalayas; it reduces stress and relaxes me; it keeps this tired, old brain working; and most important it keeps me from taking myself too seriously.

EP



My Adventure With E.: A Teacher's Perspective

Here is how it all started. Sometime in February last year, I received a surprising email:

I took piano lessons as a young teen-ager and then again, briefly, more than twenty years ago. I am now retired and would like to take some lessons again. I can read music but I must be honest and state that I have no talent. I love music and I'm mainly interested in learning more about music and sharpening my ear. If this is a situation you might be interested in, could we talk?

To me, this was irresistible though I don't remember if we talked. We exchanged emails to set up a time for a trial lesson on March 11. I mentioned that my house had some steps and also, if steps were not a deterrent, it would help me to hear E. play a very short piece, or even part of a piece. It turned out that steps were not a problem but E. wrote back:

More daunting is the idea of playing for you, as I haven't touched the piano in many years. I tried to be honest in my note but perhaps left the wrong impression. I can still play the first piece I ever learned when I was ten (Robin in the Cherry Tree in G major!) and probably Hanon's first exercise. All the music books I have are from those ancient times. If all this is not a turn off for you, I could try to work on something before I come.

So the teaching adventure started with *Robin in the Cherry Tree* and, after only one lesson in-person, we continued online with FaceTime at first, then with Zoom. E. was extremely clear about her goals and I knew that I could transmit some knowledge that would open up her musical horizons. My lessons with E. have been a blessing during the pandemic because with her I felt relieved from the kind of pressure I experienced teaching school-age students online. What I needed to communicate to E. did not depend so much on how I communicated (i.e. tone of voice, pacing, camera angles for demonstration, etc....) and I did not worry about achieving certain markers based on a curriculum.

E. always starts our lessons with questions, stemming from interesting articles or books about music she is reading, from music she heard on the radio, or sometimes, more prosaically, about a piece we are learning. Some questions are easy to answer like "why is there an F# here and not a Gb?" But more often than not, they trigger more elaborate discussions: "Can you tell me why music connoisseurs love J. S. Bach, because I don't feel anything when I listen to him unlike when I listen to Gluck? What can you tell me about Scriabin? Or, I just heard a piece by Fanny Mendelssohn, are there other pieces I should know about? Can you explain variations because I can't follow the theme?" While I do my best to answer on the spot, I sometimes follow up with web links to some recordings or interesting websites. She believes that these discussions are part of a stalling tactic to delay playing. But I think they are important. I tended at first to extend the lessons well past the hour, but we both agreed that we should limit the discussions to the first 10 minutes and finish on time. These questions give me a great thread that enables me to select repertoire in line with E's intellectual curiosity.



Early on, I introduced the circle of fifths along with the relative minor keys to explain neighboring keys, modulations and simple forms. This was a revelation to E. who revels in this kind of theoretical knowledge. She tackled all three movements of two Clementi Sonatinas Op. 36 Nos. 1 & 2, Bach Little Prelude in d minor, and a few short Bartok pieces. I noticed that E. looked frequently at her hands, which impeded the flow of the music markedly, especially with the LH. So we took a short break with the joyful *Burlesq* by Leopold Mozart to gain confidence in LH octave jumps combined with independent articulations in the RH. To get more acquainted with keyboard geography while exploring a different harmonic language (LH is legato and chromatic), I suggested *Ivan Sings* by Khachaturian. This became the first - and only piece, I believe- that E. has played for an audience, her grandson Ivan. In my book, this was cause for celebration!

Because we are both interested in celestial phenomena - the Neowise comet this summer or the great conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, which occurred on the winter solstice - I thought it could be fun to sight read a series of delightful pieces called "Piano Planets" written for elementary/early intermediate students by Alison Mathews from Great Britain. The question about variations led to a piano arrangement of the Pachelbel Canon in D.

E. practices every day, sometimes up to two hours, but she is often quite dispirited by not being able to play consistently with flow, especially during our lessons. Besides being nervous, Ms. E shared with me that she suspected that a "benign essential tremor" might be a contributing factor. I suggested we focus on strengthening the connection between finger action and reading. We resurrected the Hanon exercises, at slow tempo, hand separately at first, to encourage a faster response from each finger through repeated patterns. Transposing the exercises reinforces keyboard geography and brings E.'s attention to her left hand, which tends to drop on the fifth finger side.

We are now working on Chopin's A minor Waltz Op. Posthumous. I challenged E. to incorporate memorizing short phrases in her daily practice with the purpose of creating a continuum between seeing, finger response and hearing. Recently, we started experimenting with simple playbacks and decided to continue integrating them in our weekly lesson.

E., who has attended many concerts and heard prestigious performers from all around the world, sets the bar is really high for herself, even from the confines of her living room and with no desire to play for anyone. Nonetheless, E. is thrilled to tell me that she can now hear some harmonic changes, appreciate different textures in the Goldberg Variations, and that she has a better grasp of musical forms. She has also gone through quite a bit of music and we are now foraying into counterpoint with Bach's Invention in C. So, wouldn't you say that E. made progress? In any case, this is an adventure that I very much enjoy, particularly so, during a time when social interaction has been scarce.

