

CONNECT

CAPMT



JOURNAL



CAPMT CONNECT

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Message from the Immediate Past President

Noreen C Wenjen, NCTM • norwenj@gmail.com

CAPMT President 2017–2019



It has been an honor serving as your state President. The California Association of Professional Music Teachers and Music Teachers' National Association have shaped my path as a professional music teacher. It has helped me to find mentorship, become a leader, provide my students with opportunities such as participating in events and competitions, and create lasting friendships with teachers across the globe.

Twenty-five years ago, I started my teaching career in Washington state with my former teacher, the renowned concert pianist and pedagogue, Joanna Hodges. She encouraged me to become a MTNA Nationally Certified Teacher of Music (NCTM), which I earned after two years.

I moved back to California to close the gap on my long-distance relationship with my future husband. I joined CAPMT, and immediately accepted my first position as CAPMT Auditions Chair for District 3. I held this position for almost 20 years, and accepted other positions along the way, which led me to eventually become state president.

It is my hope that all of our CAPMT members will find time to serve CAPMT and create new opportunities for leadership and professional growth.

National Support for Teachers

My attendance at the MTNA National Conference held in Spokane, Washington in March reminded me of the importance of global thinking, multi-leveled support, and connectivity. We tell our students to stretch, grow, and challenge themselves. I step into my students' shoes and try to "empty my cup" every time I attend the MTNA national conference, especially on Pedagogy Saturday. This year's impressive lineup included keynote speaker, Alan Walker and performances by pianist Ingrid Fliter, and the Transcontinental Saxophone Quartet.

MTNA receives hundreds of proposals each year and I am very proud of CAPMT's representation at the national conference. CAPMT presenters included: Dr. Hans Boepple, Dr. Brandon Bascom, Dr. Stephen Pierce, Dr. Victor Labenske, Jeremy Siskind, Lisa Bastien, Dr. Mitzi Kolar, and me. Topics spanned pedagogy, teaching artistry, Recreational Music Making (RMM), composition, and technology. Please enjoy the pictures from the conference which are posted below my message here.

Dr. Scott McBride Smith (former CAPMT President) completed his term as MTNA President and inaugurated the new MTNA President, Dr. Martha Hilley. I completed my term as Chair of the State President's Advisory Council. Congratulations to our incoming President, Wendi Kirby-Alexander, for being elected as the new SPAC Chair!

National Opportunities for Students

Congratulations to the students of our CAPMT teachers who were selected as MTNA National Competition winners!

- Elementary Composition winner, Kyle Yeung (Teacher, Carlton Liu)
- Young Artist Brass winner, Vivian Kung (Teacher, Aubrey Foard)
- Chamber Music String Winner, Oak Piano Trio-Kaiyuan Wu, violin, Bowen Liu, cello, and Jinzhao Xu, piano (Coach, Yoshikazu Nagai)

CAPMT also connected at our Southwest Division meeting, with the largest state turnout! State Presidents reported on recent events and discussed issues and accomplishments in their state.

We celebrated our MTNA Foundation Fellow from California, Dr. William Wellborn at the Gala. Thanks to the generous support of CAPMT colleagues, friends, and family, Dr. Wellborn's contributions to music teaching and learning were celebrated. The contributions made to the MTNA Foundation Fellow fund in honor of Dr. Wellborn support student and teacher programs.

Connections with Teachers throughout California and the US

It is ironic that we sometimes have to travel across the country to connect with colleagues who live nearby. Due to technology and traffic, many of our CAPMT meetings are now facilitated online. While we love the convenience, we miss the interaction. Every year, I look forward to our state and national conference to re-connect with teachers from throughout California and the United States.

CAPMT's informal gathering at the MTNA Conference was again a well-attended event that allowed CAPMT members and guests to connect. Thank you to Amy Bhatnager, for organizing this event at Mizuna, and to our generous sponsors, the Royal Conservatory of Music (attendees Dr. Peter Simon, Dr. Elain Rusk, and Dr. Deborah How) and Yamaha (attendee Jun Fujimoto).

New President

Please join me in welcoming our wonderful new CAPMT State President, Wendi Kirby-Alexander, along with the new Board of Directors, and Chairs. It has been an honor serving as your President and representing this distinguished group of CAPMT leaders and members. I am grateful for the steadfast support and collaborative spirit of our dedicated Board of Directors, Chapter Presidents, Chairs, members, and our management company, Bravura Innovations. Special thanks to our Immediate Past-President, Dr. Jennifer Snow and Parliamentarian, Darlene Vlasek for their guidance and wisdom.

