

Piano News

October 2011

OCTOBER MINI-RECITAL

The students have been working hard to prepare the music for the first public performance this school year, and I think you'll be pleased at what you hear. We've also spent some time during group lesson on performance skills – approaching the piano, announcing, SMILING!, bowing, etc., etc. and I hope you notice their progress. Of course no matter how informal the performance may be, the students will still be a bit nervous, so please encourage your child to practice their performance at home a couple of times – practice DOES make a difference!

Please arrive 10 minutes prior to their recital time. Dress is casual, and be sure the students remember to bring their music (even if it is memorized). Each recital should last 30 – 45 minutes. We will have a very fun way to determine performance order, too – I try to surprise the students each time!

MINI RECITALS		
Friday, October 28		
Covenant Methodist Church		
4:00 p.m.	5:00 p.m.	6:00 p.m.
Grace Stensland	Lydia Fender	Annika Johnson
Julia Farrel	Ashley Knighten	Blake Peterson
Carrie Schreiner	Katie Thieschafer	Micah Johnson
Ashley Ellenz	May Lim	George Johnson
Solveig Baylor	Sam Stiles	Peter Johnson
Alli McKernan	Sebi Stiles	Emily Armstrong
Amy Reathaford	Simon Stiles	Zac Ziegler
Genevieve Gaura	Michael McCord	Nicole Brookshire
Olivia Spilker	Cale Irwin	Claire Grubb
Kelsey Ellenz	Jakob Distel	Roman Morelli
	Andrew Jaboro	Gianna Morelli
	Olivia Cooke	Lauren Udlock

NOVEMBER GROUP LESSONS

The next group lessons will be Monday & Tuesday, November 21 & 22. Group lesson assignments will remain the same as October and a reminder will be sent out the week before.

CHRISTMAS RECITAL – Friday, December 9, Music City Recital Hall

There will be two performances this year: 4:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. If you have a preferred time, please let me know – I am happy to accommodate requests as long as each performance stays balanced with a variety of ages and music. I will accept time requests until the end of November. If I don't hear from you, I will assume that either time is OK.

CHRISTMAS RECITAL (continued):

Dress will be semi-formal: DO NOT WEAR jeans of any color or style, t-shirts, athletic shoes, or other 'casual' wear. I don't require dresses or ties, but please encourage students to look their best! Polo shirts are fine, as are nice sweaters and slacks. Please be sure your child's dress shoes still fit – I've really noticed some "growth" among the kids this year!

Music does not need to be memorized. There will be programs and a short reception following each recital. Advanced students do not need to play Christmas music, but it is encouraged and enjoyed by all.

CALENDAR UPDATES

Below is an updated version of my 2011 – 2012 Calendar of Events. Everything is the same as first published in the August News, with the addition now of the Spring Recital and adjusted dates for the remaining weeks of lessons.

Friday, October 28	Mini Recitals at Covenant Methodist 4:00, 5:00 & 6:00 p.m. (Friday lessons will be changed)
Monday, October 31	Halloween – no lessons after 5:00 p.m.
Friday – Sunday, November 4-6	MTNA/OAC Competition (Friday lessons will be changed)
Monday & Tuesday, November 21 & 22	Group Lessons
Friday, December 9	Christmas Recitals at Music City 4:30 p.m. & 6:30 p.m. (Friday lessons will be changed)
Monday, Dec 19 – Friday, Dec 30	Winter Break – No Lessons
Monday, January 2	Lessons Resume (even though school does not)
Monday & Tuesday, Feb 6 & 7	Group Lessons
Saturday, February 25	Mini Recitals at Steinway Gallery 1:30, 2:30 & 3:30 p.m.
Sunday, March 4	WSMTA State Recitalist Competition
Monday – Thursday, March 5-8	WSMTA Adjudications
Monday – Friday, April 5 – 9	Spring Break – No Lessons
Monday & Tuesday, April 30 & May 1	Group Lessons
Thursday, May 10	Spring Recital Mt Spokane High School 4:30 p.m. & 6:30 p.m.
Monday – Friday, May 14 – 18	Musicfest Northwest – No Lessons
Monday May 21 – Friday June 1	Regular Lessons
Monday May 28	Memorial Day – I plan to teach this day
Monday June 4 – Friday June 8	Conference Lessons
Monday June 11 – Friday June 15	First week of summer lessons
Monday June 18 – Friday June 22	WSMTA State Conference – no lessons

