

Huntington Piano Lessons Newsletter

March 2013, by Helena Almborg

Quote of the month

"I find playing music to be one of my strongest personal therapies, not only from the state of being I can achieve while playing, but also from the energetic balancing and mood-enhancing effect on my mind, body and spirit throughout the day." Frank Fitzpatrick

From my Piano Bench



Musical schools and conservatories are great for learning how to play, write, read, and perform music. But there are things that one does not learn there. I can mention at least two—grabbing and retaining your audience.

We are attracted to some musicians because of their charisma, their stage presence, their emotional connection with the music they are playing, and above all, how they make you feel when watching a live performance. These musicians become famous and very rich.

There are plenty of talented musicians out there that nobody will ever hear of, and they will not succeed in the world of music, because they cannot connect with their audience. Horowitz, one of the most famous and successful classical pianist in the world, made mistakes during performances. Did his audience noticed that? Yes. Did they care? No. He was able to move them despite his mistakes. He grabbed his audience with the emotion of his playing.

Some performers play very, very well. They do not make mistakes. They obey the markings of dynamics, tempo and rhythm precisely, but their playing is, nevertheless, lifeless. They can't move their audience and the performance becomes rigid and too long.

The other big void in musical education, in my view, is learning how to retain your audience. I went to see a pianist perform last week. He was great!! His music was beautiful, he was expressive, he connected with the audience and me, and we gave him a standing ovation at the end of his recital.

I decided to buy his CD. I stayed in line, I paid a good amount of money for it, then I waited to have him sign it for me. I was excited, I wanted to tell him that I was a piano teacher and that I would play his CD to my students. He is from Russia, so I wanted to share my heritage with him.

So here's the big moment, I am the next on line, I am holding my breath (wow, I am going to actually talk to a star!). He grabbed a pen, opened the CD, signed with "my best wishes, with all my love."

Not once he looked at me. He didn't smile, he didn't thank me for buying his CD or attending his concert. What "best wishes"? He didn't care. "With all my love"? Bah, fiddlesticks.

Needless to say, I haven't played the CD. My students and I are not going to talk about it and I will not tell all my friends to attend his next show. After so much work, practicing, rehearsals, traveling, after so much time and effort to put up a show, in 30 seconds this love story was over for me.

Moral of the story for my students, enjoy what you are playing and be nice to your audience. Start practicing. Recital date March 17.

Featured Students



Samantha McGloin: has been my student since she was 4. Samantha was one of my youngest students ever. From the beginning, I was very impressed how she was able to understand musical concepts. She also is learning Spanish in school. Now she is 6 years old and attends 1st grade in Jefferson Primary. She loves dogs, puppies and pizza. Her grandmother Mimi always brings her to the lessons. Samantha enjoys gymnastics and is letting her hair grow long. She loves piano because it is a tricky instrument to learn and fun to play.



Joseph DiAngelo: Piano student since September 2011. When Joseph started his lessons all he wanted to do was to compose his own music and he did have the opportunity to be my only student to have ever played his own composition during my recitals. The performance was well received by critics and audience. Joseph attends 4th grade at St. Patrick School. He loves computers, WWE and Dr. Who episodes. Being so active and interested in different things, Joe likes to play the piano because of its relaxing sounds.

On a lighter note,

great news for kids and parents... last February 13, the Journal of Neuroscience published results from a study that concluded that children who started music lessons (especially piano lessons - my contribution to the article) before the age of 7 developed a better motor and auditory skills.

How's that? The study found out that in order to play an instrument, the brain has to be able to coordinate between hands and eyes and hearing, stimulating the parts of the brain that aid in planning and executing movements. Taking music lessons before the age of 7 boosts the normal maturation of these connections between motor and sensory regions of the brain. Scientist compared adult musicians that had the same amount of training and practice, except that one group started playing before 7 and the other after 7. Both groups were also compared to people without any musical training.

Result: musicians who started before age seven showed more accurate timing on a movement task, eventhough all participants had two days of practice before the task. [Piano players are better at practicing anything (again, my contribution to this research) because not only they are more coordinated, they are more disciplined, more patient and more organized].

Scientists also remarked that the early starters were better at motor coordination but not necessarily better at playing the instrument, I guess that depends on how much they practiced :-).

*"It's important to remember that what we are showing is that early starters have some specific skills and differences in the brain that go along with that. But, these things don't necessarily make them better musicians. **Musical performance is about skill, but it is also about communication, enthusiasm, style, and many other things** that we don't measure. So, while starting early may help you express your genius, it probably won't make you a genius." - Professor Virginia Penhure*