I hope to see you at the upcoming [CAPMT State Conference](#) October 18-19, 2019 in San José, CA and at the MTNA National Conference in Chicago March 21-25, 2020!

I leave you with my sincere thanks and one of my favorite quotes:

"No one who achieves success does so without the help of others. The wise and confident acknowledge this help with gratitude." —*Alfred North Whitehead*

Warm regards,

Noreen C Wenjen, NCTM
CAPMT President 2017–2019







Message from the President

Wendi Kirby-Alexander, NCTM • wkirbya@gmail.com

CAPMT President



Dear CAPMT Members,

I am honored to begin my term as President of the California Association of Professional Music Teachers. I am looking forward to serving you and our incredible organization.

We are happy to announce that we are in the process of launching a new website! We can still be found at www.capmt.org, and are thrilled to unveil the site's new look and capabilities, some of which are still under construction. We appreciate your patience as we get all features up and running, including student

program registration. We hope you will find the new platform user-friendly and reliable, and we are so grateful to the team of people that have worked so hard to make it a reality.

As I enter this new role as President, I am aware of the great responsibility I hold in serving on behalf of our members. Our governing mission is to uphold our core values. As members, we each have personal values that help form who we are, whether those include integrity, creativity, compassion, gratitude or intention. As teachers, these values are passed along to our students so that we become more than just teachers of music but mentors to our students. These core values dictate how we interact and contribute to our families and communities, and as an organization, they help us to accomplish our mission.

At a time when we live in a divided world, the core value of *connection* is especially important. We join an organization for this purpose—to make connections for ourselves and our students on many levels. Since music is the universal language, it is the most powerful way to connect. When we connect with the world through music, there is harmony. As musicians we hold not only responsibility, but opportunity for change.

I invite you to connect with others in this musical community we call CAPMT, not only as colleagues and fellow teachers, but also as friends. As friends we can encourage and support each other and strengthen our mission. Mentor a new member, ask an old friend to play duets, share ideas over a cup of coffee. We are mighty together as we go out into our communities and into the world.

I encourage all chapter leaders to schedule events for teacher development and collaboration throughout the year. We, too, need enrichment and growth as we provide the same for our students. Then, take advantage of the many opportunities CAPMT offers our students, including auditions, assessments, evaluations and competitions at state and local levels. Save the date for our CAPMT Conference this October 18-19, 2019 at San José State University. Be inspired by the exciting combination of the Beethoven Center, fine presenters and incredible guest artist, Peter Dugan, as you connect or reconnect with fellow CAPMT members.

I am looking forward to an exciting time in the history of CAPMT and I am looking forward to connecting with all of you.

Warm regards,

Wendi Kirby-Alexander, NCTM
CAPMT President



Watch President Wendi Kirby-Alexander's interview with Peter Dugan [HERE](#)

Editorial

Dr. Stephen Pierce • pierces@usc.edu

CAPMT Connect Editor



Summer is the perfect time to take stock of everything that has taken place over the previous school year. As I have reflected on the past several months of activity, I am struck by the many highlights that involve connecting in a meaningful way with my colleagues. These include a truly celebratory 50th Anniversary CAPMT Conference, an inspiring MTNA National Conference in Spokane, and another wonderful year working with terrific colleagues around the state and nation.

Conferences are a reminder to me of the value of community, and they provide teachers with the time and opportunity to connect with others. As an immigrant and California transplant, I have no family in the state, and most of my closest friends are scattered across the globe. My CAPMT music teacher colleagues are some of my dearest friends and therefore, my new adopted community. I echo our new president, Wendi Kirby-Alexander who writes about the importance of connection and community within our profession in her president's message. I truly believe that if

we demonstrate respect and kindness to our colleagues and students, as well as to everyone within the communities we inhabit and frequent, the world would be far better for it.

With this in mind, and as the newly installed CAPMT Vice President of Conferences, I am excited to invite you, our members, to attend the upcoming state conference in San José in October. We have titled our conference, *Connecting Classical to Crossover: Beethoven and Beyond*. The word "connecting" was thoughtfully chosen. As I mentioned already, conferences are a forum that provide the opportunity to connect and commune with our music teaching peers. This year, we are also eager to present a different kind of conference with a look to the future, as well as acknowledging the importance of the past.

Peter Dugan is an acclaimed pianist and teacher who specializes in working with adults in the Evening Division of the Juilliard School. He is well-known for his exciting performances as a crossover musician and will serve as our conference Guest Artist. Peter will teach an adult student during his conference masterclass, and present a recital of eclectic repertoire as the final event of our conference.

