

Mind over Music:

An Analytical Approach to Teaching the Beginner/Intermediate Piano Student

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Beginner/intermediate classical private piano lessons are one of the most popular endeavors a child may begin and then terminate during their formative education. This document is a detailed study on how to eliminate many of the reasons children quit their lessons. It is vital to rethink and reapply several methods to the musical education process so children will continue their piano lessons long enough to play music into their adulthood.

This document is divided into seven chapters. Chapter One, "Recognizing All the Obstacles as Parents and Teachers," lists the stages a child transitions as he progresses during his classical piano education. Chapter Two, "The Piano Teacher and the Piano," discusses what qualities parents should look for in a teacher and in an instrument before beginning piano lessons. Chapter Three, "Reading and Counting Music," provides recommendations on how to learn these two foundational skills to progress successfully as a classical piano student. Chapter Four, "Teaching the Four Mind Styles," introduces

an academic rubric to musical education. Chapter Five, "Motivation," provides an academic rubric to intrinsically motivate the beginner/intermediate piano student. Chapter Six, "Performing," equates the act of performing on the piano to a child's academic journey with an attempt to reduce, if not eliminate, the stress of playing in front of an audience. Chapter Seven, "Performing From Memory," discusses the different ways a child's memory works with hopes of alleviating the stress of performing from memory.

The overall objective of this document is to introduce teaching methodologies that will ensure that young classical piano students keep happily playing throughout their lives.

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Dr. Pierre Dikran Maldjian, my parents, Mr. Samuel Mitchell Melkon, Jr. and Dr. Agnes Samuel Melkon, and my three children, Samantha Marie Maldjian, Bedros Vartavar Maldjian and Mihran Melkon Maldjian.

Since this year, 2015, is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian Genocide of 1915, this dissertation is in memory of the one and one-half million innocent Armenians who perished at the hands of the Turks.

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## INTRODUCTION

One can go almost anywhere in the world and find someone who wished that he had taken piano lessons. This might be due to the piano universally being one of the most popular and well-loved instruments. In addition, one can go almost anywhere in the world and find a piano teacher with whom to take lessons as long as they have some kind of keyboard on which to practice. Next, they usually begin their lessons and practice. The age old joke answering the question, “How do you get to Carnegie Hall?” with the answer, “Practice, practice, practice,” is a beloved saying among many teachers. Therefore, it seems easy to learn the piano: find a teacher, get a keyboard or piano, and practice as much as possible. With that being said, the task of taking piano lessons and practicing should seem to be enough for someone to play the piano well, yet it is not that simple. The key to successful piano playing involves much more than lessons and practicing. This is the topic of this dissertation.

There are too many adults in this world who openly, yet sadly, state that they used to take piano lessons as a child but quit well before they were good enough to retain what they had learned. Now, they cannot play a single note and have forgotten all they were taught during their formative childhood lessons. This is because they did not sustain their music lessons long enough to develop muscle memory of the refined motor skill necessary to play the piano. Although this dissertation will not address the full scope of developmental research necessary to explain how this muscle memory occurs, it will

briefly explain it in a few sentences here. The idea is that music lessons need to continue during childhood for an extended period of time in order for an adult to retain what they have learned. Fine motor skills develop over time. According to Harvard graduate, pediatrician and one of America's top learning experts, Dr. Mel Levine, "most fine motor activities are not pursued at breakneck speed" (Levine 178). Fine motor skills rely on a "heavy dose of memory as well as eye-hand coordination" (Levine 178). This heavy dose of memory needs to constantly be repeated according to author, editor Daniel Coyle in his book, *The Talent Code*. He states that the muscle memory required to retain information that you learned as a child to play the piano well into adulthood comes from "a neural insulator called myelin, which some neurologists now consider to be the holy grail of acquiring skill" (Coyle 5). "Myelin is important...everyone can grow it, most swiftly during childhood...it's growth enables all manner of skills and to grow it takes deep practice, ignition and master coaching" (Coyle 6-7).

As adults, many former music students have realized how precious the gift of music is. Now, they wish that either their parents forced them to continue or that they themselves had maintained the desire to continue during their formative childhood years. The formative childhood years involve the ages up to and including a student's senior year in high school.

The how and why to perpetuate this desire to continue is the primary reason for this dissertation. There is a great need for a desire within the student to continue piano lessons for a long period of time. This is because many parents feel that it is acceptable

for their children to quit piano once their desire to take lessons and practice has left them.

According to pianist Helena Cromwell, “Conversely, many parents decide they have more pressing issues to negotiate with their child than music aspirations, so they too simply cut their losses and stop throwing money away on piano lessons” (Cromwell 2). If the child loses the “desire” to take lessons and to practice, then the parent becomes responsible for whether or not the child continues piano lessons and practicing. Most parents see piano lessons as merely “extra-curricular” or simply an “after school” activity. What they fail to realize is that piano lessons should be considered a major academic requirement such as math or reading. It should be a universal and integral part of every child’s formative education. Every student should learn to play the piano since this instrument has been the foundation for all musical education since the late 1700s.

Knowledge of the piano opens a child’s ear melodically as well as harmonically because it requires reading knowledge of the treble and bass clef. Piano instruction provides a solid start for anyone wanting to continue their musical studies on any other instrument and, as a result, the student progresses faster and more efficiently. Piano instruction is also an exercise of manual dexterity training a child to use both hands simultaneously as each is going in a different direction. If the desire to play well and advance is encouraged and cultivated, many more adults might be happily playing the piano well into their senior citizen years. But, because most children who learn the piano seem to get frustrated with practicing once they pass the basic beginner stage of learning, parents take their children’s supposed lack of interest or poor work ethic as a cue to quit.

There is the need for a continued interest and “desire,” so children won’t insist on quitting and parents will not condone letting them do so.

Parental participation in a child’s musical life is vital. Young children, if left on their own, will not practice correctly and/or for an appropriate length of time; it is therefore up to conscientious parents to make sure that their children continue to practice consistently. The parents are always to be considered equal partners with the teacher and should work side by side to attain the maximum learning benefit of the child. Parent involvement is very important throughout every stage. It is essential to take a moment to define who the “parent” figure could be. Most of the time, the parents involved in the child’s musical education are the mother and father of the child. In less common cases, they could be one or both of the grandparent/s, an uncle or aunt or even an older sibling. For the sake of this dissertation, the musical mentor/s living in the home of the piano student, will be referred to as the “parent/s.”

The parents and other family members are part of the trio of primary education, which is made up of the student, the teacher(s) and the parents/family. In Quanyu Huang’s book, *The Hybrid Tiger: Secrets of the Extraordinary Success of Asian-American Kids*, he states:

[A] child’s education is quaternary. This means that it is comprised of four different parts: (1) family education, (2) school education, (3) social education, and (4) self-education. I call this the “tripod theory”—three legs and one head, similar to the structure of a camera tripod...the three “legs”

are family education, school education, and social education. Together, they support self-education. When people talk about a child's education, they generally think solely of school education. But that's just one type of education, and how a child accepts and incorporates his or her schooling is also determined by the other "legs" of the tripod: family education and social education...holding everything together is self-education. Whether any form or type of education is effective (regardless of whether it is from one's family, elders, peers, school, or society in general), the outcome ultimately hinges on how the individual will react—how any particular person chooses to accept or reject certain influences. This is self-education. (Huang 36-37)

If the parent does not view piano lessons as a vital and necessary part of their child's education then, when the child wants to quit, the parents will give in. This is the primary reason why fostering a continuous desire in the student to practice the piano becomes necessary to begin with so these common obstacles may not be present for the parents to have to deal with at a later time. All that should be necessary is the moral and emotional support that is appropriate for any intense, disciplined, long-term endeavor for the child.

Piano lessons can be one of the most challenging of all tasks for both the teacher and the student. Half of this challenge is that the teacher must administer the information in an understandable way, a way that "clicks" with the student. The other half is that,

regardless of the student's level, both teacher and student need to sustain interest with two motivational ingredients: enthusiasm and persistence. These two components--enthusiasm and persistence--are what make a successful music student. Sometimes the two ingredients of enthusiasm and persistence are broken up into three categories:

discipline, desire and dedication. Enthusiasm comes from the desire to play the piano, while dedication and discipline are required to maintain persistence. Talent alone is not enough for any intense discipline. The reason for this is due to the fact that even if a student can play a melody by ear, they still need to work hard and practice in order to understand the harmonic chordal aspect of piano playing to play hands together.

Coordination may come as a natural talent for some students but that student still needs to practice enough to coordinate their hands to play together in order to make the correct organized sound. Reading music, as we shall see in chapter three, needs to be taught just like reading a language. Some students may have the natural talent of having a strong learning curve and may learn how to read music faster but here again, it still takes constant hard work and practice to do so.

Without enthusiasm and persistence in music, growth cannot be accomplished. According to Barry Farber in his column, *Diamond Minds*, "Hard work beats talent when talent doesn't work hard" (Farber, *Diamond Minds* 1). Farber's monthly column is a culmination of several of his eleven successful books. This writer agrees with Farber, in music there really is no such thing as talent, just enthusiasm, persistence and hard work. If a child has some natural talents and gifts for music then they will need to still work hard

to be good. This is a phrase used by sports professionals as well. The famous 1980 U.S. Hockey Coach stated when training his top players, “hard work beats talent when talent fails to work hard” (Cromwell 1). Any piano student who exhibits these traits is talented.

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) was known for great enthusiasm in composing symphonies and, as a result, wrote 104 for the king and court of the Palace of Esterhazy in Austria. Out of the many classical composers that children learn about in school, he is one that had what every great composer and musician wants: steady work with a good paycheck. He established himself as the permanent court composer for his wealthy employer and worked hard writing some of his greatest compositions while employed there for several decades. He always wanted to inspire young people to aspire to his success. Haydn was noted for stating, “Young people can learn from my example that something can come from nothing. What I have become is the result of my hard efforts” (Lipman and Kupchynsky 47).

Each and every piano student who has studied music in this writer’s studio has come to their first lesson with bountiful energy, focus and completely full of hope and excitement. Many other teachers attest to this emotion for their beginner students. Sabrina Ann Berger, a New York City metropolitan consummate classical violinist and electric violinist who graduated from the Juilliard School of Music and Yale School of Music has stated during a masterclass, “All of my students begin lessons with me wanting to become virtuosos. It is up to me to plant the magic of insane mindful practicing and dedication to become a great performer and musician. I must keep the flame of

excitement from their first lesson alive and burning bright until their one thousandth lesson. I do this by giving them as many tools to teach themselves as possible so that they can pick up any piece and learn it” (Ann Berger 10).

Some of this writer’s piano students already have a repertoire in mind that they very much want to learn to play while others just want to create some beautiful coherent musical sounds that go beyond simply playing *Chopsticks* with two fingers or the three-note melody of *Hot Cross Buns*. Each student needs to be taught in a manner that speaks to them. The way in which they process information must be recognized. Then each student will eventually need the *seed of persistence*<sup>1</sup> planted in the middle of their *ball of enthusiasm*<sup>2</sup> in order to keep that particular ball rolling for the rest of their lives. These are terms that have been coined by this writer to describe what it takes to work hard in order to be a good pianist.

A good example of a piano student with the *seed of persistence* already in place would be one who even after playing several wrong notes and having memory slips while performing still proceeds to finish the piece. Then, when that student gets up to face her audience, she will still smile and take a bow before exiting the stage. This student may go home and cry or feel some kind of sadness, anger, frustration, etc., but then will return for

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1 The seed of persistence is a term coined by this writer to mean that a student has been programmed in their minds to never give up even if they fail to perform well. The metaphor of a “seed” is effective because when placed and cultivated correctly, the child’s persistence to practice and perform will never die but will continue to grow and flourish like a plant.

2 The *ball of enthusiasm* is also a term coined by this writer to mean that a student never stops wanting to practice and perform. The ball of enthusiasm takes desire to the next level. The student really loves to practice because he sees what results of practicing can bring. The metaphor of a “ball” is effective because even if a ball comes up against a wall, it can keep rolling sideways until it finds another direction in which to roll again.



more lessons. She will prepare for the next concert, correcting as many performance mistakes as possible to avoid the same problems that occurred during a previous performance. As Farber writes, “Falling isn’t failing as long as you succeed in getting back up again” (Farber, *Diamond Minds 2*). True desire to play the piano, will keep a student’s *seed of persistence* going.

A good example of a piano student with the *ball of enthusiasm* as part of her personality would be one who, on her own, goes ahead and learns a piece of music that the teacher declares too difficult for the present time. The student practices the piece by herself while waiting for the teacher to give permission to begin to prepare for it for a concert. The student keeps rolling along happily learning the music the teacher has assigned in place of her highly coveted piece, knowing full well that there is probably much to learn and understand in the music of the present that serves as a stepping stone to the music the student may want to play in the future.

Students who have both the *seed of persistence* and the *ball of enthusiasm* show signs of being successful students. Both components when combined almost always create a great musician. This does not mean they need to take piano lessons into their adulthood. They need only to keep their persistence of wanting to play regardless of what life eventually brings them. A good teacher not only teaches the subject matter, but also trains a student to teach themselves. If the teacher is not present, a student can sit at the piano and play a piece or practice it as though a teacher is guiding them through their practice.

As already stated, most students are enthusiastic and extremely motivated at the beginning. Then, over time, that motivation slowly wanes and the reality of hard work sets in. This is where persistence begins: the student discovers that Andre Watts and Billy Joel did not just play like virtuoso, consummate performers in one day. They had to have structured their schedules to fit in time for consistent practicing. It can be said that a discipline, such as music, only becomes fun when one becomes good at it. However, in order to be good at it, one needs to work very hard for a long time. As meditation artist and musician Jack Kornfield states:

If you want to learn how to play the piano, it takes more than just a few minutes a day, once in a while, here and there. If you really want to learn any important skill whether it is playing the piano or meditation—it grows with perseverance, patience, and systematic training. (Kornfield 1)

If classical piano lessons were equated to major academic subjects in school like math and reading, parents would grow to expect their children to learn the piano as a foundational academic requirement. It would become a major academic subject which requires the student to practice every day. Similar to math and reading, the student would have daily homework to complete at home and then go to school the next day to demonstrate what skills were worked on the night before. This writer would enjoy seeing a student study piano in school as a major subject 180 days of the school year. Instead, general music is taught as an elective or special, usually meeting only once a week. After teaching at many schools, it has become evident that these music classes in the school

system have become an excuse for the average student to have fun and slack off. Try that in math class and the student would immediately find themselves in the principal's office with a week's worth of lunch detentions. This digression from the discussion at hand could easily be another topic for a second dissertation but certainly has relevance for children maintaining piano lessons into adulthood as this dissertation is trying to achieve.

Connecting successful academic methodologies to a classical music education raises the bar for what our American society should expect from our music teachers and our children who study music. It is putting music lessons, particularly piano lessons as the foundation for all music education, on equal footing as the academic subjects in school such as science, English and math. In addition, if teachers, students and parents are going to begin to consider piano lessons for their children as equally as important as the major academic subjects in school, it stands to reason that the academic methodologies presented by leading educators needs to be applied and successfully implemented to a classical music education.

Persistence is one of the most admired traits of any successful person in our society. It makes sense since it is the one trait necessary to perfect any trade, art or career. Farber agrees stating, "the greatest and most powerful trait exhibited in most successful people is persistence. Rejection or failure never stops them, yet if it does, it does so for only a short period of time" (Farber, *Diamond Under Pressure* 10). Some children have persistence and this can be cultivated correctly with proper guidance from both their teachers and parents. An educator may help keep the student's persistent ball of

enthusiasm rolling by making every lesson, word and action more efficient and effective, taking into consideration the individual learning style of each student.

There is not just one right way to teach piano. The true gift to teach goes beyond the subject matter itself. The gift is the way in which the material is presented to the individual student. More often than not though, music teachers like to separate their students into two categories: the “talented ones” and the “untalented ones.” The sad part about this is that the teachers are completely dismissing their teaching style from the equation. They are half of the reason for why the talented group is good and why their untalented students do not become enthusiastic over learning to play the piano; the other half is definitely up to the student. The fact is, the talented ones practiced, and practiced correctly, while the untalented ones didn’t practice at all, or if they did, their practice was not done correctly. Any student has the possibility of becoming talented. The teacher is primarily responsible for teaching the student how to practice and adequately explaining why practicing works. It is simply not enough anymore to just tell a student to practice. It becomes vital for the teacher to take as much time as necessary to teach that student *how* to do so. If the student, after comprehending the method of practicing, does not do the work, then that is beyond the teacher’s control. Only then is the teacher not at fault for any lack of progress from the student. It is up to the teacher to find new ways to motivate the student. A music teacher’s purpose is to maintain a student’s love of and interest in music, in addition to teaching the basics of the instrument. After a while, if the student shows no self-motivation to do the work, then it is time for that student to decide whether

to go forward or to quit. This dissertation will be addressing the ways in which to keep the talented students motivated and also ways to get more of the untalented ones who are practicing to blend into the former group.

It is important to note that there are children who, for various reasons, will not practice no matter what teaching or motivational method is given them. This group will not be addressed in this paper. It requires a completely separate study which has little to do with pedagogical skills in the field of music presented here. This dissertation targets the already motivated piano student and those students who want to progress, but quit because the struggle to improve becomes too overwhelming for them.

A significant way to keep students motivated is to help them work and practice toward a goal. A highly successful goal which, if done well, almost always keeps students motivated, is performance. Chapter six of this dissertation will cover proper and successful performance practice techniques. Once achieved, it becomes a matter of keeping the student working hard for the next performance while they advance their technique and musicianship skills. This dissertation is a study of how and why proper teaching methods can motivate any piano student to play and perform successfully for the rest of their lives. These teaching methods will be introduced and explained in each chapter of this dissertation.

It is vital to rethink and reapply the musical education process because many people around the world want music in their lives and feel the void of not playing an instrument in their adult life. The adults that actually get to fill that void later in life are

few in number. In addition, learning music is quite similar to learning a foreign language. Children are at their peak learning curve during their formative childhood years. These are the years in which to take advantage of and stay motivated to continue lessons and practice.

This dissertation divides an analytical approach to teaching the beginner/intermediate piano student into three concrete steps: teaching, motivating and performing. The first two steps will use academic methods of analytical learning theories and strategies that will be applied to the art of music education. The third step, performing, is mostly original material from the writer of this dissertation. This study will only address the beginner/intermediate piano student because it is always the beginner/intermediate transitioning to an intermediate/advanced level who chooses to quit lessons and stops playing music altogether.

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters. Chapter One, “Recognizing All the Obstacles as Parents and Teachers,” is a brief introduction for parents on what to expect from their child while embarking on the long journey of intense classical piano during all of their formative educational years. Chapter Two, “The Piano Teacher and the Piano,” strongly advises parents on wisely choosing the correct teacher and instrument before lessons even begin. Chapter Three, “Reading and Counting Music,” is merely about the different ways of learning how to read and translate printed music. Chapter Four, “Teaching the Four Mind Styles,” applies Dr. Anthony Gregorc’s academic approaches to teaching children music using his methodology. He is one of the leading

scientists in Mind Styles. His research, experiences with his own children and as a principle of a school has culminated in his writing of the way people learn in school. The majority of this chapter breaks down the basic methodology of teaching piano using his approach. Chapter Five, "Motivation," uses the academic motivational methodology of Dr. Richard Lavoie and applies it to musical education. He is a professor and educator with three degree's on applying motivational techniques to a child's academic program of learning. Chapter Six, "Performing," and Chapter Seven, "Performing from Memory," is the culmination of all of the previous chapters and sums up the final goal of successfully teaching a student classical piano. The Conclusion explains the long-term benefits of this type of pedagogical technique for learning the piano. It sums up how and why this new perspective of teaching can ultimately result in many more classically trained musicians for the future.

## CHAPTER 1

### RECOGNIZING OBSTACLES AS PARENTS AND TEACHERS

#### A Brief Summary of Theresa Chen's Findings

Before looking at proper teaching to maintain persistence and enthusiasm, it is necessary to be aware of ways in which the average piano student reacts to their piano lessons. As stated in the introduction, parents need to be involved in their child's academic/musical education, so from day one, it is essential for parents to know what they are getting into and generally what to expect in order to successfully proceed. For the most part, Theresa Chen's article, "The Six Stages of Piano Students: Why and When Piano Students Quit Lessons," is fairly accurate as she breaks down the most common issues of when and why students want to quit lessons. As a private lesson and music school teacher for over twenty-five years, it is refreshing for this writer to read how Chen has successfully summed up the most obvious age-appropriate common problems that both teachers and parents come across during long-term serious piano studies for the student.

Theresa Chen is a private piano teacher, owner and director of a successful music school, Opus Music, and pedagogical music educator in California who has focused her teaching on breaking down the realistic struggles and obstacles that the average piano student experiences during their formative piano education. She has over ten years of teaching experience after completing her Master's degree in Piano Pedagogy. Her



methodology has the purpose of attempting to explain to parents that their child's challenge's and struggles when learning classical piano are normal and to be expected. It is important for parents to know this kind of information so they will not allow their child to quit piano lessons so easily. She, "saw a pattern of the stages that piano students go through and began thinking and researching about the issue of piano student drop out rates, why and when" (Chen 1-2). Sabrina Ann Berger's findings with her violin students, Donna Vorhes studies with her piano students and other teachers experiences are similar to some of Chen's findings.

Each entry below begins with Chen's stage identification followed by some description. The latter half of each entry will briefly touch on how her findings may be applied to the analytical academic and motivational approach which this paper takes toward overcoming the age-appropriate stage dilemma. As such, the chapter is a general exploration of and guide on how to begin to proceed with and react to your child/student through all the stages of piano lessons.

#### Stage 1 (ages 4-6): "Listen to me play everybody!"

In this pre-piano stage, children love to make sounds on the piano just for the sake of being able to make sounds as noise. The concept of music is fascinating and they enjoy being able to be in control and produce sounds out of an instrument with their own hands. (Chen 2)

The average piano teacher and parent might view this stage as the unpleasant, loud cacophony producing stage. But, stage 1 is actually the best time to channel as much

focus as possible on creating more enthusiasm for the student to make even more sound. When a young toddler begins to babble in an effort to put the sounds of the language being spoken to her in coherent sentences and words, it is seen as cute and always encouraged by enthusiastic parents and educators. They know that the child is well on her way to eventually and quickly speaking real words and sentences in order to communicate. There should be no difference when that same child attempts to make sounds out of the piano for the sheer pleasure of just making noise. This may be called “musical babble” (an original term of this writer). This educator emphasizes to parents that this noise should be tolerated for the child to maintain their enthusiasm to continue piano. A child should musically babble more than she actually practices real music or a structured lesson plan to feel at ease and happy about her musical progress. A parent can allow a child to first begin “babbling” on the piano for a while and then after some time should sit next to the child and focus her music-making over to the actual piano lesson assigned by the teacher for as long as possible. The child should be pushed to focus her practicing a little bit longer as each day passes and when a parent determines that the child can take no more, her reward for completing her lesson assignment will be to go ahead and freely explore more musical babble. This exercise repeated every day surprises most parents because they see their child sitting at the piano for quite a long time after several months of repetition. This is an exercise in duration. When the child gets a little older and learns more, she will already be acclimated to sitting at the piano for an extended period of time.

Stage 2 (ages 7-8): “Not now, later.”

Once piano students enter the beginner and late beginner stages, they find that playing the piano actually takes practice. All of a sudden, motivation levels have dropped because now the piano actually takes work. The lesson time is often spent with the teacher practicing with the student.

(Chen 3)

The average piano teacher and parent see this as sheer laziness in the student when it is actually a test for the parents and teacher to see whether they will buckle and allow the child to quit. Stage 2 is a test of will for the teachers and parents which really has very little to do with the academic education of the piano. It is interesting to note that Dr. Mel Levine has written an entire book on the misconception of laziness titled, *The Myth of Laziness*. The research in his book invalidates the common assumption that children are lazy. He calls laziness in a child, “output failure” (Levine, *Myth of Laziness* 3). He defines the term as a “neurodevelopmental dysfunction that interferes with productivity” (Levine, *Myth of Laziness* 4). The book is dedicated to diagnosing what categories a child may appear to be “lazy” in and guides the parents on how to pull their child out of such a rut in that area.