WSMTA ADJUDICATIONS

The Washington State Music Teachers Association sponsors an event each year called “Adjudications” where students perform two memorized pieces for a master teacher. It is an exciting way to share their music with another teacher and receive encouragement and praise from someone new! I am very pleased to offer this opportunity to students who are in their 2nd year and above.

The purpose of WSMTA Adjudications is to:

1. Provide an educational experience that encourages goal setting, persistence, and creativity.
2. Provide a performance opportunity for students where an objective evaluation of each student’s skill and musicianship is made by an impartial, competent adjudicator.
3. Provide the teacher an opportunity to consult with another professional musician.

Adjudications encourage and enlist parental interest and support and provide a wholesome outlet for community pride.

Students will receive:

- A written evaluation and oral comments from the adjudicator
- A Certificate of Participation

Each student receives a “mini-lesson” where the teacher hears two pieces performed from memory (usually contrasting styles – one fast, one slow, etc.) and then works at the piano with the student.

Adjudications are held at different locations in Spokane during the 1st or 2nd week of March and the cost can vary from \$20 - \$40. It’s a small audience, made up of other students from my studio and their parents, and is held during the week, so students would have to miss ½ day of school.

This is a positive, educational performance experience for all students, and I would encourage anyone with even the slightest interest to participate. The biggest “pressure” will be to memorize two pieces.

I find that students who participate in events like this tend to stay with piano. It’s very similar to sports, where students go to practice week after week, and then have games and tournaments. Without performances, practice becomes boring and routine. This event can be quite exciting, because you never know what the judge will hear and comment on that’s different and new, and the comments are always helpful, positive and encouraging. Sometimes the comments reflect what students have heard at their lessons, such as “has your teacher asked you to count your ½ notes?” and is very motivating for students to hear the same things from another teacher. I tell my students that their practice goal is to make it difficult for the judges to find anything to say!

For the most part – I will expect almost all of my students to participate in this event, unless they are 1st year students – including students who study with student teachers.

PIANO CARE, REPAIR and REPLACEMENT

As I've said many times, piano lessons are a lot like sports. When the kids are young, their soccer balls are smaller, their sports shoes are less expensive, and the programs are low-key, fun, and not very competitive. But as the young athlete matures, so does the commitment of time, energy, and investment in quality training and equipment. As a former "soccer-mom", I truly understand this progression and development.

Piano is not much different: when the students are young and learning how to read the notes, count the rhythms, and hear the difference between loud, soft, staccato & legato, a "beginning" instrument is a perfect match. Over the years I have started many students on Costco keyboards, and pianos that have been inherited from their great-grandma. But as the student matures and becomes an accomplished musician, they move from simply playing the notes with the correct rhythm and a general mood of loud or soft, to the finer nuances of "espressivo, cantabile and marcato", voicing one note of a 4 note chord, balancing the moving inner line of a Bach Fugue and creating a mood and emotional response that keyboards simply cannot reproduce and many older, used pianos cannot achieve.

The following information will help you to evaluate your current instrument, and discover if it's time to repair or replace your piano with one that will provide your children with a quality sound and touch, which will reflect their growing skill as a musician.

Beginning Students:

- An acoustic piano with all the keys and pedal in working order. It must be able to hold a tune (your piano technician can advise you regarding that); or an electronic instrument with a full keyboard that is touch-sensitive, with a pedal or pedal attachment.

Intermediate Students:

- For students who are no longer in a method book and have moved into playing standard piano repertoire, an electronic keyboard is no longer appropriate. If you have an older piano, it may still be OK, but it is at this stage that you will need to evaluate the piano's condition.