San José State University (SJSU) was chosen as the venue for the conference in

part because it houses the world renowned Ira F. Brilliant Center for Beethoven Studies. Dr. Erica Buurman is the new Center Director and will offer conference attendees an exciting glimpse into the Beethoven Center. The center houses an incredible collection, including a variety of historic keyboard instruments. Conference attendees will have the rare opportunity of playing on a Broadwood piano among other instruments. In addition, Dr. Gwendolyn Mok, Coordinator of Keyboard Studies at SJSU will present a fascinating session on Ravel and Brahms. Gwen is a Ravel specialist and has recorded all of his piano music on an Erard piano. This session is not to be missed!

The conference will also feature presentations by several young professionals. Grant Kondo and Julie Poklewski will each present a session, while various collegiate chapter members from around our state will provide group presentations during the day. Also included will be sessions on the Royal Conservatory Certificate Program, a World Premiere performance of our Commissioned Composer's new work, as well as the opportunity to hear some of our gifted CAPMT Competition winners in concert. We hope that you will join us for an exciting event filled with music, learning, discovery, connection, and more!

Moving forward, we will be publishing only two instead of three issues of *CAPMT Connect* each year. As editor, I would like to thank Dr. Deborah How and Fresas Balistreri of Bravura Innovations for their help editing and publishing the journal

over the past several years. Their attention to detail will be missed! I also wish to thank Dr. Cindy Tseng for her excellent service on the editorial committee since its inception. Cindy has taken on an important new role within CAPMT and decided to step down from this committee. In her stead, I am delighted to welcome Dr. Sonya Schumann. Sonya has taught at Fullerton College and will be joining the faculty at San Diego State University this fall. We are thrilled to have her on board!

And now, please enjoy this issue of *Connect*. Included are an inspiring interview with CAPMT 2019 Foundation Fellow Dr. William Wellborn, conducted by Luba Kravchenko, and a highly informative article on Kinesthesia by recent USC graduate, Dr. Michelle Do. In celebration of CAPMT's 50th Anniversary, Heidi Saario offers our members 50 terrific teaching tips to use in your studio, while Dr. Gayle Kowalchuk provides an overview of 8 invaluable tools for teaching piano technique in our Coda column. With our conference in mind and thinking to the future while appreciating the past, we included one message each by our immediate past-president, Noreen Wenjen and our new president, Wendi Kirby-Alexander. These two remarkable women inspire me with their kindness, generosity, work ethic, vision, and unwavering commitment to our organization. Thank you both for your thoughtful, eloquent and inspiring words!

Happy reading and learning!

— Editor

An Afternoon of Conversation with Dr. William Wellborn

Luba Kravchenko



On a Sunday afternoon in January, I had the pleasure of sitting down with Dr. William Wellborn, NCTM in his San Francisco apartment. Surrounded by his expansive collection of LPs, CDs, scores and even a vintage Victrola, we discussed his career as a performer and teacher, as well as his teaching philosophy.

Luba Kravchenko (LB): Congratulations on being the MTNA Fellow Recipient for California!

William Wellborn (WW): Yes, I feel honored! I am planning to go to the conference. I actually know people up in that area. My first teaching job out of college was in Moscow...Moscow, Idaho! I was a sabbatical replacement at the University of Idaho for Jay and Sandy Mauchley, with whom I've remained friends. I got the call on Halloween 1986 and it was the day of my second doctoral recital. Talk about getting good news the morning of your concert! So, I lived in Moscow for the first few months of 1987 and got to know many nice people up there, including in Spokane, Washington, which is only about an hour and half away. It will be interesting going back!

LK: After Idaho, you made your way to San Francisco?

WW: I was only in Moscow one semester since the Mauchleys were on sabbatical, and while I was there, I got the job at Humbolt State University in Northern California. I enjoyed my two years there but didn't really want to stay in a small town and the possibility of coming to San Francisco happened in 1989. I came about a month before the earthquake. I was in the old Conservatory building, practicing between students when it happened and the piano kind of rolled away, but I had never been in an earthquake before...

LK: Well, that was a way to start!