Once successfully past this stage, the parents and teacher will see the worth of this battle. It is difficult for any complete academic education to be purely fun all of the time, and music is not that much different. The serious teacher will persevere through this stage, and the strong-willed parent will see that music, a subject needed to be practiced

and worked on everyday, is the same as reading and math. This is the point when most parents give in and allow their child to quit, but in truth, it really is the easiest of Chen's stages to get through as long as the child has firm limits set before him consistently by both the parents and the teacher. At this stage, pianist and music director of the Houston Piano Company School of Music, Donna Vorhes, agrees with Chen stating, "The main reason that young students decide that they no longer like piano lessons is the task seems boring, uncomfortable, routine, and difficult...practicing is a chore" (Vorhes 5). Berger adds, "Once a student needs to begin repeating the foundational basic skills of note reading and rhythm on a daily basis, they begin to get bored very quickly and want to quit" (Ann Berger 10).

Children look for validation at this age from teachers who demand discipline and look for love from parents who demand respect. If the teacher is firm about not allowing the student to slack off during lessons, she will gain the respect of the student which over time will create completely utilitarian piano lessons (thus meaning that no time will be wasted trying to discipline the student to pay attention instead of teaching). Then when a student receives validation for persevering through this stage from his teacher, he will automatically enjoy being with the teacher. Sabrina Ann Berger states, "a student must know that you are their teacher in music and their mentor in life. Once the respect has been established and a student knows not to fool around during lessons, then quite frequently will I experience a close relationship with my student outside of lesson time. It is a wonderful thing" (Ann Berger, 2).

If the parents demand that the child respect their wishes to continue piano lessons, then over time the child will want to play well to impress his parents. The child will feel accepted and validated by both parties simultaneously thus encouraging him to continue playing the piano. Once both sets of authority in the child's life set solid rules to be followed, the child sees piano as a major school subject and knows that he must do his piano practice/homework every day without question.

Stage 3 (ages 9-10): "Look mom—with my eyes closed!"

In this stage, students have gotten past the difficult stage of note reading and music concepts begin to make sense. Usually at this stage the student's goal is to play as fast as possible in attempts to show off to family and friends. At this age, students enjoy flashcards as a means of learning showy pieces and tunes they recognize. (Chen 3)

For parents and teachers, this is truly the most fun stage of all. The student has made a motivational rebound and is very excited about playing some more popular classical pieces. The negative side is that although the student has learned enough about note reading, rhythm and some dynamics to play the pieces, she can rarely play at the performance practice tempo. It is easy for a student at this stage to learn the notes and then attempt to play them on the piano in front of an audience. The truth is, unless she is taught how to practice slowly with hands apart, she will not be able to perform the pieces up to tempo well enough to get to the next level of musical difficulty. As in Stage 1, parents and teachers need to give the student some elbow room for just playing around.

Clearly, if the student has made it to this level, she is not creating musical babble. Unfortunately, to the trained musical ear, banging out and rushing through a famous fast piano recital piece is the same as sheer noise. The solution is for the teacher to still methodically train the eager student to constantly practice hands apart, slowly each day until both hands can produce an elegant coherent phrase without falling apart through fast and rushed playing.

This stage is a good time for the teacher to introduce the use of a metronome. This device keeps a constant steady beat and is a tool for all music students when practicing alone without a person to count out loud for them while the student plays. To practice without one at this stage will only result in poor counting and unsteadiness at the more advanced levels of piano playing later on. If metronome use is taught correctly and patiently, a student will grow to eventually love practicing with one for life.

After a good practice habit becomes established, the parents need to give their child even more time than in Stage 1 to play around and “let loose” at the end of the child’s practice session. This can be the student’s reward for proper practicing. Most students love the “I’m free” cathartic feeling of playing their piece frantically fast at the end of the practice session. It almost always gives them a sense of accomplishment and an eager heart for the next day’s practice session.

Stage 4 (age 11): “Why can’t I have good music-like rock or pop?”

Students are in the early intermediate stage and teachers often begin introducing students to easy pieces from the classical era. This type of

music is so far out of line of what the student enjoys to listen to on a daily basis. The student wonders why she can't play "cooler" music like the Harry Potter theme song or the rock song she heard on the radio. The student gets discouraged, do[sic] not care much for progress at the piano, and playing the piano is no longer cool. (Chen 3)

For parents who dream of hearing their child play Beethoven's *Fur Elise*, or a Mozart sonata, this stage can be extremely disconcerting. However, for the astute teacher, this is the point where he can gain the upper hand by using transcriptions of the student's desired pop songs as the ultimate reward at the next talent show in school or student recital. This educator has frequently allowed all students to perform a popular, non-classical work, at least once a year, as long as the main bulk of the student's lesson plan and repertoire, still continuously revolves around the foundational scales, exercises and standard classical pieces appropriate for the student's level.

It is vital for parents to trust the teacher when popular pieces are assigned. Many parents feel that their child is going to waste time learning a Billy Joel song at the lesson; hence it is a waste of money. They must realize that a good teacher will actually spend very little time on the student's actual desired piece during the lesson. A teacher can easily transcribe a pop song to the child's existing piano level and have him learn similar techniques that she is having the child work on in the classical selections. Then the student can work on the pop selection at home instead of taking up valuable lesson time. Sometimes, if the student is technically advanced enough to play the original version of

the popular piece, the encouragement to play it after practicing the classical music doubles their existing practice time. It also prepares the student to play more challenging classical repertoire. There is also a selection of pop songs that are classically oriented like “Cans and Brahms,” by the rock group, Yes, which is from Johannes Brahms *Fourth Symphony, Op. 98* and “Russians,” by Sting which is from Serge Prokofiev’s, *Lieutenant Kija’s Suite, Op. 60* to name a few. This writer had a fabulous Juilliard graduate and concert pianist, Joan Stein, as a teacher in her later middle school and high school years. Many of her students continued lessons with her through high school and returned during college as well. She was a firm believer in allowing students at this stage an opportunity to play such pieces in order to stay inspired to continue classical piano training.

If this level is orchestrated well by both the teacher and the parents, the next level is all but eradicated and Stage 6 follows quite quickly.

Stage 5 (ages 12-14): “I want to quit.”

After Stage 4, students often have resentment towards learning the piano. Theresa Chen’s findings as a private piano teacher is that in Stage 5 of a child’s musical education (usually during the middle school years), the student just wants to quit because they have no time to hang out with their non-musical friends thus rendering them “uncool,” to their peers. (Chen 4)

It takes away from the student’s free time, it is hard work to learn the music concepts, and it requires a lot of practice for which the child has no diligence. Unless the



parent continues to force the child to attend lessons, many students quit at this age.

Berger states,

one of the biggest mistakes many parents make during a child's formative violin lessons is to have them take the summer off from lessons. Very rarely do the children practice on their own and very rarely do they ever want to return to lessons when school begins. The main reason for this is that once they begin lessons after having taken two to three months off, they need to repeat much of what they learned and this alone can be frustrating for them. This is similar to someone who exercised regularly and then took a long break. It becomes an arduous task to get back in shape again which can be very discouraging" (Ann Berger 11).

*Parent involvement and support is very important at this stage.* It is highly recommended that parents continue taking their child to lessons, even when the child wishes to quit. Chen plainly states that "this is the stage that adults who once learned piano often look back on later and regret that they quit" (Chen 4-5). This is also a time when these same adults will state that they wished their parents pushed them to continue. Chen feels that the forcing of the task will soon die away, "Even if the parent just has the student merely 'show up' to the weekly lessons until the student passes the growing pain hurdles, that is better than the student quitting" (Chen 4). According to Joy Miller, a home schooling graphic designer and avid music supporter, in her article, "Should Parents Force Their Children to Take Piano Lessons?" "...where are the people that say

parents are wrong to force their children to learn math, or wear a coat in cold weather, or eat healthy food instead of junk?...learning music is just as important as reading and mathematics” (Miller 1). Her article highlights that it is a parents obligation to make sure that their children do not quit piano.

As mentioned previously, if Stage 5 is conducted correctly by both the parent at home and the teacher during weekly lessons, this stage rarely surfaces. By allowing the student to play desired non-classical selections as a reward at the end of lessons and at the end of each day’s productive practice sessions (all of which must be monitored and controlled by the parents), this stage jumps right to Stage 6. Once the student has proven to himself that he is cool because he can play his favorite music, he now wants to prove to everyone (even himself) that he really is a true pianist, like his teacher (as discussed in the section on choosing a good teacher: i.e., one that can play, perform and demonstrate methods taught to the student). The student begins to happily continue lessons and increase his practicing to gain the desired and necessary results put before him by both the teacher and the parents. It seems as out of nowhere, but after the many years of hard work and perseverance from all three parties involved, the student, parent and teacher, everything becomes easier, and the musical journey takes hold of the student becoming a part of their life.

Further on in this dissertation, this writer will attempt methods that should eliminate stage 5 almost completely, if implemented successfully. As in any intense

discipline, the goal is for the teacher and the parents to see the child get to a point in which he can practice and teach himself autonomously.

Stage 6 (ages 15-16): “No more kid stuff.”

After a rough patch of frustration by the student, parents, and teacher, the student will begin to gain an appreciation for classical music in the advanced repertoire. Students will feel satisfied from their ability to play difficult pieces, and the teacher will begin guiding the student on artistry and interpretation aspects of pieces instead of rhythm and note reading. Usually, at this point, they are taking piano lessons because they want to. As an adult, the student will thank the parent later for pushing them to continue. (Chen 4-5)

This is an achievement. The student is now mostly self-sufficient and thus wants to practice. This is a time for the parents, the teacher and the student to begin to enjoy the benefits of all the hard work leading up to this point. As Farber stated in his column, “hard work beats talent when talent doesn’t work hard,” (Farber, *Diamond Minds* 1) and Stage 6 of Chen’s study is a prime example of this. Everyone’s hard work has come to fruition.

The remainder of this dissertation is about how and why each piano student should reach Stage 6. Most of the time, it is the achievement of this stage that grants the piano student a lifetime of happy piano music-making because they are finally advanced enough to be able to sit and play the piano at anytime and anywhere well into adulthood.

The joy of music-making will create a peaceful adult because this achievement will give her joy all the days of her life.

Now that parents know fairly well what to expect from their child, let us examine what should be expected from the piano teacher and the piano.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE PIANO TEACHER AND THE PIANO

We have just explored the possible stages of piano progress for a student in their formative educational years that Chen has evaluated in her studies. Now, let us dive directly into the teacher and the instrument itself.

The entire process of teaching, motivating and performing is ineffective without the proper teacher to implement it correctly. As stated in the introduction, there may be thousands of piano teachers in any given corner of the world. Therefore if someone wants to take piano lessons, a teacher can be found. Very few are actually performing musicians and many teach only for other reasons than the development of their students.

Melanie Spanswick is a consummate performer, well known pianist and piano professor at the Royal Academy of Music in England. She has documented and written extensively about her teaching experiences and has given seminars, masterclasses and music festivals internationally in order to bring to light correct piano pedagogical teaching to many. The seed of her work began decades ago when she came across a grown man who came to her for lessons. According to Spanswick he was able to play...

simple piano pieces. He wanted to improve his playing considerably...

There is nothing unusual about this story so far. It was then that this man dropped the bombshell which was to change my perception of piano teaching forever. Apparently he was ALREADY a piano teacher. It transpired that he has been teaching the piano for over ten years and had

around 40 students who came to him for lessons every week. He had no qualifications at all and was unable to play a piece through without making many basic errors. What upset me even more was that he charged a higher fee per hour than I did!...a professional musician or teacher should really have a teaching or performing diploma from a bona fide music college (Spanswick location 406-413).

It will become evident, as this document continues, of which teachers we are speaking: many of them cannot play the piano well enough to perform, and some do not bother having their students perform even once a year. Unfortunately, these teachers are also common in our school systems, and conscientious parents are often forced to diligently locate good teachers to meet their child's basic educational needs. Dr. Anthony Gregorc pointedly describes his view of what he calls a marginal classroom teacher. He is...

the individual who lacks the spirit of teaching and/or is clearly incompetent. At best, he is only technically appropriate. At worst, he is mechanical, mindless, and potentially dangerous in his efforts (Gregorc, *Inside Styles* 207).

Parents have the right to find the best teaching available for their child; this applies to piano lessons as well. Sadly, most parents are ignorant of the qualifications a good piano teacher should possess and have very often for years employed the wrong teacher for their child studying piano. Some studies have shown that the teacher is mostly

responsible for the student's progress. This writer is striving to show that students discontinue lessons because of a lack of proper direction and reinforcement of motivational behavior. In this sense, "inferior teachers can do far more harm than good. They will unwittingly introduce many bad habits that could easily put your child off playing for ever" (Spanswick location 436) at a young age. A study conducted by three university music teachers, Eugenia Costa-Giomi, Patricia J. Flowers and Wasaha Sasaki found that students were directly affected by the way in which their teachers could change or foster their attitudes and behaviors. It had little to do with ability but had everything to do with the student's positive or negative behavior which stemmed from the influence of the piano teacher. "These findings suggest that children who decide to discontinue music instruction are not necessarily different from those who continue in terms of abilities or demographic characteristics, but that they actually behave differently" (Costa-Giomi 237). Negative influence of a teacher can have lasting effects or delay a child's desire to take piano lessons when they are young.

This scenario is tragic because the piano is one of the instruments with which students make the quickest progress when they are very young. Sabrina Ann Berger agrees, "Children are like sponges and the younger they are the easier it is for them to learn and retain muscle memory. It has always fascinated me that with enough repetition a young child can learn an instrument well enough to have flawless technique by the time they have finished middle school" (Ann Berger 1). It is similar to that of ballet or gymnastics, where by the time students get to high school, they should be at the peak of

their career. In addition, it is also similar to that of a foreign language where the best time to learn how to speak another language is during the formative educational years. Once a student has reached the secondary level of education, it becomes quite challenging to learn how to play the piano well enough to be somewhat good and continue playing for a lifetime. Good piano education must occur as young as possible in order for most children to sustain it for life. Pianist, writer and educator Helena Cromwell had based most of her research on the fact that the best time to master the foundations of piano is before the age of eleven. “It is a well known fact among educators that children who learn to play a musical instrument before the age of eleven are calmer, more socially accepted and perform up to eighty percent better in the classroom than their peers who lack musical training” (Cromwell 1-2). Poor piano education results in bad habits that take so long to break that the average student gives up trying after just a short while. Spanswick puts this warning in bold several times throughout her book: “**Remember, bad habits are very difficult to eradicate!**” (Spanswick location 443).

Sometimes a dedicated piano student will overcome this and, with the right new teacher, will work harder and get to a point where he can play well. Unfortunately, once the damage is done, very rarely does this student get to play the major repertoire on the piano. Nonetheless, it is really never too late to play the piano well with the proper lessons and a great deal of dedication.



## The Piano Teacher

No parent should settle for a mediocre piano teacher. One of the reasons why there are so many is because of the ease in learning this instrument as a beginner. Anyone can walk up to a piano and play a note or plunk out a melody after fumbling around for a while. Except for the voice (singing), this is difficult on all other instruments. The rest of the orchestral instruments need to be assembled and held in a very particular manner with difficult hand positions and postures. To get out a note that sounds decent also requires instruction as well. So for instrumentalists, the average teacher must have more musical training than just playing basic beginner tunes in order to teach. As a result, their advanced knowledge makes them better teachers than the majority of piano teachers who barely received enough proper education to play themselves. The piano in essence is a no-assembly-required instrument.

Most people can teach themselves the basics of piano playing and after a year begin teaching piano. Spanswick states that “many so-called teachers have little experience of piano teaching and will assume that you won’t notice their incompetence” (Spanswick location 413). In addition, one may find that some of these piano teachers will make house calls to make it easier for the parents. This is not to say that some teachers who make house calls are not good or professional; many are, but the majority of real virtuoso teachers teach from an in-home studio or music school. Good piano teachers are usually very hard to find. The following are some key attributes that a professional

piano teacher should have. Discerning parents should explore these criteria when looking to hire a good piano teacher for their child. Spanswick recommends that a parent should begin looking first for a teacher with these specifications: “their education, qualifications, performance venues or places they have played, prizes, their teachers, teaching experience, and general musical prowess” (Spanswick location 543). Her guidelines will be the general rubric followed for the next several pages about the piano teacher. New area’s will be introduced as well.

### **The Piano Teacher as a Performer**

The first goal in finding a teacher is to find one who has performed regularly on any instrument since the art of performance practice is similar on all instruments. It is important to note that teaching performance practice skills can only be done by a consummate performer. Berger agrees stating that “the most dedicated teachers have already regularly performed as soloists and/or accompanists, attended masterclasses and watched good concerts. They should always be evolving musically and giving fresh perspectives” (Ann Berger 3).

To begin with, the parent must ask, how many concerts and recitals has this piano teacher given? The number one asset a parent must look for should be performance practice. If the piano teacher has not performed regularly then the student is just studying with an older, more skilled piano student. Spanswick states that “a good teacher should

have been trained properly. Ideally they should be or have been a performer...they should have a teaching or performing diploma or a degree from a major music college” (Spanswick location 451-452). According to singer, song writer, pianist and producer Leonard Dozier, since regular performing is a requirement of getting a college music degree then your “piano teacher should have a college or conservatory training in music” (Dozier 1). Being able to perform in public well is what separates a piano teacher from a piano professional. Spanswick notes the difference in stating that “generally a poor pianist does not like to perform in public so this can be another indication of a substandard teacher” (Spanswick location 564). Executive producer, teacher and successful piano performer Evan A. Copp states that a piano teacher should be able to perform well for his students...”formal qualification like college degree’s, teaching licenses and prior experience should be considered” to assess a teacher’s “playing ability” (Copp 1-2). Many piano teachers are secondary pianists having studied and focused on another instrument as their primary instrument. This is fine as long as that teacher knows their limit on teaching the piano. For example, if the piano teacher’s primary instrument is the flute, but she had good piano instruction well into her college years, then it would be feasible for the flutist to teach piano to beginner/intermediate level students. Dozier feels that this is acceptable because most music degrees require history and theory classes for all instruments. He states that all music teachers, “should be extremely well-versed in music theory with a keen understanding of both melodic and harmonic structure” (Dozier 1). If honest, a “second instrument” teacher will release a student when that student is

beyond their teaching ability and recommend another, more accomplished pianist for continued instruction.

A good non-pianist teacher rule of thumb should then be this: *If the teacher cannot play/perform the student's music anymore, it is time to let that student study with a professional pianist who can.* Parents must notice this change in the paradigm of the child's progress. It is evident during the lessons as well. A parent should take note of this shift in case the teacher does not initiate a timely farewell and move the student to a more advanced piano instructor/performer. Parents should be wary of the mediocre piano teacher who will hold on to a student with two hands and two feet, having that student spinning their wheels for years in their studio. There is no end to great piano playing, and the student should always be improving. If a child is not improving after continuing to practice diligently every day and working hard, then maybe the piano teacher should go. A parent should find a teacher that can rise to the occasion and take the student on to new, more advanced levels of study right away.

### **How Often Does the Teacher Hold Recitals for Students**

Next, a parent should see how often the teacher's students perform. Does this teacher just give one recital a year in June or does this teacher offer several performance opportunities each year for her students? It is mandatory to find a teacher whose main goal is to get the student to successfully perform on stage as soon as possible. Spanswick

feels that “it is an extremely important element of musical training. Sadly, it is one that is often and easily overlooked” (Spanswick location 1424). Students will not progress if they do not perform because performing for an audience is the greatest motivator for practicing and perfecting their newest skills and musical pieces. A good “teacher might give free concerts. They may arrange and run classical music festivals for their students to participate in, or they may organize end of term concerts at their studios” (Spanswick location 683). “It is vital therefore to make performing a positive, happy and frequent occasion” (Spanswick location 1439). In addition, this writer’s years of teaching has proven that the more students perform in front of an audience, the faster they progress and improve. “My students who perform regularly improve the quickest in my teaching studio” (Ann Berger 2).

### **The Students of the Piano Teacher, Past and Present**

This next attribute sets an experienced piano teacher apart from all the other teachers. If a parent goes to a recital and sees that almost all of the students play with grace, poise and with almost effortless technique, then they have found the right performance practice teacher. The students of this kind of piano teacher play as though the music they are playing seems easy. This is an outstanding attribute of a great teacher. “A piano teacher who has taught for 20 years will have loads of experience and teaching methods firmly in place” (Spanswick location 547). They make the ridiculously hard

work of performing look so effortless that any member of the audience could say, “Wow, I can do that!”

This writer has observed countless times that this is truly an acquired attribute that comes with experience and astute professionalism. To give that perfect, effortless performance, a student must perform music that is slightly below their actual level of playing and perfect that music with beautiful technique, dynamics and sound. An inexperienced piano teacher may think that a good student is ready to play a strong piece at their existing level of technique, but the inevitable bad performance is usually what follows. A great teacher will know, through experience only, when to put a student on stage to perform a piece of music, and when that music is ready for a solid presentation.

After ascertaining whether the teacher’s students perform regularly and well, a parent should note what level of students this piano teacher has in her studio. Does she have mostly beginners, or an array of beginner to advanced level students? If the teacher has mostly beginners, but has a plan that those students advance to study with someone more qualified (as discussed previously as the first sign of a good teacher), then one has an honest teacher who knows her limits. But, if one has a teacher with mostly beginners who never advance over several years, then suspicion should arise that this teacher may be teaching for other reasons than the benefit and growth of their students. A good teacher should never hold a talented student hostage if she has nothing else to offer the student. And, if a student has not advanced much due to lack of motivation, the teacher should do something about it and not allow the student to keep languishing in her studio for years.

This creates a frustrating scenario for everyone: the teacher feels that lessons with this student are a waste of time and the child begins to resent the piano.

### **Contacting the Teacher between Lessons**

A discerning parent should see whether one can also contact this teacher with questions or concerns between lessons. Some piano teachers forget their students exist as soon as they leave the lesson room and make every effort not to be available should the parent try to contact the teacher between lessons. If the parent detects distancing, then this teacher has taken the wrong approach with the child. A holistic musical education for any child is an ensemble consisting of one or both parents and the teacher, not an exclusive duet between the teacher and student as mentioned in the introduction in reference to Huang's tripod theory.

Parents are the only consistent advocates for their child; therefore, it should be mandatory for parents to be able to ask questions, bring forth concerns, and be in attendance for every lesson if they so choose. "Try to establish good communication," with your child's piano teacher, "this is very important" (Spanswick location 683). In this age of modern communication with its many ways to contact a person--land and cordless telephones, cell phones with internet, texting and e-mail, beepers, computer e-mailing and skypeing--it is easy to figure out whether or not a piano teacher may be avoiding a parent.

Some private teachers and most music studios require parents to pay for lessons one month in advance. For example, it is standard operating procedure for the student to take one lesson a week; therefore, advance payment would reflect four to five lessons a month (depending on which day the student has lessons and how many of those days there are in the month ahead). The usual cancellation policy requires 24-48 hours notification unless it is for sickness, an emergency or inclement weather. A good and fair teacher/music studio should allow a conscientious parent--one who always gives appropriate notice--a chance to make-up missed lessons. When a teacher begins to give a parent a hard time about making up lessons under the above circumstances, then a parent receives the message that the teacher does not respect the parent's time and money; they just want to get paid for not teaching when the occasion arises. This scenario does happen in the music world, but not nearly as frequently and regularly as in the field of sports. What this writer finds most disconcerting is that the majority of parents do not seem to respect their own money enough to fight back.

On occasion a teacher/studio will possibly have the audacity to say to a parent that they are the only one asking for make-up lessons that had been prepaid. In this case, a parent should stand his ground by finishing up any paid lessons as gracefully as possible, leave quietly and move on to a new teacher/studio or find a way to work around the existing situation. A conscientious parent should look for another place to go of equal or greater expertise if possible. Unfortunately, this is not always possible. As a result, a parent must swallow their pride and work within the given, poorly organized system in



order for the child to receive their appropriate and paid lessons. Sometimes, due to location, a parent has very little choice as to where and with whom their child can study.