Advanced Students:

- What worked in the previous years, may no longer work at all at this stage. The students are being asked to develop an advanced technique that produces exactly the right sound at exactly the right time, in exactly the right way. Rebuilding your current piano, or upgrading to a newer vertical piano, or a small grand piano is an appropriate step.

Over the years I have developed outstanding relationships with the members of the Piano Technicians Guild. They have a wonderful website that contains helpful information regarding the care of your piano, and how to evaluate its condition: [Piano Technicians Guild - Piano Care](#). There are other pages on this site which provide information regarding rebuilding and/or reconditioning your piano.

Kevin Rindlisbacher, the owner of [The Steinway Gallery of Spokane](#), provides a valuable perspective of the condition of our instrument. My thanks to him for his very well written article:

There is a story of a lamp salesman who spent many days in a small town unsuccessfully going door-to-door trying to sell his lamps. After several days he was discouraged and tired of hearing a similar response at each home. It seems that all the homeowners were satisfied with the lamps they already had and didn't need any more. Discouraged, he contemplated quitting. He decided to give it one last attempt by using a different approach. He was greeted at the next door by an elderly gentleman who politely told him he already had a nice lamp and didn't need another one. Look around he said, "I have plenty of light in this room." Rather than accepting the elderly man's answer the salesman asked if he could be allowed to plug in his new lamp next to the homeowner's existing lamp. When the new lamp was turned on the homeowner was astonished at the additional light that filled his room! Because he was use to the low level of light that his old lamp produced he had no idea what he was missing. He could see with greater clarity and his room seemed alive. He gratefully purchased the new lamp. The moral of the story is that often times we get use to what we have without realizing how much better our lives could be with the proper tools or equipment.

A local Spokane piano teacher experienced this first hand a couple of years ago. Upon graduating from college with her master's degree in piano pedagogy she purchased a grand piano for her teaching studio. She taught on the piano for over 20 years and gave little thought to her piano other than the regular service recommended by her piano technician. One day a new adult student took their first lesson with her. The student struggled playing on her piano. He was surprised at the inconsistent feel on different notes and the limited range of tone that the piano produced. The piano was a decent piano when it was new. But like most people, the teacher didn't realize that pianos wear out. While the keys can continue to go up and down and produce a sound the musicality of the instrument---or lack thereof--- can limit the experience of making music. Once the teacher started to pay attention to the piano itself she realized that it needed to be replaced. The teacher eventually purchased a new Steinway piano. The different tones the new piano produced (dynamic range) and the control she felt with every note (action) was an amazing improvement over what she had previously experienced. She made the comment that she could never go back to teaching on her old piano.

A talented and motivated student will perform well regardless of the piano placed in front of them. But given a chance to play on a good quality instrument the chances of success increase exponentially. The owner of Steinway Piano Gallery can attest to this. He has three piano players in his home. The music room in his home has a tendency to be a revolving door of pianos. If a new model arrives he will often put it in his home for a "trial run". Over the years he has had pianos ranging from typical inexpensive upright pianos to a Steinway 9' grand piano. Without his saying anything, the time his children spend practicing and playing the piano is significantly increased when he has a better piano in the home. And the rest of the family enjoys listening to the better piano as well.

If your piano is older than about 20 years you should know that its musical performance life is on the downward slope. Many people become emotionally attached to their pianos not realizing that the emotional attachment may be clouding the reality of the instrument's musicality. I recognize that pianos can be an expensive. But when amortized over the years of enjoyment the investment will reap many rewards. Nothing signals your family's commitment to making music like the arrival of a new instrument. Don't let your existing piano limit your student's progress. Think about giving your child the best piano possible to increase their enjoyment and musical success. You will be surprised at how much brighter the musical light will shine in your home!

I hope you find this information both helpful and educational as your children progress in their musical study. Don't hesitate to contact me if you have questions about the condition of your piano, and what options are available to you. EVERYONE will benefit from a well-tuned instrument in good repair.