WW: The first tremor lasted 5 seconds or so, but I didn't know, I thought an earthquake lasted maybe 10-20 minutes, like a rainstorm or a tornado. We didn't have earthquakes in Texas or Boston! So, I pushed the piano back into place and continued to practice. And then the second tremor came, and it was a little longer and a little more severe, and I thought, "Okay, I think you're supposed to stand in a doorway? I think this is an earthquake." As I walked over, I saw a fissure crack in a building across the street and I thought, "oh, this is really an earthquake!" With the second tremor, the power went out, so they came around and told us they were closing the building. Well, I had walked to school since it was only five blocks away. I was walking home and hearing people listening to the radio in the cars, saying a section of the Bay Bridge had collapsed. So, I quickly learned what 10 seconds of that shaking can do. It was of course very disturbing—quite an intense welcome to San Francisco!

LK: Indeed! I am going to back-track a little bit. At what age did you start playing piano? As I recall, it was somewhat late?

WW: Late! I didn't start until I was 12. I started because we had music in the public schools. I am a big advocate for that! We had music class at my elementary school, we

had a choir which I sang in, we had to learn recorders. Actually, this was before recorders, we learned something called “melody flutes” which were metal and held to the side like a regular flute, but just had holes. The music teacher at our school was leaving because she was going to have a baby and she let our class know that she would be teaching piano lessons at home. So, I went home and said, “I want to study piano with Mrs. Edelman.” We didn’t have a piano in the house, but we rented one for 6 months so that my parents could see if this was just something that a kid wanted, or whether I was really into it, and the answer to that I think is pretty obvious! My grandmother lived in the same town and had a Baldwin Acrosonic piano, all with decorated legs—a more beautiful piece of furniture than it was a piano—but she was great enough to give us the piano after those 6 months. My grandmother didn’t play Classical music at all, she played popular tunes of the day, but I think she read pretty well, and she had a good ear. She had her own style of playing, kind of “easy stride”, so I think that’s where I got my musical gift. Neither of my parents played, but to their credit, they were supportive, which was great. So, I started piano the summer before 7th grade, and of course, I ate it up. Then, the summer before 9th grade, my piano teacher said, “You have perfect pitch, you should learn another instrument: Oboe or French horn, you need a good ear for those.” I had three more months of having to wear braces, so I thought, “I don’t want to put that French horn to my mouth”, so, I chose oboe and played all through high school and college. I actually went to the University of Texas on an oboe scholarship and I played English Horn in the orchestra until I was about 20. But I had decided already that I was going to be a pianist. Working on one line of music was not as interesting as playing a whole Beethoven sonata, although, to play that orchestra rep is pretty fantastic!

LK: Did you set oboe and English horn aside completely when you chose to focus on piano?

WW: I did. I played in the orchestra for another year or so after that, but finally I had to make a decision. Maintaining quality on any instrument takes a lot of time, and I finally had to say, “piano is it.” I studied voice also, but that was less time away from the instrument and also very valuable as a musician.

LK: What is your practice routine these days?

WW: It can vary, depending on how much I teach that day. Saturdays, I practice in the gap hours between students. I remember in college you felt like you couldn’t practice unless you had a three-hour block, and now we’re very excited when we get a 30-minute gap! I often teach until 9pm, so, I like to be leisurely in the mornings. After breakfast I’ll warm up for about an hour, do technique and work a little bit on repertoire. If it is a nice day I will go out and walk for about 45 minutes or so, and then come home and practice another couple of hours before I teach. That’s an ideal day. I would love to get 2-3 hours every day, more if I have a concert coming up.

LK: Have teaching and performing always been part of a twin path for you? How have those two elements co-existed? Harmoniously?

WW: I would say yes. Sometimes they have co-existed harmoniously, sometimes one nudges the other or fights for time from the other. Of course, the more you teach, the more you have to be careful that you don't overschedule yourself as a performer where you don't have time to practice. I've always felt that practicing regularly and performing inform my teaching. I can always tell if there's a period where I'm not practicing, which doesn't happen very often. Generally, when I'm practicing and in shape, I am able to share with my students what I've been trying in my practicing. One of the most important things we teach is teaching the student how to practice. The better we get as performing musicians, the better we learn how to practice. As you improve as a teacher and artist, you hear more, and are able to say more of what you hear. So, I like to be in shape, and if I need to illustrate something, I can do it. You know, some teachers say, "I don't like to play for my students because I don't want them to imitate me", but I don't really see it that way. I think because we're dealing with an aural art, oftentimes, they need to hear how it goes. They need to hear why the sound world of Haydn is different than the sound world of Bartók. Why a *sforzando* in Mozart, if there happens to be one, isn't approached the same way as Prokofiev. I think listening is a really important part.

LK: Do say more about teaching the skills of listening and self-assessment!