Some teachers feel that they spend way too much of their unpaid free time talking to parents about this or that. Therefore, they begin to ignore the parents. This is understandable, especially if a parent seems overbearing. “Do approach your teacher in a friendly and objective manner” (Spanswick 690). In cases such as these, this teacher should do as the school teachers do and set up a meeting time so the parents can bring forth all of their questions and concerns at one time instead of random lengthy phone calls throughout the week. “It is a good plan to have a progress discussion with your teacher every term. Do set up an appointment to tell your teacher what you want to discuss...don’t abuse and bombard your teacher” (Spanswick location 699). Parents should not be overbearing, yet they should feel comfortable approaching the piano teacher if a reasonable concern arises. In addition, if a teacher is truly a great one, they should know the worth of their lessons and charge a higher lesson rate to accommodate these extra unpaid parental discussions. It is important to note that the more advanced/serious the student is, the more involved the parents will eventually be.

### **The Format of the Duration of the Lesson**

The parent should note whether the teacher ends the lesson right on time, exactly to the minute, without a second thought as to what may not have been completed during

the lesson. If this should happen, your child may have become a simple business transaction. Unfortunately, this is the case for many teachers in very structured music schools due to time constraints and the consideration of students to follow. This writer believes there should be a gap of at least 5-10 min. between each lesson to allow for the completion of an extra phrase or statement. In addition, it should be a teacher's obligation to discuss what transpired during the lesson with the student's parents at the end of the lesson. Ignoring the parents and expecting a six year-old boy to remember and retain all that was accomplished during the lesson is completely unreasonable. Since thousands of music schools and studios are run on an exact minute schedule, there should be time set aside later in the day or the next day for the teacher to take a few moments to speak with the student's parents. "Always arrange to have a chat with your teacher outside lesson times. You will find that teachers book themselves for a few hours per day, so there will be little time to talk at the end of your lesson" (Spanswick location 690).

Teachers who need to end a lesson right on time because of music studio rules should always write everything down in great detail for the student and the parent. This writer is constantly writing lesson notes not just for the student and the parent, but for herself as well. Sometimes after one week has gone by, the sequence of teaching has gotten lost and/or forgotten. In addition, this writer asks that all new students begin lessons with a sturdy lesson notebook just for this purpose. A good teacher should expect the student to only use this notebook for piano instruction and not for any other subject.

### **Parents' Involvement during Lesson Time**

Very few teachers require or even allow a parent to audio or video record a lesson. Spanswick not only allows it but encourages it for the musical progress of the student. “Many teachers will recoil in horror at the thought of the parent sitting in on piano lessons. I, however, think this to be an excellent idea” (Spanswick location 1036). For those teachers who do allow it, it is to the parents’ advantage to do so, especially with younger children whose academic retention is short-lived. “I take the view that a child under the age of seven needs a parent in the room” (Spanswick location 1036). Then the child and parent can review the lesson in between visits to the piano teacher and improve accordingly.

This writer allows and overtly invites parents to sit in on all lessons to improve upon the quality of practice during the week by using similar word prompts and approaches used (those used by this writer in particular) during the lesson for consistency. A parent’s participation can never be enough and should always be welcome.

Why can parents not sit in on the lesson? The excuse given by the teacher is almost always, “The child performs better and pays attention more if the parent is not there.” This writer believes that this is rarely true. In fact, most of the time, the student works harder and concentrates more intensely from fear *because* both the teacher and the parent are present. Yes, sometimes a very young student (usually around the ages of 2-6 or even up to age 8 depending on the emotional maturity of the student) may get

distracted a little more because she wants to please her parents or gets a little more nervous during the lesson with them in the room. This is good. Children should always feel accountable to their parents' presence during a lesson especially if that parent will be practicing with them during the week between lessons. Having the parent in the room during lessons, "is helpful as then you will be aware. Make sure they understand and assimilate the instructions and information in their piano book" (Spanswick location 1014).

### **The Overall Demeanor of the Teacher**

After teaching and working for many years as a professional musician, this writer has grown to recognize the mark of a great teacher on any instrument. Daniel Coyle sums it up quite well in his book, *The Talent Code*:

They possessed the same sort of gaze: steady, deep, unblinking. They listened far more than they talked. They seemed allergic to giving pep talks or inspiring speeches; they spent most of their time offering small, targeted, highly specific adjustments. They had an extraordinary sensitivity to the person they were teaching, customizing each message to each student's personality.... They were talent whisperers. (Coyle 162)

In his book, Coyle focuses on three key elements that allow anyone of any age to master skills of not just music, but sports, art, math and any passion they may have. These

elements are similar in discussion to this paper, which are deep practice, ignition (motivation) and master coaching as quoted in the introduction. He sums up the first two sections of training with coaching in the third section. After deep practice and ignition are in place, it is the teacher who ultimately gets the absolute best out of the student.

Coyle's examples all speak of great teachers who have the good fortune to teach already advanced and self-motivated students in their chosen field which, for a teacher, is half the battle of successful teaching. Now, there are great teachers in the field of music who do not have the position of teaching at a major conservatory or music school, and teach mostly beginners or intermediates. These good teachers must take on a more disciplined approach to keep the student practicing so they can reach that plateau of more advanced playing. Often times, without admitting it to the student and parents, the teacher knows that she is just not capable of helping a student advance. At this point, the teacher must recommend a more highly qualified instructor.

Musician and writer Barry Green wrote, *The Inner Game of Music*, which, "is a book that succeeds as a practical guide for improving the quality of the music experience," (Green 4-5) specifically for the performer. He dedicated an entire section of his book on his interviews and experiences with famous, highly successful teachers on their chosen instruments. Green found that these great teachers use unique ways not only to teach their students but to inspire, motivate and grow a love of learning in them right from the beginning. Cellist/bassist and professor Leighton Conkling of Ohio University explores the instrument with his students and lets them discover

what works best for themselves. Instead of marking the bowings, the fingerings, and the phrasing and telling them exactly how he wants them to play, he invites them to experiment with a variety of different fingerings. And his ultimate dream would be “to find a way to communicate everything I know about the cello by means of a process of discovery-not by instruction.” (Green 132).

Carol Dweck, a psychology professor at Stanford University and one of the world’s leading researchers in the field of motivation states in her book, *Mindset, the New Psychology of Success*, “I think it’s too easy for a teacher to say, ‘Oh, this child wasn’t born with it, so I won’t waste my time.’ Too many teachers hide their own lack of ability behind that statement” (Dweck 196). As stated above, a good teacher will either find a way to draw the ability out of the student or send the student to someone who is capable of doing so.

### **The Disciplined Teacher**

The teacher must individualize their teaching and bring in a motivating method of discipline to maintain it. Therefore, after finding a piano teacher with all of the above qualifications--a performer, hosts frequent students recitals, has good students, available to contact between lessons, organized with the time and structure of each lesson, allows parental involvement of the musical education and has a good demeanor--it is important

for the parent to look for that last salient trait: master coaching; a teacher with enough passion for music and teaching to not be afraid to be tough and persevere with the student no matter what the parents think. Teachers who are afraid to correct and discipline while teaching are merely wasting time; both aspects are necessary for a student to learn.

In our western culture with its modern age of attempting to make education fun, a parent may get turned off by a so-called “tough” piano teacher. In essence these tough piano teachers are the ones who get the most out of their students. According to Joanne Lipman’s article, “Tough Teachers Get Results,” she feels the latest trends of teaching in the American educational system are a major reason why American children are falling behind in math and science when compared to countries who take on a more old fashioned approach to teaching. She states in her article, “Fifteen year-olds in the U.S. trail students in 12 other nations in science and 17 in math, bested by their counterparts not just in Asia but in Finland, Estonia and the Netherlands, too.” She coauthored a book with Melanie Kupchynsky (the daughter of her great teacher, Jerry Kupchynsky), *Strings Attached: One Tough Teacher and the Gift of Great Expectations*, about how he was her greatest and most inspiring teacher. In one passage in the book, she sums up what a great teacher is all about:

Yet there was something intoxicating about a teacher who had such absolute confidence—faith, really—in my ability to do better. Whatever I managed to achieve, he expected more. All I had to do was work harder. It was a simple formula, really, and it seeped into my consciousness without

me even realizing it. If I imagined a ceiling on my ability, he raised the roof higher and then shattered it altogether. How far could I go? He gave me no sense of limits, so I set none for myself. (Lipman and Kupchysky 27)

Lipman goes as far as declaring that “it is time to revive old-fashioned education, not just traditional but old-fashioned education in the sense that so many of us knew as kids: instruction with strict discipline and unyielding demands. Here is the thing: It works” (Lipman, *The Wall Street Journal* CI).

According to Jennifer O’Neil in her book, *The Pursuit of Happiness: 21 Spiritual Rules to Success*:

- You are never stuck, unless you are choosing to stay there.
- You are never limited, unless you choose to limit yourself.
- You are never less than, unless you choose to see yourself this way.
- You will never fail, unless you choose failure as an option.
- You are powerful beyond belief. (O’Neil 14)

A good teacher keeps the sky as the limit for a hardworking music student at all times. This is what Mr. Kupchynsky, “Mr. K,” did for his daughter, Melanie; his student, Joanne; and what the best teachers do for all of their students. A discerning parent should not want anything less from their child’s piano teacher.



## **Eight Principals of a Tough Teacher**

Joanne Lipman continues with eight concisely summarized principles that have made the students of tough teachers from the past successful coaches and teachers of the present and future. Other writers and teachers have written books on this topic as well shedding light on the importance of tough teachers. Dr. Robyn Jackson, a former English teacher and middle school administrator has written a book titled, *Never Work Harder Than Your Students & Other Principles of Great Teaching*. She believes in the power a teacher can have and use to take their students to their greatest potential. Sean Cain, a public educator and state school director along with public school administrator, Mike Laird, have written similar statements to Lipman as well in their book titled, *The Fundamental 5: The Formula For Quality Instruction*, which puts forth a rubric that empowers the teacher in the classroom as well.

As stated in Lipman's article, "Tough Teachers Get Results," the following eight principles are "...a manifesto if you will, a battle cry inspired by my old teacher and buttressed by new research-explain why" (Lipman, *The Wall Street Journal* CI).

### ***A Little Pain Is Good for You***

Lipman points out that coaches in the fields of musical performance, medicine, computers and even the universal mind game of chess challenge their students at all times pushing them to higher levels of performance. This writer has been to many music

masterclasses where several students would play an advanced piece nearly to perfection, producing involuntary impressed, stunned reactions from the other performers in the audience, only to have the great master say at the end, “Not bad.” A great teacher will rarely admit to a student that his work is done or a piece is “ready” for a performance. There is always something more, something bigger and greater for which to strive.

Yet, at the same time, they push the student to perform in public as soon as possible, plainly stating that a piece will never be ready so it is best to perform it now and learn from the experience for future performances. Hard work is sadly underrated and many piano students think that others who play better than them are just “natural” at playing the piano. This is rarely true. What may come natural to the student who plays well is their actual work ethic, not the talent to play well. A good teacher will teach a student the painful process of working hard. According to Jackson, “master teachers hold all their students to rigorous standards, they state goals in terms of minimal rather than maximum acceptable performance” (Jackson 32). There is no end to good practicing. One can always work harder and practice more.

Even if a piece is performed extremely well, there could always be room for improvement. Nothing worth achieving comes without the pain and sacrifice of hard work. Teachers who teach this have what used to be known as a Puritan work ethic, *the reward for hard work is more hard work*. Lipman quotes psychologist K. Anders Ericsson, in her article, who researched top performers in every field to find that all of

them, “deliberately picked unsentimental coaches who would challenge them and drive them to higher levels of performance” (Lipman, *The Wall Street Journal* C1).

This painful process of consistently working hard over an extended period of time gives young music students a great sense of accomplishment. This writer has seen firsthand how this kind of training can be a great source of confidence and pride to the student. This emotional status carries over into all aspects of their lives, professionally as well as with their relationships with others. The pain of hard work doesn't just result in becoming a good musician, but also a good, responsible person.

### ***Drill, Baby Drill***

Lipman, in her article, uses the subject of math as her basic example of how rote repetition is greatly underrated just like the pain of hard work. Constant repetition and drilling on the same matter is essential for creating a solid foundation for more complex and multi-step math equations. If the first four systems of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division have any weak points, the math student will only be set up for failure as they advance through the higher levels of math which overtly require a solid foundation in these four systems for complete success. She has concluded that, “schools need to embrace the dreaded ‘drill and practice’ (Lipman, *The Wall Street Journal* C1).

This writer sees drilling as much the same in music. The drilling of note reading and counting at a beginner level is similar to that of the four systems in math mentioned above. Without a strong foundation, in either, advancing to harder repertoire for the piano

student will most certainly be a constant uphill climb, thus removing from the student all of the enthusiasm and motivation to continue. The seed of persistence for any student will stop growing and their ball of enthusiasm will most definitely stop rolling.

Rhythm/counting for the advanced student is only successful if a strong foundation of constant drilling and repetition at the beginning stages has been established. The same goes for reading music. To drill note reading by having students write out the letter names of the notes and constant sight-reading is essential for more advanced learning to take place. Unfortunately, there are very few successful ways of drilling these facts of music. Constant daily repetition of the same task is necessary in order to master the skill. A simple style of practice similar to that of the Kumon math and reading program will be discussed in Chapter 3 for teaching music reading and counting.

### ***Failure Is an Option***

According to Lipman, kids who understand that failure is a necessary aspect of learning actually “perform better” (Lipman, *The Wall Street Journal* C1). In performing classical music, it is almost impossible never to fail at some point; classical piano education makes failing even more common. The sheer fact that all performed/auditioned music is almost always memorized creates the greatest arena for failure because memory slips happen frequently. This writer tells all of her students before every performance, “Allow yourself to make mistakes.” To expect perfection at all times is irrational and

unattainable. To strive for perfection and be content with the results of one's hard work is the success.

A Bowling Green State University graduate student followed 31 Ohio band students who were required to audition for placement and found that even students who placed lowest “did not decrease in their motivation and self-esteem in the long term” (Lipman, *The Wall Street Journal* C2).

It is interesting to note that by stating “failure is an option,” it, in essence, never results in failure. The only acceptable definition then of failure in this sense is a student who quits completely because they technically failed to give a perfect performance.

### ***Strict Is Better than Nice***

Children naturally have no desire to work continuously at an academic or musical task. They may be excited at first, but, as previously stated, once that wears off, a child must be repeatedly pushed forward to learn. Children left on their own will learn very little. Learning and retention comes from drilling and in order to drill, one needs a consistent demanding taskmaster for a teacher. All teachers need to command respect immediately. Respect can be attained by setting high expectations for each student and then implementing those expectations in an orderly, consistent method. According to

Jackson, master teachers “challenge their students to exceed the standards...and hold students accountable for achieving them” (Jackson 32).

Fear is a successful motivating factor. When a child fears that he will disappoint a teacher, that child will put enough pressure on himself to work harder than usual and do their best each and every time. A strict teacher can show disappointment when the child has not worked to potential and can simultaneously give praise to encourage that child to continue to work to their potential as well. The effect it has on the student may very well be contingent on how the disappointment and praise is executed. Cain and Laird emphasize that the location of the teacher to the student is vital for communication with the student/s. They call this “the power zone” meaning

The most effective place for a teacher to conduct his or her craft.

It is simply teaching or monitoring in close proximity to one student, or a small group of students, or the entire classroom full of students. When teachers conduct their practice in the power zone, a number of significant changes occur in the classroom dynamic. On task behaviors increase, discipline issues decrease, and student retention of the content increases (Cain and Laird 52).

### ***Creativity Can Be Learned***

It is human nature to think that those who are incredibly musical as well as being technically advanced are just “natural” musicians. This is rare in children because,

according to Lipman, “creativity needs to be learned” (Lipman, *The Wall Street Journal* C2). It is a great challenge to teach children how to be creative and musical on the piano. First, the teacher has to establish the basics—a good foundation of reading music, counting and effortlessly playing hands together. Creativity comes at the end, but nonetheless can be taught well by a good teacher.

In this section of her article, Lipman draws upon the observations of Professor Robert W. Weisberg’s research, who teaches at Temple University. He had studied creative geniuses including Thomas Edison, Frank Lloyd Wright and Pablo Picasso only to discover that there is no such thing as a born genius. “Most creative giants work ferociously hard and through a series of incremental steps, achieve things that appear (to the outside world) like epiphanies and breakthroughs” (Weisberg 2).

Thomas Edison’s National Historical Park (his home and factory) is open to the public in West Orange, New Jersey. Upon taking any tour of the historical grounds where he worked and lived, the tour guide makes a great effort to mention Thomas Edison’s work ethic. According to the guides, all of which are certified national park guides, Edison put in thousands of hours of sleepless nights and days to successfully produce many of his greatest inventions, such as the longest lasting filament for the light bulb and the phonograph to name a few. He is famous for only taking catnaps and for working his staff around the clock when he was close to completing a successful invention. Even then, sometimes, the invention failed and needed to be started from scratch, thus the coining of the phrase, “back to the drawing board.” Dweck noted:

Edison was not a loner. For the invention of the light bulb, he had thirty assistants, including well-trained scientists, often working around the clock in a corporate-funded state-of-the-art laboratory! It did not happen suddenly. The light bulb has become the symbol for that single moment when the brilliant solution strikes, but there was no single moment of invention. In fact, the light bulb was not one invention, but a whole network of time-consuming inventions each requiring one or more chemists, mathematicians, physicists, engineers, and glass-blowers. (Dweck 55)

Lipman states, “The bottom line, Prof. Weisberg told me, is that creativity goes back in many ways to the basics. You have to immerse yourself in a discipline before you create in that discipline, which is what your music teacher was requiring of you” (Lipman, *The Wall Street Journal* C2). In his book, *Creativity: Understanding Innovation in Problem Solving, Science, Invention, and the Arts*, Weisberg spends a considerable amount of research analyzing and scientifically proving that creativity can be learned even by ordinary thinking people. He states that, “There is no doubt that scientists, artists, and inventors, for example, bring forth innovations. It is just that those innovations are based on the ordinary thought processes that we all carry out” (Weisberg 50). He strongly feels that “creative thinking is not different from ordinary thinking--the thinking that we use in carrying out our day-to-day activities” (Weisberg 51). Dweck adds something similar about Thomas Edison:



Yes, he was a genius, but not always one...he was a regular boy of his time and place. What eventually set him apart was his mindset and drive. He never stopped being the curious, tinkering boy looking for new challenges...his consuming love remained self-improvement and invention. (Dweck 56)

As stated several times already, a good teacher will immerse their student in piano and expect hours, not mere minutes, of practicing. Music can be learned and seem effortless and natural for most students once the basics are mastered. Creativity comes with successful musicality, which can be learned by techniques such as varying sound production and dynamics on the piano. It is not enough to play with feeling if one does not know how to successfully transfer that feeling through their fingers onto the piano. There is little spontaneity in perfect music-making because there has been thousands of times prior to that perfect musical moment that the student has practiced that sound or dynamic at home. Incredible musical moments of creativity almost always have a history of a great deal of practice and have been experimented with time and time again before reaching the performance that the audience hears. A master teacher can teach this to any student. As Jackson states, “mastery does not happen at once. There are different steps to get to the point of mastery and it is useful for both us and our students to identify the points along the way” (Jackson 40).

### *Grit Trumps Talent*

Similarly to musicality and creativity being a learned musical task, Lipman states that Mr. Kupchynsky successfully taught grit, which he “defined as passion and perseverance for long-term goals. It is the best predictor of success. In fact, grit is usually unrelated or even negatively correlated with talent” (Lipman, *The Wall Street Journal* C2).

Others more famous, including Suzuki, the founder of the famous pedagogical master of strings, also believe this. It is the desire, perseverance and grit mentality that is the one and only definition of talent. It is stated on the Suzuki foundation web site that Shinichi Suzuki, a Japanese violinist, educator, philosopher and humanitarian, taught a groundbreaking technique called “Talent Education.” The approach is based on the belief that musical ability is not an inborn talent but an ability that can be developed. Any child who is properly trained can develop musical ability, just as all children develop the ability to speak their mother tongue. The potential of every child is unlimited.

“Grit” needs “desire and dedication,” as its best friend. According to Lipman, “Professor Angela Duckworth, who teaches psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, believes that with grit comes optimism--the belief among both teachers and students that they have the ability to change and thus improve” (Lipman, *The Wall Street Journal* C3). A parent should be wary of any teacher who tells them at the first piano lesson that their child is talented. Rather an appropriate comment for a piano teacher to make after a child plays well at their first piano lesson might be, “Your child has been

trained well and it is evident that they have worked very hard.” This comment gives confidence and pride to the child who practiced hard. Jackson feels that “among the most powerful tools that teachers possess are the words they choose to use. Those words can be used to motivate students and build self-confidence” (Jackson 43). This leads us directly to the next section of Lipman’s article.

### ***Praise Makes You Weak***

It is not the praise itself that makes the child weak, but the way in which it is administered. This writer believes in praise but only after the trial period of proving one’s work ethic has been shown over an extended period of time. There are many varying theories on the distribution of praise in both the arts and sports. Lipman states that Mr. K’s “highest compliment was “not bad” (Lipman, *The Wall Street Journal* C3). If an educator praises students too easily for just a small amount of mediocre work and effort, then the student’s motivation to please their teachers and work hard to potential usually diminishes even ceasing to exist over time. Children, by nature, need to be taught respect through discipline and structure over an extended period of time during their formative educational years. “Too much praise, too soon during the rigorous process of musical studies, can actually destroy a child’s innate desire to please” (Lipman, *The Wall Street Journal* C3). Lipman uses Dweck’s research as she specifically targets sports parents whose inappropriate praise can actually sabotage their child’s success. Lipman states that

Dweck models successful athletes and musicians with a methodology she calls a “growth mindset.” Coaches, teachers and parents who use her terminology and psychology well by not overpraising can produce truly successful and fulfilled children. Dweck proves that one of the best compliments one could give a child is to “not tell them they are smart, but to tell them they are a hard worker instead” (Dweck 37).

Since the self-esteem manner of education pervades our Western society today, it becomes almost counterproductive to go back to the old school methods of supposed harshness in the educational system. When parents and teachers rave too easily, children eventually learn to avoid a difficult reality of putting in the serious effort to be good. Proper musical education gives a student the tools to face any situation in their learning so they might overcome any obstacles and get to a point where they actually say to themselves, “That wasn’t so bad, I actually did it!”

A good teacher can keep a music student working hard even if they think a goal is unattainable. In Dweck’s book, she refers to the great violin teacher Dorothy Delay, and how Delay always kept a growth mind-set, never praising easily on any student, but still encouraging each student to unimaginable possibilities.

Delay expected a lot from her students, but she, too, guided them there.

Most students are intimidated by the idea of talent, and it keeps them in a fixed mindset. But Delay demystified talent. One student was sure he couldn’t play a piece as fast as Itzhak Perlman. So she didn’t let him see the metronome until he had achieved it. ‘I know so surely that if he had

been handling that metronome, as he had approached that number he would have said to himself, I can never do this as fast as Itzhak Perlman, and he would have stopped himself.’ (Dweck 199)

Delay taught that hard work is rewarded with hard work which leads to unimaginable results. Dweck states,

For her, teaching was about watching something grow before her very eyes. And the challenge was to figure out how to make it happen. If students didn’t play in tune, it was because they hadn’t learned how...And she usually found a way. (Dweck 195)

As Lipman states in her article, Mr. K. made the sky the limit, but did not give a compliment greater than “not bad.”

### ***Stress Makes You Strong***

Stress can be a great motivating factor and, if handled well by the student, can assist in promoting consistent progress. This writer often worries when encountered with a complacent (in a manner of being unconcerned) student during a music lesson as this type of student feels no urgency, nor a sense of accountability to work hard, improve or try to please his teachers. It is of great importance for a good teacher to enforce a high level of expectancy in the student in order to get results immediately. This writer always knows whether or not good teaching and/or study habits have been established by prior

teachers during the very first music lesson. Those students who feel stressed are the ones who will be working hard and producing great results on the piano, while those who appear unconcerned will just not care whether they improve or not, thus resulting in little or no practicing at all. As the saying goes, “If you want something done, give it to the busiest person.” It is this type of person who will get the job done because their own internal stress will not waste time but will maximize their day to be as productive as possible, attaining positive results. The stress of discipline is a great gift that is passed on from a great teacher to his student. Therefore it is vital for this ingredient to be present during music lessons. Being tough on a student actually makes them stronger in the long run. Lipman states in her article, a teacher must be “cold, unyielding, and kind of scary” (Lipman, *The Wall Street Journal* C3). But collectively, these traits convey something very different; confidence. At its core is the belief, the faith, in the students’ ability to do better. There is something to be said about a teacher who is demanding and tough, not because he thinks students will never learn, but because he is so absolutely certain they will. Spanswick sums up a good teacher as being “lively, entertaining, patient, experienced, quick-thinking, flexible, willing to try a new approach, kind yet firm, encouraging, a careful listener, fresh, interested, conscientious and must love their subject” (Spanswick location 569).