BG



Intersections of Music Therapy & Music Education

Emily Smith, MEd, MT-BC, is a vocal instructor and music therapist serving the greater Grand Rapids area. A native of Roanoke Virginia, Emily earned her degree and board certification in music therapy from Appalachian State University in 2014 and her Master's in Education from GVSU in 2019. The bulk of her clinical work is in end-of-life care and she currently co-owns West Michigan Music Therapy, LLC. Emily maintains a private studio in addition to teaching applied voice, introduction to music therapy, and aural comprehension at GRCC. Additionally, Emily enjoys an active performance schedule that includes collaboration in local worship spaces, music for special events, & symphonies.

Working with people, especially in a musical context, can feel like exploring a beautiful, diverse, and sometimes challenging landscape. Both student and teacher are moved through the process of musical creation, with the emphasis on process. In the musical space, we may experience frustration, euphoria, and everything in between – and often these associations span far beyond notes inked onto a page (or, these days, iPad screen). When I reflect critically on the intersections of my two areas of practice, music therapy and music education, I find so many connections of one practice informing the other. I will share my reflections through a person-centered approach, the orientation that informs my work both as a therapist and an educator.

When I use the phrase person-centered, I mean that the student and their goals are at the heart of the experience. This does not necessarily mean student-directed, but I attempt to give students as much autonomy as possible when it comes to their learning. There lies a “sweet spot” of structure and improvisation with each student at each lesson, and I find that my training in music therapy aids in assessing the correct balance. A student-centered view includes looking at the student holistically, taking family structure, values, strengths and needs, preferences, and personality into account. This builds rapport and a culture of caring in the lesson that goes beyond whether the student is completing assignments or practice goals.

Carl Rogers, the psychologist who championed a person-centered view of therapy, coined the concept “unconditional positive regard” for each client he saw, and that every person could grow under the right conditions. Holding my students in a place of unconditional positive regard does not mean that they are coddled in the lesson – rather, I come to each lesson as a neutral, caring adult that seeks to help students grow as a person in the context of our music lessons. Our students, at any age, are vulnerable. They are coming to us, a perceived “expert,” with a variety of goals, and are trusting us to guide them through the process. As their teacher, I feel honored to introduce them to new skills that help them feel accomplished, honor their identity, and even develop their brain.

Speaking of goals, we music therapists are extremely goal-oriented. In my work as a music therapist, I use intense observation to help determine and set goals for each person with whom I work. Areas including cognition, communication, socialization, motor skills, emotional regulation,



sometimes spirituality are commonly explored in music therapy. Music education, particularly the format of a private music lesson, marries beautifully with achieving and improving long-term goals in all of the aforementioned domains. While I might not openly share with my six-year-old piano student that music is helping her language development and autonomy, I can design the lesson format to encourage singing and choice-making. Adult students often come to private study with non-musical goals in mind; they want to improve their confidence, keep their “brain sharp,” or increase their social life through concerts, 1:1 conversation, and group performances. I encourage my adult students to set their own goals and to take an active role in their learning, with my job as being more of guide and resource than director. A bi-yearly recital, which I call a “community music share,” is a celebration of each student and what they share with the group of friends and family.

The music lesson is a microcosm. In it, we talk to ourselves, sometimes nicely, but often harshly. We experience immediate feedback from our efforts in the form of sound. I encourage my students to improvise often, and reserve time during lessons for free creation on the piano, a common music therapy intervention. Using phrases like “there are no wrong notes!” and inviting a sense of curiosity rather than judgment has a big impact on students at any skill level. In the therapeutic space, improvising on the piano can increase trust, bring forth emotion, encourage playfulness and reciprocity, and evoke images and stories among other benefits. I’ll often ask students what they were imagining or thinking about when improvising, which helps achieve two main goals: developing descriptive language, especially with younger children, and encouraging metacognition, or the process of thinking about your own thoughts. If we can learn to be kinder to ourselves and more curious in the musical space, it’s likely those neural connections can be strengthened outside of the lesson as well.

I have been teaching fully online since the onset of the pandemic in March 2020. Through this time, I have noticed subtle but noteworthy shifts in the way that I am present to my students as therapist and teacher. As many of you have likely experienced, the fact that we were able to continue regular lessons online was a challenging blessing. Despite the virtual hiccups, though, a sense of normalcy and ritual has been maintained, an aspect of online teaching about which many parents have expressed gratitude. Regular interaction with an adult that holds them in unconditional positive regard is beneficial for students’ social lives and sense of self. Piano progress as a measurable goal has been motivating for many of my youngsters, and my older students are turning to music as a coping skill to help ease the pain of isolation and monotony.

I’ll end this narrative with a recent vignette of 9-year-old student Kaden, who has been in my private piano studio for two years. The next song in his book was Home on the Range, an unfamiliar piece for Kaden. I demonstrated the song and encouraged Kaden to sing along with me, which he did. His dad entered the room after several moments and put his hands on

Kaden's shoulders, singing along with the two of us. It was beautiful. In that moment, I felt both the therapeutic and educational spaces working seamlessly; we just were three humans, connecting through music.



Emily with student Kirra, 2013 and 2019.

This newsletter contained 3 stories of lessons, and how they are shaped by our surroundings and worldview. If you would like to contribute a personal story about teaching or learning, please contact the editor.

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