In summation, parents should be wary of any teacher that exhibits less than the description above. A good piano teacher is extremely hard to find. When parents find an exceptional teacher, they should make the investment in their child. Then they should

spend time practicing with their child, asking questions, being involved every day, and should see their unassuming child turn into a confident, exceptional musician. Parents will be happier with the results than with any other investment they make for their child's future.

As we shall see in the next section, it is equally important to buy a real piano.

### **The Piano**

The instrument on which a student practices is very important. Since the dropout rate for private piano students is so high (referring back to Chen's findings in Chapter One), whether or not a student's family should purchase a piano is always a difficult conversation for the piano teacher to broach. There are a wide range of opinions, but all piano teachers would prefer that their students practice at home on a piano rather than a keyboard. This writer has found that the reality is, as stated previously, most parents who start their children with piano lessons see music as an extracurricular activity, not a required subject, such as math or reading. This view is what creates the difficulty a parent has in deciding whether or not to buy a piano or a keyboard. If a parent has every intention of making piano lessons a lifelong endeavor, then a piano becomes an immediate, must-have purchase. If a parent states, "Well, I have no room in my home right now, and I want to wait and see whether my child will *want* to continue taking lessons before I buy," then a teacher knows that the parent has not taken the lessons

seriously enough to commit to them for the long-run. Many times these same parents soon look to purchase a piano--usually within the first year of lessons--after realizing the importance of music lessons. It is very hard for a teacher to tell the parent what to do, but a good teacher will almost always say something to the effect: "I cannot tell you to go out and buy a piano instead of a keyboard, but I can tell you that if you make the commitment now to purchase a piano instead of a keyboard, your child will know instinctively that these lessons need to be taken more seriously." In pianist Julia Lind's article, "Piano, Digital Piano or Keyboard: Which is Best for a Child's Piano Lessons?" she states,

People have many reasons for not wanting to purchase a piano which are: pianos are very expensive, parents don't want to invest in a piano in case their child ends up not liking piano lessons, there is no room for a full sized piano, and pianos may be too loud for people living in apartments or town homes. (Lind 1-2)

The only excuse that a good teacher would accept in their own mind is the last reason on this list. Tenants sharing the same space as a piano student may not want to hear the painful process of attempting to create lovely piano music in their dwelling place even if they love to listen to music. The process of getting to the lovely-sounding music is not always very lovely. In this instance, a digital piano (with a headphone jack so the student can wear headphones to hear themselves practice) will almost always be recommended over a piano.



“A digital piano is always better than an electronic keyboard because: they have 88 keys, the keys are weighted similar to that of a real piano, and they have the same sized keys as a piano (most keyboards have smaller sized keys)” (Lind 2). When purchasing a digital piano, it is mandatory to also have a stand and a bench to go with it. This writer has seen parents try to save money by pulling up a stool to the kitchen table (just one of many sad examples) which results in extremely poor and incorrect posture. It is important for the digital piano to also be touch sensitive so the student can learn proper dynamics in order to play with musicality. Most importantly, according to Janice A. from her Internet article “Piano vs. Keyboard,” when buying a digital piano, “go for the ones with the least amount of buttons! More buttons, more sounds, sound recorders...all those things don’t help your child! Those extra bits won’t get used. You’ll only need the basic piano sound” (A. 5). As long as the digital piano is as close to a real piano as possible, the student can improve.

In an actual house or an apartment/condominium dwelling where traveling sound is not an issue, a piano should become a necessity. This writer believes there should be no question that an instrument should be bought, only what type of piano should be bought. If a parent is sincerely serious about their child taking piano lessons, then a piano should be part of the décor of the home. In today’s culture, where people have little reservations about buying multiple televisions, electronics, new cars and fancy phones, there are very few excuses for a parent not to want to purchase a piano for their child.

The likelihood of a child wanting to continue piano lessons with a real piano in their home to practice on is far greater than one who is practicing on a keyboard.

“Students who practice on electronic keyboards have a much higher dropout rate than those who practice on a piano” (Lind 2). There are several reasons for this, all of which point to the unspoken psychological implications an astute child will perceive immediately. This list is endless and applies to all areas of intense discipline, not just music. Children know the severity of importance based on how the parents holistically act toward the endeavor.

When a child is aware that a piano could have been bought, but a keyboard was purchased instead, the message is clear. The parent is immediately diminishing the seriousness of the discipline. In addition, for most children, any keyboard becomes a toy with all of its gadgets, bells, whistles and electronic noise-making possibilities. The parent would need to hover over the child, nagging them to stop playing with all of the tempting devices in order to just get the child to practice in piano mode.

Since the parent opted for a keyboard instead of an actual piano, the child is also aware that the endeavor of practicing and taking piano lessons is expendable and can be just as easily removed from the house as it was installed. The actual purchase of the piano is similar to that of a sofa or dining room table; it is understood without question, that this new item is meant to be a permanent fixture in one’s home, implying an expectation that it should be used regularly.

All of this having been said, once a parent has found the right piano teacher and has spent good money to buy and move the best piano suitable for their child to their home, the process of learning the piano should become a productive one, full of learning and discipline.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **READING AND COUNTING MUSIC**

Learning how to read and count music, the skills that consume the majority of time during beginner to intermediate piano lessons, are much more concrete than most of the other skills needed to learn the piano, skills like phrasing or dynamics. These two--reading and counting--often become the most frustrating basic piano skills for many students. Classical piano, unlike other genres such as rock or jazz, require the piano student to play the exact note and rhythm written on the page at all times. In jazz or rock music, there is a great deal of improvisation (creating music without preparation of exact notes and rhythm) which allows the student to be more free and spontaneous. Most classical piano pieces involve playing the same music by deceased classical composers in the precise way that all previous pianists have played them, with the correct notes and rhythm found on the page. In jazz and rock, no two pieces are remotely alike and any pianist is allowed to add or subtract notes at liberty.

The greatest range in learning curves among piano students always appears in music reading and rhythmic skills than any other skill. A student's learning curve is the speed in which they learn the assigned material. It is important to remember that reading and counting music is merely a skill. People want to believe that some musicians have a great talent at being able to sight-read any piece of music. Being able to read and count music fluently only comes with consistent practice.

As stated in chapter two, this problem can only be eliminated by finding a good piano teacher first. Spanswick emphasizes having a good teacher right from the start so the basics of piano are well learned, “Many beginners will only learn piano basics for a while (and then possibly quit) but the problem is that in teaching the so-called basics you are already setting in stone all sorts of important aspects like posture, hand positions, fingering and basic rhythm grasp. If these are taught incorrectly or skirted over during the early stages, it will be very difficult for the pupil to make any serious progress” (Spanswick location 436-443).

Some students will almost always be better at reading and counting than others, but that does not make the better note readers more advanced than the student who plays music by ear. Even those who play by ear need to count correctly. Once a piano student can read and count without assistance from a teacher, they can truly accomplish anything they want on the instrument. This writer has seen an entire new world of joy has been unleashed in them and most students at that point continue lessons so they can become an intermediate or even an advanced player.

### **Reading Music**

It is heartbreaking to hear hundreds of people say they could not learn how to play the piano because they did not learn how to read music well enough to do so. This is a great tragedy because almost anyone can learn to read piano music with a simple,

effective and repetitious method. If one can walk or ride a bike, they can read music. All that is needed is a little time every day, mindful focusing, and a consistent work ethic. According to pianist and teacher Shawn Cheek after twenty years of teaching, he has concluded that, “It takes no musical talent whatsoever to memorize the notes on the staff, count, and push the right keys at the right time” (Cheek 1). It is important to note that he states this in bold in his two page article.

Learning how to read music is similar to learning basic arithmetic. There are several mnemonics that aid students with reading the lines and spaces of the treble and bass clef staves. Mnemonics are memory devices that help a person to remember a detail about a particular topic. Sometimes they can be in the form of a recitation. An example of this would be the mnemonic to remember which months of the year have 30 or 31 days (“Thirty days has September, April, June and November, all the rest have 31...”) In the case of music, the first letter of each word helps to recall the name of the note on a line or space. Mnemonics for the clefs include:

- *Treble clef spaces from bottom to top: F-A-C-E*
- *Treble clef lines from bottom to top: Every Good Bird Does Fly*  
 (taking the first letter of each word represents the letter name of the line: **E-G-B-D-F**). Other mnemonics for the treble clef lines are: **Every Good Boy Does Fine**, or **Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge**.
- *Bass clef spaces from bottom to top: All Cows Eat Grass (A-C-E-G).*

- *Bass clef lines* from bottom to top: **Great Big Dogs Fight Animals**  
**(G-B-D-F-A)**.

There are many students who enjoy making up their own mnemonics and several educators use different ones that become more personal to the student or the class they are teaching. For example, for the treble clef lines the students could use mnemonics like **Elmo Gave Burt Dried Flowers**, or **Elephants Go Bouncing Down Freeways**. Most music teachers will state that the way in which they remember the note does not matter, as long as they read the correct note. Whichever mnemonic is used, the student should remember that the first letter of each word represents the letter name of either a line or a space of the treble or bass clef staff.

This writer has come across several virtuoso teachers who prefer that their students never rely on these or any other mnemonics to remember the letter names of the lines and spaces on the treble and bass clef. The reasoning is that the child may use these mnemonics as a crutch and, over time, it could slow down the speed at which a student can read a note. This writer has noted that this may be true because there are no mnemonics for the upper and lower leger lines of both the treble and bass clefs (the notes above and below the staff). Another common explanation used is that when a student learns a language's alphabet, they are expected to see the letter and immediately sound it out in any given word, thus after a short time, the child can read without faltering or slowing down to decipher the letter and sound. It is a hard decision to make as a teacher

because some children respond to mnemonics and some do not. This writer introduces students to both methods and then sees which one works best for each student.

As mentioned above, the student should practice reading music every day with drilling and constant repetition of the same notes in a given piece. A great way to test the student is by photocopying the piece the student is working on five or six times and then have the student write out the notes in pencil on the photocopy of the treble and bass clef. If someone in the child's home knows how to read the treble and bass clef, then another effective way to test the child's reading is to have that person sit next to the student and recite the notes one by one out loud in the order they will be played on the piano. There are many methods of teaching students how to learn the note names of the treble and bass clef. There are flash cards which have the note on one side and the letter name on the other for students who need to work by themselves. There are even games on electronic devices where note recognition is the only way to advance in the video game. To master note reading on the piano, it is necessary to practice this every day.

This same approach in repeating the same sheet of an exercise many times every day was perfected by Japanese math teacher, Toru Kumon, who wanted to help his son do better in school. As always, "necessity is the mother of invention." Thus, the world's leading supplemental program in mastering math was invented. As Joanne Lipman, Mr. Kupchynsky, others, and this writer know so well, the key to Kumon's method is completely based on daily drilling and repetition of the subject. As David Russell states in his book, *Every Child an Achiever, A Parent's Guide to the Kumon Method*, "Kumon is a



structured supplement to regular school work. It is designed for parents who want to be certain that their children have the maximum chance to develop their potential as learners” (Russell 20). The child does anywhere from about 1-20 pages of Kumon math worksheets every day beginning at a level that they can do perfectly and quickly. As each day passes, the level of math gets incrementally harder, then right at the point when it becomes too hard for the student, the center director has the child go back 50-100 pages in the level to repeat the same pages over again. Some children only need to repeat pages twice while others need to repeat them five, six, even seven times. Children with a strong learning curve (not “smart” per se) can progress faster and move from level to level with greater ease while children with a slow learning curve (not “dumb” per se) may need to progress slower and repeat more often.

This Kumon method for math can be directly applied to reading music. This writer recommends that parents make several photocopies of their child’s music that they are working on and actually sit every day to write out the letter name of the notes above or below the staff as good note recognition practice. Applying this constant drilling and repetitive exercise to reading music has almost always been successful among all students for this writer.

In the beginning, using the above mentioned mnemonics will help considerably when writing down the letter names of the notes on the music. Sometimes, to assist a student’s learning curve, saying the letter name out loud while writing it down is more effective. If a student does this every time they learn a new piece of music, they will

eventually begin to not only read music, but to sight read music. Once this is accomplished, a good teacher can begin to work on harder aspects of playing the piano such as counting and dynamics.

It is interesting to note that students who give up on reading music really are not giving up because they cannot actually do this simple task, they may be giving up because there is not a parent at home pushing them to practice the drill of repeating the reading music exercise. Spanswick feels that it is up to the parent to help get the child organized for such tasks, “This is where parental guidance comes in and this can be a crucial factor in the success of a child’s piano playing” (Spanswick location 960). Cheek recommends that parents use the flash cards with their children and practice reading music together, like reading a book at night before bedtime. “You will really know if the student knows the note on the staff or not,” (Cheek 1-2) with parental help.

It is safe to say that learning to read music in this manner is truly boring as Cheek states “it is pure data entry, boring, but necessary,” (Cheek 2) just as the students at the local Kumon center in town might state as well. This writer has had her children attend the Kumon math and reading centers and, except for maybe the first month or so when repeating the Kumon sheets was easy, they have wanted to quit but have continued for years because of the continuous work and prompting of their parents. This brings us back to what has been previously stated: reading music only requires work and persistence. The learning curve of the child will determine whether they learn to read music quickly or

will take more time to absorb and retain. Nonetheless, the end result is the same, once learned, the world of classical music repertoire is open and waiting to be read.

### **Counting Music**

Learning how to count music is simply done in the same manner as reading music. First, a student needs to learn the simplest note values on the piano, then they practice counting them by repeating the rhythm every day in the piece the student is currently working on. Most teachers begin with teaching the absolute value of the note and its corresponding rest (referring to the fact that all note values are counted against the quarter note receiving one beat in any given measure):

- The quarter note and quarter rest = 1 beat
- The half note and half rest = 2 beats
- The dotted half note and dotted half rest = 3 beats
- The whole note and whole rest = 4 beats

Having a student clap their hands together while counting out loud is very effective as well, similar to reading the note names out loud when learning how to read music. A student should do this by first clapping and counting the right hand and then doing the same for the left hand. Using the senses of sight (reading of the rhythm), touch (clapping of the hands together) and sound (that of the hands clapping and the voice of the child speaking simultaneously) create a strong learning tool. Since piano does not

require the use of a student's mouth (like the voice or the flute, for example) the student can also count out loud while playing the notes on the piano at the same time to double the effectiveness of learning the correct rhythm of the piece being practiced.

First and foremost, a student should understand that musicians need to learn how to read and count music. It is not easy to read and count music fluently enough to sight-read a desired piece at the beginner to intermediate level of piano playing. Deliberate practice is required in order to be able to execute this well. Different than just practice alone, deliberate practice means a student maintains the highest intellectual concentration that she can manage for as long as possible. This can also be called mindful practicing or quality practicing, not just spinning your wheels practicing which, after hours of playing, the student has learned nothing. Barry Green uses the term awareness in his chapter of mindful practicing.

Our awareness, the simple quality of attention that we pay to events, people and things, is greatest when all our faculties are working and we are paying attention to what's happening. It makes use of all our senses, taking its cues from what we see and imagine, hear and feel. Awareness shows us what feels and works best for us (Green 36-37).

This will make a student's practice habits efficient and not wasteful.

In addition, a metronome is almost always mandatory to help keep time when practicing late beginner to intermediate music, otherwise a student will usually have difficulty trying to play evenly in more advanced music. When to introduce a metronome

into a students' daily rhythmic practicing depends on the students' internal steadiness of rhythm. Practicing with a metronome is somewhat similar to that of trying to look up a word in the dictionary. If a child has no idea how to spell the word at all, it will be almost impossible to find the word in the dictionary to check its spelling. There needs to be some semblance of how to spell the word in order to even try to find it alphabetically in order to correct its spelling. The same is true when working with a metronome. If a student has no idea of how to keep the correct time of the music, then working with a metronome will not help to keep consistent and accurate timing. Spanswick agree's stating, "Personally, I think beginners should not really use a metronome because not only do they need to develop an 'inner' pulse themselves but they will find such a device difficult to play along to at a time when they are getting to grips with the basics" (Spanswick location 1146).

As mentioned in the section on reading music, students may quit because they have not been pushed and/or encouraged to put in the required time of deliberate practice and repetition of the skills to master timing over an extended period of time. Since learning how to read and count music is a major part of learning how to play the piano, it is easy for a student to get discouraged and want to quit. Students often feel that if they begin a task that they have a desire to complete, and it becomes too difficult, then they must not be good at it, or not talented enough to do it. This is incorrect because it seldom requires talent to read and count music. If a child can read a simple toddler board book, they should be able to read music. If a child can count from one through four, they should

be able to count their music. As already stated, it is simply a skill that gets better when repeatedly practiced correctly. Reading and counting piano music is more challenging than reading and counting music on other instruments (all of which are one-clef instruments) because the student is required to read two clefs (the treble and bass clefs) at the same time. Each clef is read differently. Often equated to a foreign language, reading two clefs of music, therefore, is similar to reading two foreign languages at one time. In addition, both hands often play different rhythms at the same time. There are very few tasks that people physically do which require both hands to do different movements at the same time. Piano requires a strong sense of coordination in order to read and count both clefs simultaneously. This may be one of the reasons why piano students often find a second instrument much easier to grasp. Nonetheless, this is one of the salient reasons why piano is most often considered the classical music foundation for all instruments and musical education.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **TEACHING THE FOUR MIND STYLES**

In Chapter 3, learning how to read and count beginner to intermediate classical piano music was introduced. As mentioned in that chapter, the speed of processing affects the student's learning curve considerably. In addition, the way in which the student processes the information must also be considered. This is because there are many different learning styles for many different kinds of students. This chapter will divide the beginner piano student into four general categories in order to show how the challenging process of reading and counting a piece of music can be successfully taught using Anthony Gregorc's four mind styles. It is a simple methodology which takes the basic task of how to read, count and learn music to a more individualized, targeted teaching level. The words used to teach the lesson plans for these four learning styles are only a few examples of how to proceed with each student that falls predominantly into each category. It should, by no means, be the only way to verbally proceed to teach them accordingly. The suggestions in this chapter are merely examples of how to proceed when teaching the student who predominantly fits into that category.

It is important to note that this is this writer's practical application of Gregorc's Mind Styles rubric for piano instruction. It has been successfully implemented in this writer's studio when needed as well as with this writer's own children.

This chapter presents suggestions on how students may positively react in each category to help them learn how to read, count and practice with more ease and success. The personalized approach presented here is in addition to the straightforward method introduced in Chapter 3 of reading and counting their music. To this writer's knowledge, there are no other applications of this kind for musical instruction.

In order to determine what mind style a person may be, an instrument (or tool) called the Gregorc Style Delineator needs to be completed (Gregorc, *Adult Guide* 9-11) (please see chart/test 1 on pgs. 163-165). This tool is to only be used for adults to access their own mind style. A teacher should give their own assessment of what they may think a students' mind style is in their classroom. It stands to reason that it is easier for a private piano teacher to access a private students' mind style because they only need to teach one student at a time. The Style Delineator tool "was developed to aid an individual to recognize and identify the channels through which he/she receives and expresses information efficiently, economically, and effectively" (Gregorc, *Style Delineator* 1).

On Anthony Gregorc's *Mind Styles* chart, there are four combinations of learning styles that describe how an individual comprehends and processes information. Among all students, "there is indeed a common sense shared at a basic level. These quantitative differences account for our specialized abilities and our inability, beyond the basics, to understand and relate to all others equally well" (Gregorc, *FAQ's Book* 4). Authors such as Cynthia Ulrich Tobias and this writer draw upon the academic research and



experimentation of Dr. Anthony F. Gregorc in order to incorporate new methods of teaching specific subjects. His research on teaching styles has been implemented solely for formative academic school subjects; therefore this dissertation is the first attempt to use Gregorc's work for teaching music. In his book, "*Gregorc Style Delineator: Development Technical, and Administration Manual*," and "*An Adult's Guide to Style*," he breaks these learning styles into four categories:

1. Dominant Concrete Sequential
2. Dominant Abstract Sequential
3. Dominant Abstract Random
4. Dominant Concrete Random

Gregorc explains many times throughout his research that it is nearly impossible to neatly fit any one person into just one of the above categories. The fact that "every individual has the ability to use all four style channels, makes the point that there is no 'pure type'" (Gregorc, *Adult Guide* 41). "An individual can be high or low in one or all four of the scales representing the constructs" (Gregorc, *Style Delineator* 9).

The use of the word dominant, as the first word for each category, only implies that most people naturally and predominantly fit into one of them. Many individuals have characteristic tendencies in each one, but most often a person will clearly be dominant in one over the others. This writer understands the word "dominant," to mean a person's majority of traits or where a student's forte falls.

The title words “concrete,” and “abstract,” are categorization terms for a student’s perceptual quality. This is how they receive and process information that is given to them.

Gregorc defines his perceptual quality terms as follows:

**Concrete** is the quality that enables you to register information directly

through your five senses: sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing.

When you are using your concrete ability, you are dealing with the

obvious, the here and now. You are not looking for hidden

meanings, or making relationships between ideas and concepts. *It*

*is what it is.*

**Abstract** is the quality that allows you to visualize, to conceive ideas, to

understand or believe that which you cannot actually see. When

you are using your abstract quality, you are using your intuition,

your imagination, and you are looking beyond “what is” to the

more subtle implications. *It is not always what it seems.*

(Gregorc, *Adult Guide 5*).

As mentioned above, not all students neatly fit into one category; therefore, all will not perfectly fit into one perceptual quality either. Gregorc’s models are so thorough that he successfully took his theory deeper to include terms for ordering ability as well as their perceptual quality. This is what makes his research so original and one of the best methodologies for the purpose of applying academic approaches to the field of musical education in this paper.

The title words, “sequential,” and “random,” are categorization terms for a student’s ability to organize information in their brain after they have processed instructions from their teacher. This is how they order the information once it has been received and processed. Gregorc defines his ordering ability terms as follows:

**Sequential** ordering ability allows your mind to organize information in a linear, step-by-step manner. When using your sequential ability, you are following a logical train of thought, a traditional approach to dealing with information. You may also prefer to have a plan and to follow it, rather than relying on impulse.

**Random** ordering ability let’s your mind organize information by chunks, and in no particular order. When you are using your random ability, you may often be able to skip steps in a procedure and still produce the desired result. You may even start in the middle, or at the end, and work backwards. You may also prefer your life to be more impulsive or spur of the moment than planned (Gregorc, *Adult Guide* 5-6).

As one can see, combining the four terms creates four clear and comprehensive combinations of the strongest perceptual and ordering abilities of each student. It should be noted that all students in each mind style should always practice the above Kumon style reading and rhythm exercises first before applying their specific mind style to practicing. The reading and counting drills of Chapter 3 are a basic foundation for

everyone's practicing. The mind style method is a more detailed and thorough form of teaching since rhythm, counting and reading music gets progressively harder as the student plays more beginner to beginner/intermediate music. After the student has established the routine of the Kumon style of reading and counting, then the teacher can assess the child's processing and teach in a mind style manner.

Gregorc feels that teachers can empower their students by implementing a successful mode of teaching through his mind style models. Teaching through the lense of these models can make a student feel that, "you are somebody, your mental design has meaning, you are wanted and loved , and that your life makes a difference on this planet" (Gregorc, *FAQ's Book* 15). This is how every beginner/intermediate piano student should feel.

### **The Dominant Concrete Sequential Student**

Let us begin with the students who predominantly fit into the Dominant Concrete Sequential group. The following points are how these students produce the best results:

- When they apply ideas in a practical way they thrive.
- It is necessary for them to organize each task in order to proceed successfully.
- They feel the need to fine-tune ideas to make them more efficient, economical, etc.

- They have a talent for producing concrete products from abstract ideas.
- They usually work well with time limits. (Gregorc, *Mind Styles 1*)

The descriptions below indicate what makes the most sense to a dominant concrete sequential student:

- They mostly enjoy working systematically and/or step by step.
- They pay close attention to details.
- Having a schedule to follow makes even the most challenging task simple for them.
- They naturally use literal interpretations.
- The details of knowing what is expected of them motivates them to work hard.
- They thrive on establishing routines, and ways of doing things.

(Gregorc, *Mind Styles 1*)

Important emotional traits that are common among dominant concrete sequential students and which are necessary to keep in mind when teaching them are described below:

- They get frustrated or impatient easily and quickly if they feel that their precious learning time is being wasted with opinions and emotion.
- They can get angry if they repeatedly cannot complete what is expected of them in a designated time limit. Even though they do work well within time

limits, and can work quickly, they should be allowed extra time without penalty if needed.

- They can hold a grudge if the person teaching them is not attentive to their exact needs.
- Although they seem confident and in control at all times, the dominant concrete sequential student's feelings will get hurt if the person teaching them gets insulting or assumes that they are naturally insensitive in any way.
- They can be very quiet and at peace for an extended period of time.
- They can compartmentalize very well, so if something emotionally disturbing has happened in their life, they can still focus on the task at hand with great intensity.

Children in this category would work very well with an extremely detailed and specific practice schedule. Let us take one piece and show how Gregorc's styles can be applied to teaching piano during a lesson. The example will be the *Minuet in G*, by Johann Sebastian Bach (Please see sheet music Diagram 1, p. 166). Most people know this piece very well whether or not they are trained classical musicians. In addition, many piano students at some point during their training show a desire to play and perform this particular piece. It is considered a beginner, but not a basic beginner piece, so that even a student who has only studied piano for a few months can master it with the proper practicing. Teachers usually assign this piece to a student who has a relatively good

control of playing both hands together comfortably. This control can be acquired fairly quickly with a conscientious piano teacher and a student who practices efficiently.

The *Minuet in G* requires the early piano student to play hands together, but not the same notes at the same time like a basic beginner piece would be played. As one can see, in the *Minuet in G*, each hand is playing different notes with different rhythms going in different directions. When a student hears the piece they usually think, “That’s not so hard,” but then when they sit to read it, they feel stumped and disappointed because they cannot immediately read and play it the way they have heard it. Now, although most piano students are taught the above memory phrases, they still get stumped when trying to read the Bach *Minuet in G*, for the first time.

This leads us to how Gregorc’s theories can help reduce the stress behind learning how to play such a piece and get the anxious student quickly and happily playing music.

It would be best for the dominant concrete sequential student to practice reading the *Minuet in G* two measures at a time, first hands alone, then together. This student should practice each set of two measures until both measures are smooth with their hands together. The *Minuet* has two sections separated by a repeat sign. For the first week, the piano teacher should assign the dominant concrete sequential student only the first half of the piece. It contains 16 measures; therefore, it would require the student to practice a minimum of twenty minutes a day to get through the appropriate practicing amount in a seven day period in order to complete the assignment properly. The kind of practice

schedule that would most appropriately agree with the dominant concrete sequential student can be seen in Appendix A.

Most piano teachers will see the following lessons as a test of hard work and talent for the student. The teacher may wonder, “Did this child practice and prepare enough?” or “Let’s see what this child can and cannot do.” If the teacher assigned the right way to practice, like the lesson plan described in Appendix A, then the dominant concrete sequential student should have practiced enough and most likely practiced very hard and diligently as well. The question that the teacher should be asking is, “Did I assign the right method of learning to keep this dominant concrete sequential piano student motivated?” This is because the dominant concrete sequential student wants their teacher to tell them exactly what to do. “They like to have the teacher be in charge of the class. They virtually expect to sit at the knee of their teachers, pick their brain, and receive practical information” (Gregorc, *Inside Styles* 187). In addition, these children are almost always conscientious, they “expect to perform well without verbal encouragement. They are driven by their own sense of what good work is” (Gregorc, *Inside Styles* 187). If the piano teacher is specific and organized about the lesson plan for this child, then it will produce a win-win situation for all involved, the child most importantly, the teacher and the parent as well.

An appropriate greeting for this student would go something like this: “Hello, how did your week of practicing go with the seven day planner that I assigned you to complete?” Any other question outside this subject may not get a good response from the



dominant concrete sequential student. After teaching for many years, this writer's experience has been that this student wants to discuss the task at hand. This student's validation will come from impressing the teacher with progress made from the day planner outlined for him.

They do not need a compliment to encourage them for future learning and practicing. "If they receive no criticism, they assume everything is okay, 'No news is good news'" (Gregorc, *Inside Styles* 187).

Since the dominant concrete sequential child loves detail, it is up to the teacher to isolate just the measures where the mistakes of wrong notes were made and focus on them until the student has mastered correcting his mistakes. By the end of the lesson, this student will feel good and be productive again. The teacher should give another extremely specific day plan for the following week based on the progress of the student's week of practicing and the lesson.

In essence, teaching the dominant concrete sequential student is very easy because the lesson plans are very black and white. The only challenge in teaching this type of student may be setting aside enough time at every lesson in order to write down the day planner or the detailed list of what to do for the student.

These students like lists and are very organized, so it is up to the teacher to give a practical list of what to do and in what order to do them. Since this writer considers herself to be a dominant abstract random, teaching this kind of student may become difficult at times because a strong emotional self-restraint needs to be present during the

lesson. If the teacher “is a natural, dominant concrete sequential, he/she will express him/herself via that point most of the time. . .if the person is a dominant abstract random with little concrete sequential orientation, he/she must decide how to ‘fill’ the demands” of their concrete sequential student (Gregorc, *FAQ’s Book 9*). It takes great restraint on this teacher’s behalf not to ask questions like, “How do you feel or think about my day planner?” or “Do you like the way in which I am explaining things to you?” or “Are you happy with your practicing?” The concrete dominant sequential student may not have thought about any of these questions, nor would they be able to answer them if taken off guard during the lesson. It is always important for the teacher of this type of student to remove her emotional side from the lesson and focus on getting the student to happily complete the task at hand. In addition, if the teacher is not predominantly a dominant concrete sequential person by nature, constantly writing weekly practice lists with specific instructions can become tedious. But, as always, it is the job of the piano teacher to do this for the musical progress of this student to continue successfully. As the teacher, “it is critical that they know their own minds and are conscious of what they are doing and why they are doing it” (Gregorc, *FAQ’s Book 9*).

Since all students do not fit neatly into one of Gregorc’s categories, it is normal for the dominant concrete sequential student to show his emotional side from time to time. If and when the student slips into one of the other types, it is necessary for the teacher to recognize that and treat the isolated moment from that perspective. The teacher must follow the lead of the student at all times. Since the dominant concrete sequential is

very black and white oriented, it is almost always evident when he slips into another learning type during the lesson. It is usually evident when they begin to get more emotional than usual or begin to speak in vague or obtuse terms. This writer has mostly experienced this when a child tends to be too tired, or has not practiced enough to perform well at the lesson.

In addition, when they do not act as a typical concrete dominant sequential student, the teacher should not dwell on the fact that they slipped into another category. These students quickly move back into their natural state of learning very quickly. “Literal” and “detailed” are the best rules of thumb when teaching most dominant concrete sequential students.

### **The Dominant Abstract Random Student**

It may appear that the dominant abstract random student could very well be the opposite from the dominant concrete sequential, so let us take the same piece of music and teach it from an opposite perspective. The reason why it is good to use the same piece is to successfully juxtapose the teaching style of one type over the other. It should be remembered that it is up to the teacher to teach to the learning style of the student. Comparing the four different teaching styles using the same music can set an overt example of how to conduct a lesson depending on the student’s categorical learning style.

This is how dominant abstract random students produce the best results:

- They consistently listen sincerely to others.
- It is easy for them to understand feelings and emotions.
- They naturally can focus on themes and ideas.
- It is their general nature to bring harmony to group situations.
- They strive to have a good rapport with almost anybody even if they need to sacrifice themselves in doing so.
- They try to always recognize the emotional needs of others.

(Gregorc, *Mind Styles 2*)

The following points describe what makes the most sense to a dominant abstract random student:

- They mostly personalize learning to their own experiences and feelings on the topic.
- They can have broad, general principles.
- They thrive on maintaining friendly relationships with everyone whenever possible.
- It is common for them to participate enthusiastically in projects they believe in.
- The main goal for them mostly is about emphasizing high morale.
- They make most decisions by deciding with the heart, not the head

(Gregorc, *Mind Styles 2*)

Important emotional traits that are common among dominant abstract random students and which are necessary to keep in mind when teaching them are described below:

- They rarely intentionally do or say anything to hurt other people at any time.
- They do not like being ganged up upon. If there is something about them that more than one person doesn't like, two or more people should not speak to them about it at the same time. Individual conversations are more effective.
- It is important for those educating them not to ever point out what is wrong in a confrontational manner because they will become hurt and may no longer trust that person.
- They are themselves almost all of the time and do not/cannot put up appropriate appearances without great effort.
- They are almost always well-adjusted emotionally and want to be friends with everyone they know. As a result, they are usually very bad at judging who their real friends are and can get hurt too easily because of this.
- They usually know they are good people and feel offended when someone gets upset by their words or actions because they never intentionally want to hurt anyone. If they do, they are quick to apologize even at the expense of their own pride.
- It is easy for them to dwell on any immediate emotional upset, which prevents them from giving any task at hand its full concentration.

According to Tobias, unlike the dominant concrete sequential student, the dominant abstract random child is, “somewhat unstructured and free-flowing, and they often struggle when it comes to keeping a consistent schedule or detailed routine” (Tobias 54). It is rare to expect a dominant abstract random student to follow such specific day plans with an exact practice schedule as outlined above for the dominant concrete sequential student. This kind of student may feel incredibly overwhelmed with such an outline and would most likely not follow, read or use it at any point during the course of the practice week. “They prefer guidelines with minimal structure and can become disruptive in tightly structured situations” (Gregorc, *Inside Styles* 188).

A weekly lesson plan for the dominant abstract random student would not include a day planner for the *Minuet in G*. The teacher should give general instructions, but with a focus on completing the task with as many right notes as possible. Wrong notes hit in the passages where both hands are playing in opposite directions, should be expected and accepted by the teacher after the first week of practicing. Writing the assignment in paragraph form usually works best. In addition, only assigning half of the *Minuet in G* is cutting off the meaning behind playing the piece as a whole. This student should try to practice the entire piece as much as possible.

The kind of practice schedule that would most appropriately agree with the dominant abstract random student can be seen in Appendix B.

Instructions can be verbal and/or written. The teacher should try to make sure that the dominant abstract random student understands the given assignment before leaving

the lesson. Too many exact written rules may eventually be ignored. It is important for the teacher to recognize which instructions should be verbal and which written ones will be most effective. The student should verbally repeat back to the teacher the expected practicing for the week. Remember that it will most likely be paraphrased, but as long as it is what the teacher expects for the following week, communication has been accomplished.

It is important for the teacher to have this student practice in phrases that can be sung at every lesson. If needed, the phrases can be practiced in four or eight bar sections, but should not be cut off in the middle of any phrase. Dissecting the piece would make little sense to the dominant abstract random child and would just make them feel as though the piece no longer has a greater purpose. After one week of practicing the piece, the student should hopefully return with having made some progress, but more importantly with a happy heart. If the student sits at the piano and begins to play poorly, then the teacher needs to know first what they found upsetting or frustrating about their overall week of practicing. It usually has nothing to do with too many mistakes, but most likely has to do with how someone in their home reacted to their practice habits or lack thereof, or mistakes they made, etc. This does not mean to say that a dominant abstract random student would not want to play precisely; they often do. They are “inner motivated, using personal criteria for achievement” (Gregorc, *Inside Styles* 188). If their emotional needs are not met, they most likely will allow some notes, fingerings or rhythms to slip past them. If the overall structure of the phrase and the singing quality of

the piece has not been disrupted, then this student most likely will be satisfied. The main reason for this has little to do with the child's intelligence. It has to do with the fact that they usually are not perfectionists (which is often a common trait found among dominant concrete sequential students). The musicality of the piece and the emotion it would set off for the listeners are far more important. If a parent or sibling in the home invalidates their hard work by pointing out all of their mistakes, it will only discourage and sadden the dominant abstract random piano student.

In addition, if something outside the realm of their musical world has upset them (anything that someone said or did to them that they can't get off their mind); it will most likely affect how they perform during their lesson. The teacher must be astute enough to notice any slight change in demeanor of this student and give them a small window of time in order to allow them to vent about the situation. Once the student feels validated by the teacher then the lesson can proceed productively.

From the very beginning of the lesson, the teacher must try to keep in focus the importance of the *Minuet in G* to the dominant abstract random student. If asked, this type of student will most likely have a deep feeling about the piece which will be of great importance to the student when it is successfully completed. Remember, music will be about feelings and emotions for this type of student.

These children usually need constant praise, reassurance and validation. Since the student has a very personal feeling about the *Minuet in G*, she most likely wants to learn this piece well in order to receive acceptance and praise from family and friends. "They



expect to perform well and look for subjective signals of approval and disapproval. A smile, a touch on the arm or a happy face” (Gregorc, *Inside Styles* 188). These children need to know that what they are learning is also important to the people they care about the most. At a separate time, when the dominant abstract random student is not within earshot, the teacher can guide the parents of this student on how to react to the student’s practicing at home. Some of the motivation for this type of student most certainly comes from a positive environment at home. The parents could express to this type of child how much they love the *Minuet in G*, and how excited they are that she is actually learning it for the next family function or performance opportunity. Spanswick states that “it goes without saying that you should continually encourage your child. When a child has accomplished something...please do listen, bolster and praise them. Your positive comments and remarks will have an amazing effect on your child” (Spanswick location 1021). It is usually very difficult for a teacher to get this child to progress without support from the student’s family.

### **The Dominant Concrete Random Student**

The dominant concrete random student is very similar to the abstract random student in that they “dislike step-by-step directions and procedures...they will begin taking a test without reading the directions” (Gregorc, *Inside Styles* 191). They are very tactile students. They “are problem-solving, application-oriented, experiential learners.

Experimentation is a key approach in their learning process” (Gregorc, *Inside Styles* 190).

This is how these students produce the best results:

- They are excellent at inspiring others to take action.
- It is natural for them to be able to see many options and solutions.
- They frequently contribute unusual and creative ideas.
- Visualizing the future is something which comes automatically to them when they begin to process the work they are doing.
- They often find a different way to do things, not because they strive to be different, but because their vision goes beyond what appears to be the only way to do something.
- The gift of their personalities is to accept many types of people and look beyond a person’s stereotype in society.
- They work best when thinking fast on their feet and love to take risks when an opportunity arises for them to do so. (Gregorc, *Mind Styles 2*)

Below describes what makes the most sense to a dominant concrete random student

- Using insight and instinct to solve problems based on what knowledge they already have is their primary strength.
- Working with general time frames rather than specific deadlines helps them to be more creative.
- They enjoy developing and testing many solutions.

- They most naturally enjoy using real-life experiences to learn.
- Trying something themselves rather than taking your word for it is what they most likely will do each and every time a task is put before them (Gregorc, *Mind Styles 2*).

Important emotional traits that are common among dominant concrete random students and which are necessary to keep in mind when teaching them are described below:

- They are carefree most of the time.
- They respond well to criticism, if presented in a constructive manner.
- They are almost always happy.
- They are adventurous.
- They are very emotionally simple but still need a great deal of love, affection, and praise.
- They have a playful personality most of the time.
- They can be immature, but still very smart at the same time.
- They need verbal repetition with almost everything to retain information.

This is the one type of student that is almost always unpredictable for the teacher, yet at the same time keeps actively engaged. Piano teachers most likely will feel that these students teach them part of the time instead. The best trait of this type of student is that they are not afraid to perform in front of an audience. Sometimes, they may be a little nervous at their first few performances, but once they see that it may be easy, they will

begin to look forward to and even revel in their public performances. They already are internal “dare-devils” who are not “afraid to try new things or take risks” (Gregorc, *Inside Styles* 190). Since the *Minuet in G* is a famous piece, it should be taught with a potential performance on the horizon for this type of student. They would thrive on performing something famous for an audience and take pleasure in knowing that their performance is affecting everyone positively. Since the *Minuet in G* is naturally broken into several small bar phrases, it can be easily taught to the student during the lesson by having the teacher play a phrase and the student repeat it back. These students are usually good at learning with as many of their senses as possible, so watching and hearing the phrases played by the teacher first can help them process twice as fast. Their aural skills are almost always their strongest sense and way of processing information. They usually like to make oral noises when doing their homework. If they play an instrument that does not require the use of their mouth, they like to sing as they play, or make other oral noises while practicing. This writer finds this to be a very fascinating phenomenon because visual playing is her strong suit and aural skills take an enormous amount of effort.

Sometimes it may appear that after the teacher states a simple set of instructions, they heard nothing, but once the teacher refocuses them immediately and has them repeat verbatim what was just said, they can process the spoken information right away. This is not because they are being disrespectful or disobedient. It is because their creative minds may be talking unnecessarily in their heads and they actually did not hear what was just said to them. Oftentimes, if a parent or teacher gets angry because they just told the

dominant concrete random student to do something, and the student literally did the opposite, the student gets offended and asks why the parent or teacher just yelled or became cross with them. This writer has always been baffled by this response because it appears that the dominant concrete random student is deliberately not listening. They just needed the parent or teacher to focus them first before giving instructions or a command. In actuality, the dominant concrete random student usually thrives on being a good listener and mostly wants to please their parents and educators, they “love to hear the sound of applause for their efforts” so if one or both get mad at them, they can feel offended (Gregorc, *Adult’s Guide* 38). One of the main reasons why they cannot hear instructions or commands immediately is because their imagination in their head blocks their outer aural senses. Their inner ear is usually perfect and is almost constantly working and forming sounds.

Sometimes, for this kind of student, sounds are not processed in a normal fashion. This is called Auditory Processing Disorder (APD). According to Dr. Jay Lucker, an audiologist and speech language pathologist from the National Coalition of Auditory Processing Disorders in America, it is “a neurological defect that affects how the brain processes spoken language. This makes it difficult for the child to process verbal instructions or even to filter out background noise” (Lucker NCAPD) 2-3. It has been referred to as “dyslexia for the ears” by many music teachers, including this writer.

It must be stated that this writer does not adhere to the majority of labels given to healthy children because she believes anything can be overcome with the proper drilling

and discipline. APD is quite common and in most cases goes completely unattended in most children. It is usually discovered when a child has been exposed to a very intense discipline such as private classical music lessons or when an extremely attentive parent notes that their child is not responding within a normal range. Many children grow up to be perfectly fine adults with APD and most are not aware they have an issue.

Although this writer has come across several students with APD they seem to most often fall into the dominant concrete random style and have some of the best musical ears. This is because they have an “adventurous, optimistic, and inspirational mind ignoring written steps to react to the inspiration of the sounds of the moment” (Gregorc, *Adult’s Guide* 35). This writer believes it is because they already have so much sound going on in their heads (which is the reason why they are almost always orally noisy when doing the task at hand) that they can focus internal sounds and patterns to be incredibly musically creative.

The kind of practice schedule that would most appropriately agree with the dominant concrete random student can be seen in Appendix C.

This writer finds these students a challenge only because many of the ideas this type of student brings to the lesson are completely original. In addition, it is this type of student that will want to rearrange or recompose a piece of music to fit his needs. It is almost impossible to limit these students. “They are known for their intuitive leaps and their creative formulations in various situation” (Gregorc, *Inside Styles* 190). If the

teacher could stymie their student's ongoing internal and external sounds, she could stunt their musical and intellectual growth.

These students almost always want to take piano lessons to express their own independent creativity. They mostly have a desire to be deeply creative on the piano. One of the hardest parts about teaching these students is to teach them concrete note reading. One of the best approaches is to have this student read any new piece of music or new passage first before playing it during a lesson. In this writer's teaching studio it has become customary to have this type of student read music for themselves. The teacher can then begin to demonstrate, phrase by phrase with the student's permission. The student then repeats the same phrase back right after the teacher has demonstrated it. These students frequently like help, but want to feel as though they are the ones asking for it instead of feeling as though the teacher is giving them unsolicited advice. This is because they like to be the "prime instigator of change in environments which are amenable to rearrangement. His motto is 'Don't fence me in'" (Gregorc, *Adult's Guide* 36).

The parents of this type of student will almost always tell the teacher that their child is usually happy, very active and adventurous with bountiful energy. Musical babbling, as mentioned previously, is usually necessary for the dominant concrete random piano student. In order to focus properly, they may need to actually experiment with their own spontaneous musical sounds before sitting and properly practicing a lesson of

organized sound. This can be their way of blowing off steam, or relaxing before processing the musical lesson or task at hand.

The dominant concrete random piano student would be the kind that may eventually break away from the strict rigidity of normative classical piano repertoire and start exploring jazz or possibly a unique form of rock ‘n roll. This creative student would be drawn to jazz improvisation which would be an ideal emotional and musical outlet. Anyone who has been to a club to hear some good jazz can attest to the fact that when a solo arises for an individual musician to play within the chart (jazz lingo for “a piece of music”), they can freely express themselves by going off on an incredibly spontaneous bout of creative musical impromptu, playing that most often wows the audience into a brief applause as the group resumes the main theme of the selection. Jazz style of playing definitely is adventurous and these musicians love the excitement of risk-taking and musical exploration on the spot.

### **The Dominant Abstract Sequential Student**

These students have a similar learning and processing as the dominant concrete sequential group. They often work well together in teamwork situations. This is how these students produce the best results:

- It is important for these students to gather data before making decisions as they learn anything.



- They analyze ideas that are presented to them and process them before acting upon them or not. (Gregorc, *Mind Styles 1*)

Based on the first two characteristics stated above, it is not surprising that these students thoroughly research all data and ideas, using facts as well as feelings before processing the necessary information in order to take the next step.

- In a group setting, they are usually the students who provide a logical sequence to follow to finish the task at hand. They use their own sequence of tasks as well when working alone in order to assist them in accomplishing the end result.
- If they are not sure of an outcome with their own acquired common knowledge, they use facts that they have researched and analyzed to prove or disprove theories presented to them.
- They analyze the means to achieve any goal and then decide whether or not they believe they can or want to proceed with the given task.  
(Gregorc, *Mind Styles 1*)

Below describes what makes the most sense to a dominant abstract sequential student:

- Using exact, well-researched information is almost always the only way in which they can process information.
- Learning more by watching others doing the exact task they have been given to do rather than doing it themselves first helps them to visually

process what needs to be accomplished. Since this is a strong suit of these students, visualization methods of teaching usually help them considerably.

- Using logical reasoning makes the most sense to them. If a task becomes too nebulous or vague, this type of student will most likely have difficulty finishing it.
- Needing a teacher who is an expert on the subject is of extreme importance to this type of student. Often times, since the student will almost always research the subject matter at hand thoroughly, it can become disconcerting for this student to trump his/her teachers knowledge on the subject matter at hand.
- Living in the world of abstract ideas, although perplexing at times, often gives this kind of student an exciting challenge to work with.
- Working through an issue thoroughly helps this student to move onto the next step or task happily (Gregorc, *Mind Styles* 1).

Important emotional traits that are common among dominant abstract sequential students and which are necessary to keep in mind when teaching them are:

- They are very easy going.
- They do not hold grudges.
- They are very quiet.
- They are good listeners, but are not always attentive responders.

- They are happy to be helpful, but do not offer unsolicited help.
- They are not deeply sensitive and are very forgiving with everyone.
- They are confident and secure within themselves even if they know they don't fit in.

The most important advice that any teacher educating a dominant abstract sequential piano student should keep in mind is that this type of student mostly does not enjoy performing. They also frequently need constant in-lesson demonstrations for everything they are taught. They are usually incredibly visual students and thrive on watching and mimicking their teachers. Performing seems not necessary for them since they “avoid direct concrete experiences in favor of vicarious ones” (Gregorc, *Inside Styles* 189). Knowing these two key details can help all lesson plans fall into place with ease. The *Minuet in G* is a piece that would make them more nervous than happy because it is a well-known melody in which a mistake would be easily recognized.

The kind of practice schedule that would most appropriately agree with the dominant abstract sequential student can be found in Appendix D.

Finding the right piano teacher can be difficult for these students because of the dichotomy they present in their musical processing. It is this type of piano student that mostly needs the most well-researched and carefully chosen teacher based on the important traits of what comprises a good teacher already discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

It is almost vital that the dominant abstract sequential student study with an advanced level piano teacher, the real concert pianist, otherwise this student may not make good progress on the piano. They “thrive in an intellectual environment where they can communicate their knowledge and research with others who possess the same interests and level of advancement” (Gregorc, *Adult's Guide* 25). The piano teacher must be able to demonstrate and visually explain almost everything to this student. As mentioned above, they are predominantly visual learners. Without this visual processing the dominant abstract sequential student may not learn within their proper learning curve. Since demonstration is one of this student's primary strengths, the teacher must be able to sight-read in order to demonstrate on the spot. Spanswick feels that “to teach the piano, you need to be able to correctly demonstrate technique and to be able to play and perform at a much higher level than your students are expected to achieve” (Spanswick location 429).

This brings out a challenging dichotomy for both the teacher and student. This is because the professional piano teachers usually expect their students to perform in public and it is the general nature of the dominant abstract sequential student to shy away from performing altogether. Since this type of student is thorough with details and information it stands to reason that they will naturally thrive with a professional performer, but need to find a happy balance with the teacher so the student does not feel pressured into participating in concerts most of the time. It is hard to recognize most of the needs of the

dominant abstract sequential student. They often go misdiagnosed because of this dichotomy.

The dominant abstract sequential children are almost always great piano students and take their musical training seriously most of the time. They have “an academic type mind and take the subject matter discipline seriously and knows it thoroughly” (Gregorc, *Adult’s Guide* 24). Because they usually process so quickly with their visual strengths with “thinking processes that are often fluid, active and quick” and show the teacher nothing but well researched conscientiousness at most lessons, the teacher often misunderstands this as the ideal performer to show off at the next concert (Gregorc, *Adult’s Guide* 23). These students mostly learn their music well enough to perform and with great care and attentiveness to dynamics and phrasing as well. This is because the dominant abstract sequential student has researched the style of the piece they are learning and most likely has also listened to many recordings of their piece to get the tone and character of the music just right. If the music is a baroque piece like J. S. Bach’s *Minuet in G*, our teaching example music for this dissertation, then this student has taken the time to read about the Baroque Era in classical music and would even study other Bach pieces in order to better understand the *Minuet in G*.

Their pieces, once learned, are almost always performance ready leading the teacher to believe that performing would be easy for this student since they have prepared so thoroughly. It is important for the teacher of this type of student to give them plenty of time before deciding whether to perform or not and when. In addition, once the teacher

has completed everything they have to teach to this student, and they see the student has learned their music well enough to perform, the teacher needs to back off and leave the student alone. “They believe that knowledge is power and come across as the eternal student always needing more time to ‘sit on the fence’ weighing all data” before making a decision (Gregorc, *Adult’s Guide* 25-26). The student may want to research some more or practice to her liking before considering a performance.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **MOTIVATION**

This chapter will focus solely on motivating those same students listed in Gregorc's four mind styles from Chapter 4 to continue studying piano. This is the second step in the three-step process of this document. As stated several times, lack of motivation is the number one reason why children quit the piano before they get to a point of continued inspiration.

As has been stated in Chapter 2, students who practice on a piano have a greater chance of continuing lessons over those students who practice on an electronic keyboard. A digital piano should be reserved for those students who live in apartments and town houses. A piano will almost always be the obvious choice for students whose parents want them to take lessons and learning seriously.

Taking a step back now, it is necessary to refer back to Chapter 1 briefly and review some of the reasons why the dropout rate is so great among piano students. The discussion revolved around Theresa Chen's findings. She takes her own experiences as a professional piano teacher and notes a consistent pattern among her unmotivated students. Although, her age categories are not exact and the stages can expand one or two years on either side, the stages she outlines seem correct and fairly universal among most piano students. By combining her findings with Lavoie's motivational techniques, it could possibly solve many of the motivational problems before they actually occur. "It is

important to note that motivation is one of the few psychological aspects that remain consistent throughout the life span. As an adult, you are doubtless inspired by the same motivators that inspired you as a child” (Lavoie 97). Motivational techniques are vital tools for most parents and educator’s when attempting to teach children a focused subject matter such as music.

Richard Lavoie’s book, *The Motivation Breakthrough: Six Secrets to Turning on the Tuned-Out Child*, separates all children into eight motivational types. Remember that first a child needs to be taught correctly using Gregorc’s method; only then can Lavoie’s motivational methods be effective in musical training. Like Gregorc’s work, Lavoie’s research has been applied for academic purposes. This dissertation will be the first of its kind to use Lavoie’s academic motivational techniques for teaching music. Motivational techniques are important and are almost always expected to be used for children. This is why a premeditated plan of attack for the parent and teacher is necessary. The goal “is to foster lasting motivation that is inspired by their desire to learn and grow” (Lavoie 11). His motivational characteristics are meant mostly for the teacher and the parent to assist in keeping the student’s ball of enthusiasm happily rolling along. As stated at the beginning of this dissertation, teachers often dismiss themselves from the reasons why a student may not be motivated with a desire to learn the piano. During a particular workshop, Lavoie came across a history teacher who point blank stated, “Quite simply, it’s not my job to motivate these kids. If they are not motivated to learn, they can sit in the back of the class and sleep if they wish...that is not my problem” (Lavoie 4). Lavoie



clearly states throughout his book that a teachers tools of motivation are their greatest asset. His response to this gentleman was, “It is your job, sir. Kids don’t come with batteries...You’ve got to provide the batteries if you want them to function” (Lavoie 4).

This is where both Lavoie and Gregorc’s fundamental foundation of thought originates, the teacher is the number one person responsible for the education of the student. This writer chose these two methodologies strictly based on this origin of thought. This dissertation is mostly about what Gregorc states so succinctly, “Teachers are the number one medium in that classroom. Some teachers imagine themselves as invisible intermediaries between the content and their students. Nothing could be further from the truth” (Gregorc, *Inside Styles* 208).

Like Gregorc and this writer, Lavoie believes that children can learn by inspiration from the teacher and from within themselves. It is interesting to note that Lavoie does not focus on physical rewards for his motivational techniques. His goal is to guide the teacher and parent to recognize a child’s intrinsic motivation that comes naturally from within a child’s deepest desires. “This internal drive will inspire the child to work to her fullest potential whether or not a reward is promised. Learning becomes its own reward” (Lavoie 12).

It is important to note that this chapter is this writer’s practical application of Lavoie’s motivational techniques. To this writer’s knowledge, there are no other applications of this kind for musical instruction.

In the paragraphs below, Lavoie's eight motivational techniques and their characteristics will be introduced and defined. Then each technique will be explained in terms of the motivational characteristic as it is applied to the piano student.

**Gregariousness.** These students are highly verbal, have a good sense of humor, are self-confident, popular, dislike being alone, enjoy group/team/committee work, are peer-oriented, have a generally positive attitude, are outgoing and friendly, and are stylish.

**Autonomy.** These students master new material rapidly, are very productive, have a good memory, are highly verbal, are very curious, enjoy independent work, have an extensive vocabulary, retain a large fund of background information, and are self-motivated and decisive.

**Status.** These students fear imperfection and failure, are highly sensitive to criticism and reprimands, often request confirmation/reassurance, are peer-oriented, can be judgmental, are fashionable, need praise, can be self-critical, are generally compliant, and enjoy the spotlight.

**Inquisitiveness.** These students have passionate interests, are avid/independent readers, have a large fund of background information, have strong memories, enjoy experiments, ask

questions, give unique/creative responses, enjoy problem solving, can be gossips, and are volunteers.

**Aggression.** These students have strong opinions, want/like responsibility, can be argumentative, question authority, complain, are very persuasive, can have quick tempers, have a unique sense of style, are outspoken, and can be vindictive.

**Power.** These students enjoy being in charge, are often involved in power struggles/debates, have leadership qualities, are self-confident, courageous, decisive, straightforward, independent, can bear grudges, are competitive, persistent and tenacious.

**Recognition.** These students are optimistic, self-assured, industrious, goal-driven, efficient, highly competitive, vain and self-promoting, enjoy the spotlight, are sensitive and easily disappointed, and enjoy performing.

**Affiliation.** These students seek and display group identity, are sensitive to the needs of others, are skilled motivators, fear rejection, seek adult attention, admire role models, are helpful, cooperative, sensitive to disapproval, can be conformists, and volunteer often (Lavoie 108-11).

All children fit into at least one of the eight categories above, but as with Gregorc's work, they may display some characteristics in some of the other categories as

well. “When you carefully and thoroughly analyze the behaviors, traits, and temperament of a child, a pattern of preferences will begin to emerge and you will be able to...complement the child’s motivational style” (Lavoie 107). Lavoie’s approach to motivating a piano student is synonymous with Gregorc’s teaching styles. “In order to motivate all the students, a teacher must utilize a wide variety of approaches, strategies, and techniques” (Lavoie 107). Both are needed to ultimately get a child to the performance stage.

### **The Gregarious Piano Student**

In general, these students are pleasant during a piano lesson on any given day because, as summarized above, they are already confident, outgoing, friendly and easy to work with in a group. Although labeled as “private,” any piano lesson really is in a group because the teacher is there next to the student at all times. It really should be called a duet or partner lesson. Presenting the lesson in this manner will give the gregarious piano student a joint sense of responsibility. Their natural accountability as an equal partner in the lessons will help motivate them during the lesson as well as when practicing at home between lessons.

The gregarious student almost always appears to be super motivated during the lesson and will happily and easily agree to everything the teacher asks him to do during the practice week while at the lesson. “While at the lesson” is key because once this type

of student goes home and needs to sit at the piano by himself in a room where the piano is by itself, everything changes: the gregarious student usually dislikes to practice alone. Remember, he does his best work and is motivated by working with others in a group. Sometimes all it takes to motivate a gregarious child is to have a parent, caregiver or sibling sit in the room and comment on something pertaining to their lesson every once in a while. The gregarious piano student, “is never happier than when he is in a crowd. He does not enjoy independent or solitary projects” (Lavoie 99). When this writer has come across a gregarious student (they are very easy to identify), the first advice given to the parents is to tell them that someone must be present while their child is practicing. Some gregarious piano students actually need a person to sit right next to them and either help teach them notes or just comment on what is being practiced. Some of them may just need someone else in the room or even nearby silently doing another task (cooking, paying bills, etc.) while the child practices, saying something every once in a while. The gregarious student can somehow concentrate even when there are other noises going on in the room because this type of student needs the reinforcement of a group setting, which includes the sounds of others. In the classroom and at home, “the gregarious student needs a deep sense of belonging and can contribute significantly to class morale and school spirit” (Lavoie 111). This student needs to feel “unconditional love, support, and encouragement, from her surrounding environment and gathers her self esteem for practicing in this “environment where it can grow” (Lavoie 121). In fact, if it is too quiet and too solitary, the gregarious student will become distracted and get nothing done. This

student will also feel motivated to practice if they can do so with another student instead of practicing alone. “The buddy system can be used when two students are trying to learn the same piece. It can be fun for them to collaborate together, teaching each other” (Cromwell 13). The most successful way to keep the gregarious student motivated is to avoid letting them feel alone at any time during their musical journey of learning the piano.

### **The Autonomous Piano Student**

Since one of the strongest traits of this type of piano student is that she enjoys working independently, it may be assumed that this type of student will not have a difficult time practicing by herself. Motivating this student to work hard is also easy because she already likes to do so. These students tend to have very strong learning curves and process most information rapidly. The teacher must move quickly and introduce as much new music/exercises to the autonomous student at every lesson in order to keep them motivated to continue piano. They naturally have good memories and, because they are very productive, they can build and retain muscle memory fairly quickly. Scales and exercises can be taught and maintained very easily with the autonomous piano student so the piano teacher should know to strengthen this student’s motivation by assigning new exercises at every lesson.

Since the autonomous piano student is so curious, it is common for them to even bring music of their own to the lessons, asking for help with difficult passages. They put “great energy into projects that involve research and hard work” but take pride in the fact that they themselves, “mastered the new material rapidly” (Lavoie 101 and 108). Because they are already self-motivated, the pieces may be much more advanced than the student can handle, so it may be necessary to explain to the autonomous student that their chosen pieces could require more practicing and patience over a longer period of time. Also, it is prudent for the teacher to try and shorten that time period by simplifying the same piece of music so the student can play it sooner. They are “decisive” and work “diligently” to “tackle a project alone, quickly and invariably to see it through to a positive conclusion” (Lavoie 100). This writer often wonders whether these types of students teach the teacher more than the teacher teaches the student. They usually have information about a piece or subject that goes beyond the basic knowledge needed to play it, and they sometimes ask questions that the teacher cannot answer. The good piano teacher must keep up with them and if he cannot, should be humble enough to recommend a teacher who can or attempt to find a satisfactory answer.

It is important to recognize the speed at which these students master their music and proceed with caution should they want to play a duet with another musician. Autonomous piano students may get bored very quickly if grouped with other students because most of the time they are more advanced or can learn faster. This is because when they work, they do so with great “focus and energy on a well-defined task at hand.

They simply cannot handle too many options or choices” which others may suggest in a group and can “become confused and anxious quickly if they know the task could have been completed successfully if they were alone” (Lavoie 174-175). In addition, the autonomous student usually ends up doing most of the work in a group setting and would not enjoy any of the drawn out group experiences while doing so. They relish, “opportunities to work independently on projects” (Lavoie 100).

It is important for the teacher to recognize this and not suggest any duets or partnering for this type of student for a while. The most successful way to keep the autonomous student motivated is to give them a concert piece to work on with a concert goal which is not too far in the future. The prestige of playing for an audience and having power over their performance will keep them happy and practicing.

### **The Status Piano Student**

The greatest asset of the status piano student is the fact that they usually love to perform. As soon as they have learned a piece, they are looking for a venue to perform in front of an audience. This is because for the status student, performing in front of an audience and receiving applause and compliments is the only true validation of all their hard work during practice.

Keeping them motivated, though, is definitely a tall order for their teacher, family and friends. Lavoie finds that the status student is “extremely sensitive to criticism, is



self-critical and although grateful for positive comments, would have difficulty changing their initial reaction to a job not well done” in their own eyes (Lavoie 101). These students become their own worst enemy and it is up to the teacher to try to break their usual self-critical and judgmental state of being. The most successful way to keep the status piano student motivated is to constantly confirm that they are doing well, that their teacher and parents are happy with their progress, and to allow them to make mistakes without negative criticism. This is due to the fact that, “their self-esteem is intricately tied to the opinions of other” (Lavoie 100).

Giving the status piano student a concert date to work toward for their friends and family is also important, but without any pressure on making that performance mandatory. In addition, the student must always perform for a very accepting audience who will applaud even if she plays every note wrong. The teacher should be aware of the type of audience that will be present for the status piano student beforehand. For instance, if it has come to the attention of the teacher that the local newspaper writer may be present at a town student recital and may cast judgment, then it would be wise to leave the status student out of that concert. “He needs a teacher who is enthusiastic and who celebrates children’s unique strengths and affinities” (Lavoie 111). The most successful way to keep the status piano student motivated is to have them work on music that is slightly below their level of playing, so they can perfect it well enough to perform in public for family and friends.

### **The Inquisitive Piano Student**

This kind of piano student usually loves the instrument they are playing. “This inquisitiveness is not limited to her area of expertise or interest; she enjoys learning about nearly any topic” (Lavoie 101). One of the greatest strength of the inquisitive piano students is their enthusiasm. They usually dive right into the task at hand and want to do and be the best they can. Lavoie states that the inquisitive student “is curious and enjoys problem solving and research” until they have learned in completion (Lavoie 123). Another strength of the inquisitive piano student is their determination to learn their pieces as perfectly as possible. “She is extremely curious and hungry for new information” (Lavoie 101). Keeping them motivated is usually very easy as long as they can find many recordings and/or see some performances of the piece they are playing so they can listen to every possible way of playing it. Barry Green confirms this fact with an experience of his own.

My first bass lesson was very frustrating. I had never heard a bass solo in my life, and my eighty-year-old teacher asked me to play one...it was no good...some time after this I heard Gary Karr play a concert...I watched and listened to his performance very closely. He even played some of the pieces I was studying in my lessons...What I learned from that concert was worth ten years of lessons. I found that I could “translate” my

experience of watching and listening to Gary Karr into my own playing (Green 131-132).

Parents can keep their inquisitive piano student motivated by allowing them to go on YouTube to listen to several classical artists perform and take them to as many concerts as possible to hear the piece/s the student is working on. It is important for the family and the teacher not to get frustrated with this type of student because it may appear that they are wasting a great deal of time trying to get a phrase just right. In actuality, they are just trying to find which way of performing it will keep them passionate about the music. Lavoie finds that, “the inquisitive person wants and values information...is interested in gaining social, personal and professional information and continually enjoys researching topics of interest to her” (Lavoie 102).

As listed above, since they have such strong memories, it is easy for them to learn their pieces quickly. Once they have passed the curiosity stage of watching as many performances as possible, it is important for them to perform their memorized pieces in a concert or recital in order to move on to another exciting and wonderful piece of music that they will almost always be passionate about. The most successful way to keep the inquisitive piano student motivated is to just let them be themselves since they are usually self-motivated to begin with. When their motivation lags, spark their curiosity either by giving them a new piece to explore or by allowing them to watch/listen to as many performances of their piece as possible. They will be practicing again in no time.

### **The Aggression Piano Student**

It can be assumed by the title of this section that these type of students could possibly be poor candidates for piano lessons, but surprisingly, they usually turn out to be some of the most deeply passionate and musical students. A piano teacher and parent must not focus on the student's negative attributes, but pour their efforts into constantly reinforcing the student's positive ones. Lavoie points out that the aggression piano students "need for aggression is not necessarily negative or disruptive." It can be, "channeled into positive activities," (Lavoie 102) if dealt with well. This writer has found that the best way to counteract the student's inclination to question authority in an argumentative manner, get upset over being asked to repeat a passage that they think was played correctly or begin to complain is to give the aggressive piano student more responsibility than the average student. Responsibility of any kind will fulfill this child's deep need to be important and to receive credit for it as well. "For this subset of children, prestige and recognition are fundamental to their motivation in the classroom" (Lavoie 187).

The responsibility that works best is to ask the aggression student to repeatedly help a younger sibling with her practicing and homework. Cromwell states that a teacher should "allow your piano student to teach a sibling, parent grandparent or anyone else who is willing to sit down at the piano with them" (Cromwell 11). It has amazed this writer time and time again that just this small responsibility can have such a character

change in the aggression piano student. If a younger sibling is not a viable option for the aggression piano student, asking this student to help some other beginner piano student in the same studio, when possible, works just as well.

Here is the key: the aggression piano student is almost always mentally sharp and frequently exhibits a strong learning curve. The responsible part of their personality is often neglected because it is assumed that if they are constantly mad about being educated that asking them to have a responsible chore will just add fuel to the fire. This writer has yet to see this happen. The aggression piano student is “interested in expanding their sphere of influence and want their feelings and opinions to be recognized and responded to” (Lavoie 103). In fact, if an aggression student is present, this writer rejoices because a helper is at hand. The list becomes endless of how a teacher and parent can curb the tempered side of an aggression student.

It is easy at times to want to dismiss this type of student because of their lack of diplomacy. This is because they tend to get overheated very fast, may appear to have anger issues and, may hold a grudge for quite a long time. In addition, even if they ask for your help, when you try to administer answers to their exact questions, they can still be hostile. This is perplexing to an educator who is trying very hard to teach such a student. The average reaction to such a student is for an educator to shout back, state an obvious flaw in the child’s behavior/character and possibly administer a well deserved punishment or insult. Sadly, this type of student is the one who actually needs more love,

reinforcement and attention than the others listed in the motivational styles of Lavoie. He states,

It is important to recognize that the youngster is very easily embarrassed. This hypersensitivity is caused by the fact that the child's view of herself is intricately tied to opinions. Even a seemingly benign public reprimand or scolding can cause great embarrassment for the child. When correcting the child's behavior, the adult should make an effort to begin and conclude the meeting in a positive way (Lavoie 191-192).

The most successful way to keep the aggression student motivated is to not react to any tirades or anger outbursts and wait for them to end. Once finished, ask the aggression student to perform a simple, responsible task and wait for them to come back to you patiently. They almost always do. Once they have returned to your piano bench, begin the next assignment with matter of fact assurance and watch them learn. They will produce some of the most deeply passionate and musical playing of all the motivational styles.

### **The Power Piano Student**

This kind of student, if focused by the teacher correctly, will most often teach themselves. Lavoie finds that the best way to motivate them to do this positively is "to give power to a child without surrendering any power of your own as a parent/teacher. Seek the Power Child's advice or input on family issues, and whenever possible, follow

his advice” (Lavoie 142 and 147). Since their predominant traits are confidence and leadership, giving them these motivational techniques that feed into this desire to lead others helps them learn very fast. In addition, a good piano teacher must pick and choose their battles so not to crush the power piano student’s enthusiasm. By doing this, they can diminish many of the battles presented by the power piano student. This can be done very easily by giving him constructive choices. “You merely give a little power to the child. You are successfully and effectively meeting a significant need that the child has. Look for opportunities to give him power by giving him responsibilities, asking for his advice, or requesting his input” (Lavoie 147-148).

Of all of the different motivational techniques, it is this one that usually demands more parental help at home than most of the others. “This should not be viewed as a negative trait, but merely as a certain type of worldview” (Lavoie 103). This writer’s experience has been that most parents love to put their child into this motivational category but in actuality, the parent is misunderstanding their child’s positive traits completely and turning them into problematic issues.

The power piano student is a little bit of both the status and the aggression piano student combined. This writer had come across these attributes from both when teaching the power piano student. Sabrina Ann Berger states, “a student needing power and a need for a label from their teacher such as, “she is one of my best students,” is actually a good thing. They like the responsibility it carries and often practice harder. They attack their music and its difficulties with vigor as though it is something to be conquered. They feel

the need to protect their status and are proud of their position as being one of the best”

(Ann Berger 6).

The motivational technique that comes from the status piano student which almost always works with the power piano student is that they love to perform. Their need for power and authority frequently leads to successful performances because frankly, they love the feeling that they have control over the audience by giving an excellent performance. This love of performing for others may seem conceited or attention getting but for a power piano student it is just the right mix of confidence and self-righteousness to perform well. The balance of taming their need for control but maintaining their confidence comes during the performance preparation. These students need a parent and teacher to focus their energies on performing well for the sake of the composer. “The performer’s role is to identify...the intellectual, emotional, and psychological processes and intentions of the composer. It is by resonating with the composer on a level beyond the symbols on a page that the performer becomes most unified, most identified, with the being of the composer” (Berger 11). Since there is usually a power struggle with other children and their parents and teachers, this student needs to focus on the purpose of performing for the music. This almost always remedies their competitive nature and most of the need for a power struggle because almost all of the music a beginner/intermediate classical piano student performs in public is music by a western deceased classical composer. It may not be possible for the student to compete with a deceased composer therefore this becomes a great avenue of approach. The student can bring the composer



to life on his terms. “Just as an actor brings a character to life, the performer brings the composer to life through his presentation of the music” (Berger 11). The result is almost always a nicely polished piece, performed well.

The motivational technique that comes from the aggression student which is successful with a power piano student is to give them more responsibility than the average student. Ask them to take over following their given piano assignment for the week without help from anyone. Ask them to help out at home with everything. Their need for control will be satisfied but funneled constructively therefore leading to a less argumentative and destructively assertive student. This is where parents need to jump in and help. Throughout the course of the average, domestic day of chores and tasks to be completed, the parent of the power student must delegate as much responsibility within reason to the power student. By the time this student is ready to practice, she can focus productively on the lesson plan without holding a grudge against anyone for anything because the internal needs of the student have been met. In summation, this kind of student can actually be a benefit to all involved if their emotional needs for control are met on a daily basis. It becomes a win-win situation in the end.

### **The Recognition Piano Student**

The greatest asset of the recognition piano student is the fact that they almost always love performing their newly finished piano pieces. They will even pull out an old

piece for an upcoming concert if their new pieces that they are currently working on are not performance ready. Simply put, they will almost always want to perform and want others to see and praise their accomplishments. Lavoie describes a person with a need for recognition below:

On every Academy Award evening, past Oscar recipients are invariably asked where they keep their coveted statuettes. Often, the actors will say that they built a separate wing in their home, where the award is displayed with reverence and solemnity. Still others will say that it is used as a doorstop in their child's bedroom. Actors in the first category are recognition-driven; actors in the second category are not. It is important to understand that recognition-driven people are not braggarts who are constantly preening and need attention. Some people simply have a greater need for recognition than others (Lavoie 104-105).

Their personality profiles for motivation are quite similar to that of the status piano student, who also exhibit love for performing as their greatest asset. The difference is that unlike the status piano student, the recognition piano student has a double dose of pre-existing self-confidence. The status piano student, as stated above, tends to be very self-critical.

Since the recognition student is almost always self-assured, the teacher and parent can easily motivate them to learn new pieces well for any given public performance. They do not typically have a huge fear of failure and can usually recover performing with

wrong notes and memory slips fairly quickly. This is an outstanding characteristic of this type of student because they have the capacity to move on quickly and not carry over grudges and previous failures into future performances.

The reward and motivational technique that works best for them is for everyone in their life to get excited about their next performance. They “are driven by a need to be recognized and acknowledged for their accomplishments and efforts” (Lavoie 104). Since the recognition piano student is very performance driven, they can be trusted with extra work that does not need constant teacher and parental monitoring. Their own internal, industrious work ethic will keep them practicing naturally as long as there is a performance in the near future. This writer allows this type of student to pick the majority of their own classical repertoire since they are constantly performing. Unlike the status piano student, the most successful way to keep the recognition piano student motivated is to have them work on music that is slightly above their level of playing. The reward for their performance ready pieces is the traditional Puritan work ethic, more work for the next performance.

### **The Affiliation Piano Student**

Last, but definitely not the least, of Lavoie’s eight motivational type piano students is the affiliation piano student. This chapter has thus far followed the motivational technique order that Lavoie presented in his book. It is a sheer coincidence

that this type of piano student is described last because it has been the experience of this writer for decades that the affiliate piano student is where most of the beginner/intermediate students predominantly fall. Similar to Gregorc's minds styles, no student fits neatly into just one category. Although most piano students can be seen as affiliates, they almost always exhibit motivational characteristics from the other seven techniques.

The affiliation piano student thrives strictly on their relationship and association with their parents and teachers. Lavoie observes that "the affiliation person has a strong need to be connected with others and with organizations, movements, and institutions" (Lavoie 105). It is vital for a parent to recognize this immediately when choosing a piano teacher for their child. Yes, they do exhibit motivational characteristics from the previously discussed styles but the root of their motivation is stemmed from a close and positively influenced relationship with their educator's. After this has been established the affiliation piano student can do almost anything with their musical training. They will develop their personality accordingly and can go in and out of all the motivational technique's listed above. The affiliation student must have the cooperation of the parents and the teacher as a team working as one unit to support the growing piano student. This student needs the tripod theory stated by Huang from the introduction, family education, school education and social education which leads to self education.

Here is why most beginner/intermediate piano students predominantly fit into the affiliation piano student category: they are too young to have developed their full

personalities. Their world has mostly been sheltered to their family life and to that of those educating them in and out of school. Costa-Giomi feels that “given the value of a positive pupil-teacher relationship-especially in the early stages of learning-the issue of making musical corrections within a supportive and encouraging environment seems relevant to lesson satisfaction and perhaps continuation” (Costa-Giomi 236). As previously mentioned, children are professional students. It is their full time job to be educated. At this point, they do not know any better than that which is put forth in front of them by their parents and teachers. Children thrive on finding their identity in a group setting and finding a sense of acceptance and belonging in their immediate family and their school age peers. It is easy to assume then that the basic beginner piano student will most likely start as an affiliation piano student and mature into including the other characteristics of Lavoie’s motivational technique’s once they are good enough to find their true musical selves.

The greatest motivating technique for the affiliation piano student comes directly from Richard Lavoie himself, “As teachers, we must remain mindful of the hallmark of the helping professions. When we deal with students, we must always remember: Before they care how much you know, they must know how much you care.” (Lavoie, 230). Love and emotional support is the greatest motivating factor for the affiliation piano student. Once this need is filled on a daily basis, the affiliation piano student should happily want to practice every day.

In summation, a student's internal motivation is the engine behind their own self desire to practice. Many children will voice their motivation as well which is of great assistance to the teacher and parents. "Listening to what children have to say about their musical motivations, aspirations, and interests and monitoring their practice may provide teachers with valuable information about the student's commitment to learning an instrument" (Costa-Giomi 234).

The final chapters of this analytical approach to teaching the beginner/intermediate piano student are about the understanding and teaching of the art of successful public performances. These last two chapters are the culmination of all that has been discussed in this dissertation thus far.

## CHAPTER 6

### PERFORMING

The ultimate goal of all teaching, motivating and practicing is to get the hardworking music student to perform in front of an audience. Almost all students, if motivated and taught correctly, can learn their music after enough productive practicing. The true test lies in whether or not that student can perform their music successfully. This requires just as much mental and physical preparation as does learning the music. This is the third and final step in the three-step process of holistically teaching the beginner piano student.

Performing on stage in front of a crowd after all the hard work is one of the most gratifying moments of a student's life, if they are properly prepared. As stated in previous chapters, it all boils down to hard work to perform well and very little talent.

According to Lipman and Kupchynsky in *Strings Attached*, “you have to strive for perfection in order to achieve excellence.... True happiness can only be achieved through hard work” (Lipman and Kupchynsky 16). Overcoming performance anxiety is a true test for a student. They either fail or succeed at it. There is no gray area or in between state. According to O’Neil in *The Pursuit of Happiness: 21 Spiritual Rules to Success*,

Everyone is afraid of failing, but for some people, the desire to succeed far outweighs the fear. That is really what sets many successful people apart

from the not so successful people. It is not that they had no fear; it was that their desire to succeed overpowered their fear of failing. (O'Neil 62)

O'Neil goes on to list many famous people who failed repeatedly during their journey to career success, including Walt Disney, Babe Ruth, Steven Spielberg and Donald Trump. She includes a famous quote from Michael Jordan as well, "I've missed more than nine thousand shots in my career, I've lost almost three hundred games. Twenty-six times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over in my life. And that's why I succeed" (O'Neil 61). Chapter 2 of this dissertation discusses how the right piano teacher allows failure as an option as long as the ultimate failure of quitting is never an option. Now that the student has attained musical success in getting to performance level, it is important for all the teachings of the good piano teacher to finally fall into place.

At this time, it is important to define what a truly successful performance should be. Performing simply means carrying out an act in front of the public eye. Berger states that it is the role of the performer to, "share the experience and communicate musical thoughts with an audience. The listener is the ultimate target" (Berger 13). It could be as grand as playing the piano at Carnegie Hall with reviewers in the audience from major newspapers, or just playing for your family in your own home at the next holiday dinner. This writer tells all her students that "the mark of a good performance is not whether you played your music perfectly; it is whether you convinced your audience that you did so." This is an original statement by this writer that has yet to be repeated or explained by



others in the field to this writer's knowledge thus far. The audience will feel it is a good performance if they walk away with positive emotions. "The listener (audience) to the music essentially follows a performance by recreating it in his or her mind. The listener actually performs it in his or her own imagination, by remembering and recreating it as it is being produced" (Berger 15). This helps most students to accept any unexpected mistakes before the performance, so they will not get stuck in the middle of their piece.

To keep going is the number one goal of all successful performances. To "keep going," simply means that one never stops playing until one reaches the end of the music. Even if the student needs to spontaneously recompose the piece, or begin a section again, they should never stop in the middle of any performance because of mistakes or memory slips, if playing from memory. Then, when the student is done, they should stand up, face their audience and gracefully take a big, long bow with a smile on their face. This shows their audience that, regardless of how they feel on the inside, they are happy with themselves and feel worthy of all the applause, ovations and accolades.

The only performance preparation many piano students undergo may be for big end-of-the-year recitals their piano teacher may host. Very few teachers require that their students even perform more than once a year. This is the most counterproductive flaw of many teaching methods. Spanswick believes that a wonderful way for students to perform frequently is to take piano exams (where the student performs to receive points towards an award) and to perform at festivals. She too frowns upon teachers who do not have their students on stage frequently. "Some teachers never enter students for any exams or

festivals, believing them to be completely unnecessary. It's time to make a quick exit if you get that reply" (Spanswick location 658). Performing once a year rarely works.

Cromwell believes that "all piano students will benefit from giving more frequent performances regardless of how simple the performance may turn out to be" (Cromwell 21). In addition, administering the specific teaching methods described in the previous chapters is of little use if they are not applied to more frequent performances. According to Spanswick, "you can never have too much experience of performing in public" (Spanswick location 1462).

Even if the student seems ready for the recital, a bad performance the day of the only recital of the year can leave that student feeling worthless. Linger with a bad experience can imprint it in a student's mind preventing them from wanting to perform again. This writer's experience has been that if a student gives a bad performance, having another performing opportunity fairly soon helps significantly. The student can have the opportunity to redeem himself right away which becomes necessary for consistent musical progress. According to music psychologist, Susan Whykes, it is good to get over a bad past experience by replacing it with a good one as soon as possible, "If you keep on remembering past experiences of performance anxiety, you will naturally feel quite anxious. Our past experiences of bad performances stay in our memories. They can be bright, colourful and painful" (Whykes location 447). Unless a concert comes soon to create a good experience, this bad experience can remain etched in a student's mind.

If the student performs well, they usually want to show off their performing abilities again very soon, not a year later. Very few endeavors in the world replace the great self-esteem given to a child after they have performed well on stage. Cromwell feels that “learning an instrument will help your child build self-esteem, peer acceptance and respect” (Cromwell 2). Confidence is something that grows through such experiences, and performing well in front of an audience is the biggest boost of confidence any child could ever receive. All the teaching styles and methods of the world cannot replace the euphoric feeling a student gets when he has performed his chosen piece well in front of an audience. “Dedicated performing piano students systematically gain confidence in their abilities to achieve whatever they set out to do” (Cromwell 1). A student must test his ability level by performing as frequently as possible. Several performances right from the start of the student’s lessons and musical education is essential. Ann Berger states that “I expect my students to practice being a professional like myself. They should perform as frequently as they can. Once I give them the tools to teach themselves, they can even prepare a piece on their own and perform it if they want” (Ann Berger 24). It is not necessary for the student to wait until they are playing a piece that is worthy of being performed before getting up in front of people. Students do not need to play like professionals. They only need to play just as frequently as professionals in order to feel like one. This educator has students performing as young as age four, playing *Hot Cross Buns*, for ten seconds with both hands at in-home recitals. The student receives warm

applause and praise immediately which encourages them to go back to practicing the piano the very next day.

Each performance experience is a stepping stone of learning and all students improve their skills after performing in a concert. In addition, each performance either reduces the amount of nerves or helps to learn to cope with the nerves a student undergoes over time. Kate Jones writes about confidence-boosting strategies in her book, *Keeping Your Nerve*. Cellist Steven Isserlis confirms that performing more frequently does certainly help, “My nerves have never really become less, but I comfort myself with the thought that I’ve been through all this hundreds of times. That usually makes me feel a bit better” (Jones 22).

Teaching performance practice is very different from teaching a student how to practice the piano or how to work through their pieces. Performance practice teaching is the last step after the piece has been learned to the best of the student’s ability.

It is recommended that each student have their performance pieces learned fairly well at least a few weeks before any concert so they will have the opportunity to test perform for family and friends several times. Spanswick believes that “your piece needs to be part of you, so much that you feel you could play it in your sleep” (Spanswick location 1439).

It is frustrating for successful performing teachers to witness how their students get so miserably nervous for a concert. Way too many of these successful performers have gone through this tense rite of passage themselves. Jones gives one exact scenario

of what the performing student usually goes through once they are on the stage in front of their audience beginning to perform, “your body is wildly out of control... your hands are cold and wet...the pounding in your chest drowns out all other sounds...all the nerves condense into one feeling-panic” (Jones 5). This nervousness seems unnecessary to begin with for performers. Why does the young musician have to be so tortured if they are truly doing something that they love? It is the ultimate goal of this music teacher to prevent such anguish from happening to each and every one of her students. After spending ten years of formative musical training very stressed and constantly nervous, this writer came to realize in her adult life that it really doesn't matter what happens on stage. This writer always tells her students that a few wrong notes never hurt anyone, especially themselves. If the performance does not go as well as expected, pianist Joanna MacGregor tells students that, “People are not going to die, the world isn't going to stop turning” (Jones 20). “The creation of unrealistic expectations can be dangerous” (Jones 19). Trombonist Christian Lindberg believes, “The pressure for people to be correct in every single situation and not to make any mistakes is impossible. In performance what you need to say to yourself is, ‘It doesn't matter’” (Jones 19-20). Performing should be an exciting and invigorating event, not one that creates severe stress and chaos for the student. MacGregor states that a performing student should focus on, “being alert, being alive to the situation-it's different from the kind of nerves which prevent you from functioning” (Jones 18).

It should be noted that a small amount of nerves can be helpful at times if those nerves help to sharpen your awareness in order for the student to perform better. Isserlis believes that, “it’s a bad sign if musicians aren’t nervous at all” (Jones 17). This writer has frequently stated to her students and students parents that apathy is not a desirable emotion as a performer. “Lindberg agree’s: ‘I think you have to have a certain tension in yourself to make an interesting performance’” (Jones 17). There should be a sense of urgency in order to play well. As this writer’s dear Godfather, uncle and WWII hero, John Takoushian, has always stated before walking on stage, “Be A Lert!”

Teaching performance practice technique should always begin with a comparison that is real and acceptable for the young student. The best analogy that clicks with almost all students is their academic life. That is what children do: their “full-time job” is to be a student. Lavoie agrees stating that “[K]ids go to school for a living. That’s their job. Their entire identity” (Lavoie 25). They think, eat and breathe in terms of school, and it is the one area of their life that usually consumes their families as well. Using their school life as a juxtaposition in their musical endeavors is only natural and, most of the time, the most effective example. In addition, this dissertation is an attempt to equate classical music training to major academic subjects in school therefore it is appropriate to combat stage fright in an academic mind set. These attempted effective examples and comparisons are coined expressions of this writer.

Performing in front of an audience--outside the arena of auditions and competitions--should actually be easier and less stressful for a young musician than taking a test in school. The many reasons are as follows:

- The school subjects students take tests in are required, and they receive a grade. A public performance is not required and there is no grade given at the end.
- The student is judged by their academic success on the test and that grade affects their overall grade point average. A public performance of music has no judgment from the teacher (unless it is for future performance improvement) or audience, and affects no other previous or future performances.
- If the student fails a test or even worse, fails the class, it needs to be repeated or reinforced with supplemental work in order to progress to the next grade level or graduate with a diploma. One cannot fail a public performance even if they play every note wrong and have a memory slip in every passage. All that it amounts to is a “bad performance,” and that is it. It does not and should not define one as a person the way grades do in school.
- Performing does not work the way a grade in school does because there is nothing concrete for the listeners of the performance to grasp. It is not until a child attends music school that an actual grade is attached to their performance. Before that, the student will have given many performances,

some may not have been as good as others, but again it is completely subjective as to who is there, and who is interpreting what a good or bad performance is.

- Retaking a test in school usually requires the student to study the material again and usually it is never the same exact test that was originally administered. If a student plays badly at any performance, they can play the same exact music at another performance in order to redeem themselves. In addition, they can practice the exact sections of the music that gave them trouble during the concert. This kind of a second chance in a student's performing world gives the student a safety net of security and, over time, an unbelievable sense of self-confidence that far exceeds any this writer has ever seen. It does not make performing such a daunting task after a while, so if the student does not perform as well as expected, it is alright because another performance will always be waiting around the corner.

This list has the potential to be an endless list of comparisons between academic and musical performance success. The point here is to have the music student understand that performing should be the easiest task that they do in their formative years. There are no significant ramifications for a bad public performance.

Since the majority of this dissertation focuses on the musical training of the beginner to intermediate young piano student, it is important to explain to a nervous performer that they will need to accept the likelihood of having a less than par piano to



perform on if a concert or recital takes place somewhere else other than their home or their teacher's home. The idea of having to perform on a foreign piano can certainly upset a young student. MacGregor states that, "It's important not to panic from your first impressions of a new piano" and "to try and project yourself in what you are trying to communicate regardless of the piano's strength's or weaknesses" because "it's good to get into the habit of enjoying playing bad pianos"(Jones 21-22). She encourages students to perform on foreign pianos as often as possible even if they need to perform the same piece several times.

Lastly, it is almost always a great source of encouragement and inspiration for a student to witness their own teacher on stage performing for them as frequently as possible. Taking a look back at chapter two's section of the "Piano teacher as performer," can certainly help a nervous student. This writer has found that performing at the end of a student recital gets most of her students very excited about the next concert or recital. "If you are a teacher, give them a good model by your teaching. Demonstrate to them first hand that enjoyment and self-expression are important. This is far more powerful than merely talking about it" (Jones 35). By performing for students, a teacher is stating for them that, "If I can do this, so can you."

## CHAPTER 7

### PERFORMING FROM MEMORY

The memory system of a child is challenged every day during their formative years of education. Virtually every exam is a test of how much information on the given subject one can retain. Some children study insanely, but still test poorly on exams. Sometimes it has nothing to do with their memory retention, but the process by which they file their information in their brain while studying.

This chapter will discuss memory in two categories, *visual* versus *aural* retention. Some music students, who are aural learners, can memorize a piece after only practicing it for one week while others, who are visual learners, cannot really get a hold of it even after a long span of practicing. According to Dr. Mel Levine, this is a natural occurrence in musicians, they are either aural or visual by nature. The band teacher of one of Dr. Levine's patients noted that one of his flute students was clearly an aural learner. He stated that "she has this incredible musical memory; after hearing a piece just once she can play it on her flute with amazing accuracy. I think she has a natural talent for anything that comes in melodious sequences" (Levine 185).

The visual group most often needs to memorize the music as a visual image in their minds. This means that in the student's mind's eye they can actually read the note by note score of their piece. Some visual learners find this method of memorizing their music comforting. According to Barry Green, "I use the sense of sight to focus my

awareness while playing pieces that I have memorized: I close my eyes and visualize the score, reading it as if it were there on the stand in front of me” (Green 40).

Unfortunately, this is sometimes the only means by which the visual learner can play for memory. For some, including this writer, it is very tedious and sometimes takes the joy out of performing. The former type of students, the aural learners, memorize more through a strong reliance on their refined aural skills. It is the students with good aural skills that mostly have the easier time memorizing. These are also the students that can play tunes by ear with great ease; however, sometimes these same students have great difficulty sight-reading a piece of music. They need to spend an enormous amount of time reading and practicing each measure until it “gets into their ear.” Once they can hear it, they rely on their finger muscle memory to play without consciously thinking about each note. The aural memory children rarely need to visualize the printed music in their minds.

There are two types of aural students; those with great *relative pitch* and those with *perfect/absolute pitch*. Almost all good music students have good relative pitch. This means that through proper musical training, the child’s ear can hear differences in tones, intervals and qualities of sound. According to music theorist Lee Humphries in his article, “Learning to Sight-Sing: The Mental Mechanics of Aural Imagery:”

Unlike absolute pitch, relative pitch is quite common among musicians, especially musicians who are used to playing by ear, and a precise relative pitch is a constant characteristic among good musicians. Also, unlike

perfect pitch, relative pitch is common among non-musicians and can be developed through ear training. (Humphries 1)

Relative pitch is a necessary component of being a good musician, and when refined to an advanced level, playing from memory becomes easy.

It is important to note that for performing, we are discussing the student's short-term memory abilities. Most young students have their short-term memories tested on a daily basis. The short-term memory of the piano student with relative pitch needs to be fostered carefully in order for them to perform well on stage without sheet music. Once the teacher discovers the way in which the student processes memorization, then the path to success is just a matter of time. According to Levine:

So short-term memory must be highly versatile in what it accepts for quick storage. And here's where some significant differences between students become all too apparent. Some of them may show superior visual short-term memory, while others are great at retaining verbal communications but not so good in capturing visual fragments. (Levine 96-97)

*Absolute pitch* (AP) is an extremely rare trait one is born with and can be found among very few musicians. The absolute pitch student needs very little short-term memory training, if any at all. They have their "perfect-pitch ears," and that is all they need. Michael Abrams is a scientist who has conducted studies on people with perfect pitch. He has stated in his article, "The Biology of Perfect Pitch," "yet only one in 10,000 Americans has perfect pitch, and even professional musicians tend to make do with

relative pitch” (Abrams 1). There are definitely more people with it, but they do not know that they have it because no activity in their lives have prompted the knowledge of its existence within them. Music is one of the only areas in which AP would be discovered. This educator often tells people that there are many Americans with absolute pitch, but they are delivering mail somewhere in Idaho, sitting at a computer crunching numbers, or doing domestic chores as a parent not even aware of what great gift they have. Scientist, Alexandra Athos, has also studied people with perfect pitch and agrees that it is truly a rare gift that often goes undetected in many people in her book, *Dichotomy and Perceptual Distortions in Absolute Pitch Ability*:

Absolute pitch (AP) is the rare ability to identify the pitch of a tone without the aid of a reference tone. The nature of absolute pitch (AP), also known as perfect pitch, lies outside the ken of most humans. It is an unusual perceptual gift, rigorously defined as the ability to name the pitch of a tone without the use of a reference tone. AP is distinguishable from relative pitch, a skill common in trained musicians, in which a pitch is rapidly derived by calculation of its interval from a reference pitch. (Athos 37)

Most children with absolute pitch become great musicians quickly and with far greater ease than most other musicians. Many musicians with perfect pitch can play anything effortlessly from memory at any time, without even trying. They learn by ear the way a person with a photographic memory can recite information verbatim immediately.

All sounds, intervals, notes, tones and pitches can be processed instantaneously. It is their natural state of being. Musicians without it state that it is not a talent because it requires no effort on the part of the perfect pitched musician. But, it is one of the greatest gifts any musician could ever have and to have it is an incredible blessing. Susan Rancer is a music therapist with perfect pitch and works with misunderstood musicians who have this rare gift. She herself was not taught correctly as a young musician because her perfect pitch qualities were misunderstood by her musical educators. She discusses these issues in her book, *Perfect Pitch, Relative Pitch*:

Individuals with any degree of ‘perfect pitch’ learn differently than those without it. If taught using conventional methods, students in the perfect pitch spectrum may become unmotivated and their talents could be left undeveloped. However when these students are encouraged appropriately, musical talent may blossom in dramatic ways. Flexibility is absolutely essential when teaching those with perfect pitch because these students process information differently. Teachers without perfect pitch sometimes misconstrue behavioral or learning problems in students when they should, in fact, be respecting a gift. (Rancer 1)

Since the student is already genetically unconventional having absolute pitch, it stands to reason that conventional teaching is highly inappropriate. A teacher without AP can successfully teach a student that has it, if they recognize how important playing by ear is for their student, and will constantly play new music for the student so it gets in their

ear right away. In addition, the absolute pitch student may want to perform a piece their way, either transposing it to another key, which they can do with great ease, or adding/subtracting chords of the harmony. Playing anything from memory is like walking for the AP student, and because playing from memory is a big deal for a young student, the absolute pitch student gets a continual ego boost for being able to do so most of the time without much effort. The best way to keep an AP student happy is to allow them to perform from memory all of the time. When teaching classical selections to an AP student, it is important for the teacher to play the piece many times or to have the student listen to a recording of it over and over again. Once the classical selection they are working on gets in their ear they will be able to correct themselves immediately at home when they play the wrong note. In fact, wrong notes are aurally painful sounds for the absolute pitch student therefore they will always attempt to give a note perfect performance in concerts. AP piano students correct themselves most of the time when they play wrong notes.

It is important to make a clear point to all performing piano students when they reach a certain level that piano is considered a memory-performing instrument. It is vital for the student to understand this if they do want to continue progressing on the piano. If they do not have absolute pitch, they must develop a great relative pitch. Many times this writer mentions to students that piano is the foundation of all instruments. They may find learning a second instrument to be significantly easier and faster since they began musical studies on the piano. When considering performing from memory, the educated teacher

must be able to access the student's memory abilities realistically. It is not wise for a teacher to push a student to perform from memory on the piano if that is not one of the strengths of that student.

Piano is important to maintain as a foundational instrument, but it could be to the student's benefit to begin and excel on another instrument with less demands for memorization. A great way for a teacher to help a student musically is to possibly recommend the appropriate instrument to complement their already existing strength.

There are instruments on which memory is almost always required. Learning music for a good memory student would be easier and faster on voice, the piano and any of the orchestral stringed instruments, violin, viola, cello and double bass. In addition, it is essential for the teacher to stress to the sight-reading students that playing a standard orchestral instrument would be to their benefit. If a student can sight read well and fast, this is the arena in which they will thrive. Piano, in this case, becomes a secondary instrument instead of the student's primary instrument. Sight-reading students who have good visual skills would benefit mostly from playing a woodwind, brass or percussion instrument, which require sight-reading and strong visual skills almost all of the time. There are few competitions, auditions and performances which require memory skills for the latter group of instruments; therefore, if a music student wants to continue to an advanced or professional level, these instruments would be ideal.

Lastly, these orchestral instruments listed above may also benefit those students who may not be as physically coordinated to play the piano well enough to get to an



advanced level. According to Mel Levine, choosing the correct instrument for a child can be the key to whether or not they become a musician. In his book, *A Mind in Time*, he stresses the importance of identifying a child's motor skills first before choosing the ideal instrument. He states that a person's, "musical motor output has to be one of the more obscure brain operations" (Levine 173) but continues on to describe what his research has shown to be true. He has found that, "rapid motor sequencing is essential for keyboard instrument," (Levine 182) thus needed to play the piano. "Some forms of tympani (cymbals and kettledrum) are less demanding," (Levine 172) when compared to rapid motor sequencing on the piano and, "a trombone stresses the use of large limb muscles, while a clarinet demands more fine motor function" (Levine 182).

In conclusion, performing should be one of the most exciting moments in a young students' life. Every effort should be made to make a child's performance experience the best moments of their year.

## CONCLUSION

As stated by Richard Carlson in his book, *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff and It's All Small Stuff: Simple Ways to Keep the Little Things from Taking Over Your Life*, “seek first to understand...meaning mastering the idea that if you want quality, fulfilling communication that is nourishing to you and others, understanding others must come first.” (Carlson, 73) The task of correct communication falls upon the educator and the parents of the beginner/intermediate piano student. Richard Carlson was a highly successful stress management speaker and educator until his sudden death in his mid-forties. His greatest contribution was to funnel understanding and processing of information down to its bare essence so communication between people would flow like water in the ocean. It is a priceless moment when a teacher can successfully communicate with their students.

This dissertation has attempted to show how and why teaching classical music to beginner/ intermediate piano students through the lens of academic approaches can increase the flow of communication to result in a future of more classically trained musicians.

The long term benefits of this type of pedagogical technique are endless. This dissertation may accomplish new methods of classical music training by reaching out to a larger pool of American students and parents through academic techniques. There could be more adults who play an instrument in our society. Piano lessons could be a staple in

our public and private educational system and children could have private piano lessons as part of their formative educational years. Piano training could be part of every child's homework routine like math and reading. The three main sections--teaching, motivating and performing--of this dissertation has simply outlined what every family could possibly do to give the gift of music to their child. To have more children grow into classically trained musician adults could possibly lead to a happier society overall. This method could possibly be a solution to the lack of classical music culture in our American society. This dissertation is merely a possible example of how and why to increase classical music appreciation in a society that has been pervaded by mediocre music and sports.

The following is a concise summary of each chapter written in this dissertation. This brief conclusion will explain the salient points of each section in order to show what was accomplished in this dissertation.

### **Recognizing Obstacles as Parents and Teachers:**

This chapter accomplished the task of basically informing the average non-musician parent of what to expect during their child's normal stages of learning the piano as a beginner/intermediate student. It is vital for parents to know what to expect. More often than not, parents remove their children from lessons prematurely because they think that it is abnormal for their child to experience one or all of Theresa Chen's stages. If a

parent begins to recognize the phases and stages of maturity during formative piano lessons then they will begin to feel more sympathetic towards their child instead of angry and frustrated.

Then by applying a more academic and analytical approach to her stages, some of the negative effects of each stage may eventually turn positive or just be eliminated completely. This will hopefully create a smoother transition from stage to stage for both the student and the parent.

This writer sees the future of classical piano lessons in our public and private schools as mandatory. In the private lesson realm, this writer hopes that parents and teachers who read this dissertation will be inspired to persist in giving their students/children a wonderful well-rounded education in classical music that will sustain these children all of the days of their lives.

### **The Piano Teacher and The Piano:**

This next chapter informed the parent of the correct piano teacher to look for before beginning lessons and the appropriate instrument to buy so the lessons will be most effective. This writer's experience showed that most parents just pick the most convenient set up for them when choosing a piano teacher. Convenience should not trump quality when choosing a teacher. The same is true when choosing the correct instrument as well.

In conclusion, this chapter put forth a parents' guide for finding the correct teacher and instrument that will benefit millions of parents and students in the future. This knowledge will hopefully prevent many students from quitting the piano at a premature stage in their development thus preventing them from becoming happy, cultured adults.

### **Reading and Counting Music:**

This chapter accomplished the task of laying down the very essence and foundation of learning how to read and count music as a basic beginner piano student. It may appear that this chapter can be applied to any western classical instrument and in truth, it can. The difference is that most other classical instrumentalists are reading one clef whereas the piano requires a proficient knowledge of two clefs simultaneously, the treble and the bass clef. This fact alone should require all beginner piano students to be fluent in note reading as soon as possible. In addition, counting music can soon become the bane of a students' existence if not taught with constant repetition and correctly right away.

Learning these two basic yet essential skills immediately on the piano cannot ever be emphasized enough. This chapter serves as a starting point for all parents and students beginning piano lessons for the first time. Reading and counting music correctly is the foundational piano requirement for sustaining interest and progressing smoothly as a student advances in training. Without this foundation, a young student will most likely

want to quit as the repertoire begins to get harder. This chapter will prevent many more students from terminating their intermediate level piano training. If followed correctly, the simple information of this chapter will allow the student to pick up a piece of music and play it from beginning to end without many stops, thus encouraging them to continue taking piano lessons.

### **Teaching the Four Mind Styles:**

Chapters Four and Five are dedicated to the thesis of incorporating the methodology of academic approaches and applying them directly to the art of teaching the beginner/intermediate piano student. Chapter Four took the simple methodology of Dr. Anthony Gregorc's, *Mind Styles* of academic research and applied them to teaching music. This writer has not found research such as this anywhere else. So much emphasis has been put on the American academic school system to stay abreast of the ways to teach our students subjects such as math, reading and science. The goal has been to stay competitive with foreign countries who seem to be ahead of our students. This writer felt that if the theme of this dissertation is to deem a classical piano education as important and as equal as subjects such as math, reading and science, it stands to reason that the academic methodologies should become musical ones as well.

Chapter Four took the basic task of reading and counting music to a more individualized, targeted teaching level. After chapters One to Three were put into place,

it is the information of this fourth chapter that speaks to the student. This chapter will benefit future generations of piano students by highlighting the way in which a student processes information. A student's comprehension relies mostly on the way in which the material is presented and a student's processing speed. All students do not fit neatly into just one of Gregorc's four categories but an experienced and wise teacher and parent can see how a student has a dominant tendency in one over the others.

In conclusion, the material in chapter Four is groundbreaking because it is the first time these four mind styles are being applied to music. In addition, these academic theories may help a beginner/intermediate piano student excel at the piano through a fine tuned individualized method of pedagogical techniques. It is with great hope that this writer brings this kind of teaching to the forefront of our society in order to keep more students happily playing the piano.

### **Motivation:**

This chapter attempted to accomplish the task of keeping beginner/intermediate piano students motivated and enthusiastic during their formative years of piano lessons. As stated many times in this dissertation, lack of motivation, dedication and desire are the main reasons why children quit the piano before they are good enough to retain what they have learned.

Chapter Five took the logical methodology of Dr. Richard Levine's eight motivational techniques of academic research and applied them to teaching music. This writer took each one of the techniques and extended its characteristics to apply to the piano student. To put it simply, children almost always respond to one or more motivational techniques. Since this is predominantly the case, it stands to reason that a detailed motivational methodology would make logical sense when trying to keep a piano student enthusiastic about continuing lessons. This writer feels that the fifth chapter has a great necessity in proving the chapters before it, and after it, valid and logical. The next two chapters following this one would cease to exist if the techniques of this motivation chapter are not put into place during a child's classical musical training. The ultimate goal in writing chapter Five is not to state that this is the one and only motivational technique required to keep a piano student happy, but to put forth one coherent and possibly successful form of motivational techniques that speak to a piano students' heart. This fifth chapter is the catalyst for the final two chapters of this dissertation.

### **Performing and Performing From Memory:**

Chapters Six and Seven served as the successful culmination and end result of chapters one to five. Successfully performing one's well learned piano pieces should be the ultimate goal for most piano students. Chapter Six accomplished the tough task of presenting what it takes to give a successful musical performance. Performing in front of



an audience, any audience, has almost always been this writer's most difficult hurdle to tackle. As an educator, this writer deems it necessary to make this part of a student's musical education as painless as possible. This chapter should be a necessary part of any piano teacher's studio. This writer has found that some great teachers have fallen short when it comes to alleviating the severe stress of performance anxiety for even their most advanced students. This chapter's greatest long term benefits are to create happy, confident and relaxed performing piano students. It is just one example of how to go about creating this feeling in performing piano students and this writer found it repeatedly successful when implemented correctly. Chapter Seven was given its' own section only because performing from memory carries with it an entirely new set of fears and nervousness that can set any beginner/intermediate piano student back several months or even years. It is important for parents and teachers to identify how a student processes music from memory. This knowledge is vital and necessary for a piano student to play from memory successfully.

Performing and performance practice techniques are very often ignored during a students' formative musical education therefore these last two chapters bring to light the importance and necessity of incorporating such techniques into a students' classical musical education.

In a final concluding remark, this writer hopes that this dissertation can bring forth some original ideas and concepts that will affect the future of beginner/intermediate classical piano students positively. It is with a humble and grateful heart that these many

chapters have been written. The satisfying fulfillment that a person receives from living a life permeated by great music making should never be underestimated. It is one of the greatest blessings and one that all children should be able to carry with them as adults all the days of their lives.

## CHART/TEST 1

## DIRECTIONS

Before starting with the Word Matrix on the next page, carefully read all seven of the following directions and suggestions:

1. **Reference Point.** You must assess the relative value of the words in each group using your SELF as a reference point; that is, who you are deep down. NOT who you are at home, at work, at school or who you would like to be or feel you ought to be. THE REAL YOU MUST BE THE REFERENCE POINT.
2. **Words.** The words used in the Gregorc Style Delineator Matrix are not parallel in construction nor are they all adjectives or all nouns. This was done on purpose. Just react to the words as they are presented.\*

4. **React.** To rank the words in a set, react to your first impression. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. The real, deep-down you is best revealed through a first impression. Go with it. Analyzing each group will obscure the qualities of SELF sought by the Delineator.

5. **Proceed.** Continue to rank all ten vertical columns of words, one set at a time.

6. **Time.** Recommended time for word ranking: 3 minutes.

7. **Start.** Turn the page and start now.

## Example

3. **Rank.** Rank in order the ten sets of four words. Put a "4" in the box above the word in each set which is the best and most powerful descriptor of your SELF. Give a "3" to the word which is the next most like you, a "2" to the next and a "1" to the word which is the least descriptive of your SELF. Each word in a set must have a ranking of 4, 3, 2 or 1. No two words in a set can have the same rank.

4 = **MOST** descriptive of you  
1 = **LEAST** descriptive of you

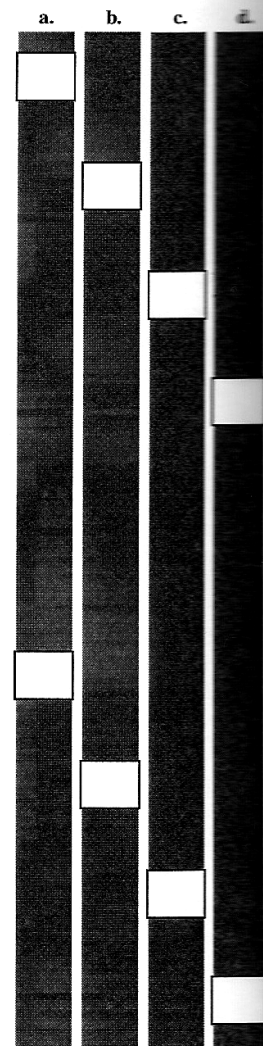
X	
a.	4 sun
b.	2 moon
c.	3 stars
d.	1 clouds

\*For an explanation on how and why these words were chosen, see the "Development" section of An Adult's Guide to Style.

## WORD MATRIX

	1	2	3	4	5
a.	<input type="checkbox"/> objective	<input type="checkbox"/> perfectionist	<input type="checkbox"/> solid	<input type="checkbox"/> practical	<input type="checkbox"/> careful with detail
b.	<input type="checkbox"/> evaluative	<input type="checkbox"/> research	<input type="checkbox"/> quality	<input type="checkbox"/> rational	<input type="checkbox"/> ideas
c.	<input type="checkbox"/> sensitive	<input type="checkbox"/> colorful	<input type="checkbox"/> non judgmental	<input type="checkbox"/> lively	<input type="checkbox"/> aware
d.	<input type="checkbox"/> intuitive	<input type="checkbox"/> risk-taker	<input type="checkbox"/> insightful	<input type="checkbox"/> perceptive	<input type="checkbox"/> creative

	6	7	8	9	10
a.	<input type="checkbox"/> thorough	<input type="checkbox"/> realistic	<input type="checkbox"/> ordered	<input type="checkbox"/> persistent	<input type="checkbox"/> product oriented
b.	<input type="checkbox"/> logical	<input type="checkbox"/> referential	<input type="checkbox"/> proof	<input type="checkbox"/> analytical	<input type="checkbox"/> judge
c.	<input type="checkbox"/> spontaneous	<input type="checkbox"/> empathy	<input type="checkbox"/> attuned	<input type="checkbox"/> aesthetic	<input type="checkbox"/> person oriented
d.	<input type="checkbox"/> trouble shooter	<input type="checkbox"/> innovative	<input type="checkbox"/> multi- solutions	<input type="checkbox"/> experimenting	<input type="checkbox"/> practical dreamer



Total of  
above      
CS AS AR CR

After ranking all ten sets, read how to determine your score on the next page.

## SCORING

1. **Add Across.** Add across the "a." row of words in the first five sets. Put that total in the top "a" column box. Do the same for the "b", "c" and "d" rows of the first set. Next, do the last group of five sets, putting the row totals in the bottom group of boxes.

### Example

$$\begin{array}{cccccc}
 \text{a.} & \boxed{4} & + & \boxed{4} & + & \boxed{1} & + & \boxed{3} & + & \boxed{2} & & \boxed{14}^{\text{a}} \\
 \text{a.} & \boxed{1} & + & \boxed{3} & + & \boxed{4} & + & \boxed{2} & + & \boxed{1} & & \boxed{11} \\
 & & & & & & & & & & \text{Total} & \boxed{25} \\
 & & & & & & & & & & \text{of above} & \text{CS}
 \end{array}$$

2. **Add Down.** Add the top and bottom box in each scoring column to get the total for that column.

3. **Check.** If your combined total scores of CS (a), AS (b), AR (c) and CR (d) is greater or less than 100, please recheck your addition. All four columns should total exactly 100.

FIGURE 1: Minuet, from the Notebook of Anna Magdalena Bach

Measures 1-5 of the Minuet. The treble clef staff contains a melodic line starting with a quarter note G4, followed by eighth notes A4, B4, C5, and quarter notes D5, E5, F5, G5. The bass clef staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with a bass line of quarter notes G2, F2, E2, D2, C2, B1, A1, G1.

Measures 6-10 of the Minuet. The treble clef staff continues the melodic line with eighth notes G5, F5, E5, D5, quarter notes C5, B4, A4, G4. The bass clef staff continues the accompaniment with quarter notes G1, F1, E1, D1, C1, B0, A0, G0.

Measures 11-16 of the Minuet. The treble clef staff features a sequence of eighth notes G4, A4, B4, C5, quarter notes D5, E5, F5, G5. The bass clef staff continues the accompaniment with quarter notes G1, F1, E1, D1, C1, B0, A0, G0.

Measures 17-21 of the Minuet. The treble clef staff has eighth notes G4, A4, B4, C5, quarter notes D5, E5, F5, G5. The bass clef staff continues the accompaniment with quarter notes G1, F1, E1, D1, C1, B0, A0, G0.

Measures 22-27 of the Minuet. The treble clef staff has quarter notes G4, A4, B4, C5, quarter notes D5, E5, F5, G5. The bass clef staff continues the accompaniment with quarter notes G1, F1, E1, D1, C1, B0, A0, G0.

Measures 28-32 of the Minuet. The treble clef staff has quarter notes G4, A4, B4, C5, quarter notes D5, E5, F5, G5. The bass clef staff continues the accompaniment with quarter notes G1, F1, E1, D1, C1, B0, A0, G0.

**APPENDIX A****THE DOMINANT CONCRETE SEQUENTIAL  
STUDENT'S LESSON PLAN****Lesson Plan for All New Pieces**

Each day practice the Kumon style of writing out the notes and clapping out the rhythm. This should be done until it is perfect.

**Lesson Plan for the *Minuet in G*:**

- Day 1:** Read through and practice the right and left hand parts, hands alone for the first 16 measures. Practice two measures at a time. Follow the exact fingerings that are already printed in the music or that has been marked by pencil in the music at all times for consistency.
- Day 2:** Do the same as Day 1 until both hands are smooth with the correct notes, fingerings and rhythm. The repetition of Day 2 will build necessary muscle memory.
- Day 3:** Same as Day 1 and 2 if needed. If both hands are separately playing the first 16 measures with the correct notes and rhythm well, then move on to playing hands together in four measure increments. It is mandatory to perfect each four measure section well, hands together, before moving on to the next set of four measures.

**Day 4:** Same as Day 1 and 2 if needed. If you have progressed to practicing hands together, then continue day three in four measure increments. If on Day 3 you were successful in completing the first four measures, hands together, then you should continue on to the second four measures today. At the end of your practice session, you should end with connecting all of the measures learned, hands together, in order to slowly begin putting the sections together smoothly.

**Day 5:** By this day, you should hopefully be able to play both hands alone with the correct notes and rhythm. If not, then you need to be patient and continue to work on the right and/or left hands alone in four measure increments, connecting all learned measures at the end of the session hands alone again. More than twenty minutes of practicing may be needed in order for you to feel that progress is being made.

**Day 6:** Continue with the instructions of Day 5.

**Day 7:** Continue with the instructions of Day 5. Repeat all successfully learned measures over and over again.

**Day 8:** Return for a piano lesson and show me how you practiced.

**Note to the teacher:** Keep all lesson plans as black and white, as literal and as direct as possible.



## **APPENDIX B**

### **THE DOMINANT ABSTRACT RANDOM STUDENT'S LESSON PLAN**

#### **Lesson Plan for All New Pieces**

Each day practice the Kumon style of writing out the notes and clapping out the rhythm. Do one or both Kumon style exercises depending on which one you feel needs the most work. If you get frustrated, take a break and work on your daily practicing at the piano and then return to working on writing the notes and/or clapping out the rhythm. Even if this takes several weeks, please do this every day until it is perfect.

#### **Lesson Plan for the *Minuet in G***

Please be sure to begin every practice session by singing the piece out loud as well as possible. Play hands alone, but very slowly in order to get as many right notes as possible with correct fingerings and rhythm. First, slowly practice the entire piece at one time, beginning with the right hand to get the melody that you just sang under your fingers. Then put brackets around the phrases in which you repeatedly play wrong notes and/or fingerings. The phrases should be in two or four bar groupings. Practice these phrases alone several times before attempting to connect them to the rest of the piece. Do the same with the left hand. Since the left hand has the harmony part or accompaniment, it is possible to sing the right hand part out loud while practicing the left hand alone. Next, after playing hands alone comfortably and with ease, begin to put hands together in

four bar phrases. Remember, notes and fingerings are important, so be as accurate as possible while practicing your phrases at all times.

Now, I will give you a series of verbal instructions and I want you to repeat them back to me before you leave, so I know you processed and understood exactly what is expected from this week's practicing.

*Note to the teacher:* This student sometimes likes to keep a journal of their life, which includes their practicing. If this student does so, have them bring their practice journal to each lesson and read it over while the student is demonstrating what they practiced for you. Try not to react to the journal in any way, but maintain a positive attitude and response after reading it. Although this Appendix has been put in to show a possible example of a lesson plan, oftentimes it may be most effective for the student to just take notes while you verbally tell them what and how to practice. I find this method of paraphrasing the teacher's words easier for this type of student.

## APPENDIX C

### THE DOMINANT CONCRETE RANDOM STUDENT'S LESSON PLAN

#### **Lesson Plan for All New Pieces**

Each day practice the Kumon style of writing out the notes and clapping out the rhythm. If you can come up with your own method of learning the notes and rhythm that will prove more effective for yourself, then do so. If you would like to practice a combination of both, then do so every day until reading/playing the notes and rhythm are effortless for you.

#### **Lesson Plan for the *Minuet in G***

First, find a good performance of this piece on video by a pianist whose playing you admire or want to exemplify. Listen to and watch it every day once or twice before practicing. After several weeks of perfecting the basic notes, fingerings and rhythm, add dynamics and begin to play along with this video adding your own musicality to it along the way. This is the ultimate goal to keep in mind while practicing and following the lesson plan explained during your lesson.

For the first week, there will be no specific day planner, but it is expected that you divide up your piece according to the way in which you best hear where there are natural phrases and listen to the recording you have chosen to practice with eventually.

Once one hand can be played up to your desired tempo, begin to perform with the recording even if you and the performer in the recording are not in tune together.

In order to get to this place, I suggested that you break the measures into two or four bar phrases and practice hands alone first then hands together before continuing on to the next section, but if you feel you can handle larger sections at a time, please do so.

*Note to the teacher:* Without putting it any more succinctly, there really is no full proof definitive lesson plan that has ever worked well across the board with this type of student. This is because their depth of insight, instinct and unusual creative ideas go beyond what most teachers have to offer. I have found that for this mind style student, the lesson plans have been very different for each. The above lesson plan is just one of many types of lesson plans that could possibly work. This particular lesson plan was chosen only because it has seemed to work effectively with at least several students in this mind style category. This is because they enjoy experiencing a real live performance simultaneously with their own practicing. This aspect of practicing feeds into their playful, adventuresome personality.

The best advice for the teacher is to just keep reinventing the wheel for this type of student.

**APPENDIX D****THE DOMINANT ABSTRACT SEQUENTIAL  
STUDENT'S LESSON PLAN****Lesson Plan for All New Pieces**

Each day practice the Kumon style of writing out the notes and clapping out the rhythm. This should be done until it is perfect even if there is no intention of preparing for a possible performance.

**Lesson Plan for *Minuet in G***

Please see Appendix 1 for the lesson plan of the dominant concrete sequential student. The reason for this is because, like the dominant concrete sequential student, the dominant abstract sequential student likes logical reasoning and practical instructions in order to learn efficiently.

Here is the difference: the dominant concrete sequential student does not necessarily question instructions the way in which the dominant abstract sequential student does, therefore, the teacher must be experienced and knowledgeable enough to have a logical and practical reason for each and every lesson. If possible, it would be most highly effective for the dominant abstract sequential student to witness a daily instructional video of the lesson written out in Appendix 1 for the dominant concrete sequential student. Even more effective would be to have the teacher video himself demonstrating days 1-7 of Appendix 1 for this type of student. Then the student can go

home and each day observe what and how to practice the *Minuet in G* for that day and then try it for themselves once they have observed the instructional video for that day. Since this student is doubling their work load compared to the dominant concrete sequential student by first needing the lesson plan written out, then visually performed to observe before practicing, it is unrealistic for the teacher to expect quick progress on the *Minuet in G*. The processing will take twice as long but more often than not, the end result is near perfect each time.



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