WW: Sometimes I'll ask them, "did you hear that?" and they might say "no, I didn't hear that", so I'll say: "Listen again. Do you hear when I do it?" And they'll say "oh yeah! I didn't like that one!" And I'll say, "Good, I wanted you to learn not to like that one! I want you to learn to like this." Then I'll have them hold my hand to see what it felt like. For some students, that's all you have to do. They hold your hand and see how to move, and they get it and they're great. For others, that doesn't work as well. Sometimes you need imagery, sometimes you need brass tacks—pick this finger up, rotate your wrist this way. So, a lot of it is finding what each student responds to the best. There are certain things you are going to talk about with everyone, but each student is different, and that's of course what makes it endlessly fascinating. If you're paying attention, it makes teaching really interesting all the time. There's something Lynn Freeman Olson said, and Martha Hilley told us this in Texas: "Don't just teach the piano. Teach music. Don't just teach music. Teach music to people." I think both of those are vital. The more they learn about music, the better pianists they will be. And the more you pay attention to that particular person, the more you are going to be able to convey what you feel about the music and the excitement and the beauty of it, and the more they are going to be involved in it!

LK: Most of the students you are currently teaching are fairly advanced. Do they often come to you in late intermediate stages of study? How do you manage that transition?

WW: It is my favorite part of teaching! I think it is a very tricky level and a dangerous level. They play Opus 49, No. 2 Beethoven, and then all of a sudden, they hear the Pathétique and want to be able to play it! Sometimes it is too much, so how do you get them from that pretty good intermediate stage to the next level? I think a lot of it is repertoire, making sure it is not too hard too soon. It should be a challenge, but not overstress them physically to the point that they don't know how to do it. There's a lot of great repertoire: Kabalevsky, Schubert, Schumann, Mozart, Bartók is great! I think that is a really fun age—junior high, high school. There's a lot of angst and a lot of teenage stuff you deal with, but there's a lot of excitement and their learning capacity is heightened, so if you can get in on that, it's great!

LK: How do you approach issues of sound creation with your transfer students?

WW: Music is sound first of all, and I think it is just learning how to pick your hands up and put them at the piano, when they haven't thought about that. I am not necessarily one of those teachers that always needs to take them back to square one—you're playing a Beethoven Sonata, but we're going to go back to Book 1 of Hanon all day (that's a great way to kill enthusiasm!)—but just that basic idea of picking your hand up in a relaxed way and setting it down, it sounds so easy, but it is so hard for so many students, especially if they haven't ever thought about how to really make sound. If you move your hand differently it makes a different sound. I like that challenge of reconstructing and showing them what they know already and perhaps adding a little bit more flexibility. Every once in a while, you have to teach them how to have more finger strength, but it is usually the other way around, you have to teach more flexibility.

LK: How do you help your students develop a high level of security and confidence in performance, technically as well as in memorization?

WW: One of my great mentors was my pedagogy teacher at the University of Texas, Amanda Vick Lethco, a fantastic human being, brilliant woman, a magnificent teacher, I couldn't say too many things about what a beautiful person she was. I consider myself very lucky to have worked on piano pedagogy with her. One of the phrases Amanda Vick Lethco was so adamant about was that our job as teachers is to *arrange the success*. She showed us a lot about sequencing the repertoire, what to teach technically at a given time. So, I learned to look and say, "Okay, what Baroque pieces go with these Classical pieces?" so that I could see across the board what the level looked like. We did the same with composers. So, how do you sequence Bach? If they can play Minuet in G, are they ready for the first Invention? No! There are a lot of pieces that go in there. So, you have

to do that, over many years. In terms of making the student secure in performance, that's teaching them how to practice each week. That's developing their process in how they memorize something. Do you teach them just to play the piece until they can just run their fingers over it? Please no! I'm a big believer in teaching the theory, so that they know what they're playing. I don't care if they are 12 years old—if they have a piece with an Augmented 6th chord, I'm going to stop and teach them what an Augmented 6th chord is and why that sound is so cool. I'm not going to say, "oh, when you get older, you'll learn what that chord is"—I think that's nonsense! So, to get them prepared, I make sure they know what they're doing when they play. Can they play the left hand alone from memory? Can they tell me what this chord is? Do they understand that when they make a crescendo in this phrase, they are leading to the I 6-4 and then the harmony is resolving? Do they understand how those theory things that they learn to get the right answer on the test are important to music? If they are able to make that connection to music, they learn it better.

I have a studio class once a month when they come in and play for each other. And of course, I think that helps a lot, because the only way we practice performing is to do it. "It sounded fine when I was at home!" How many times have we all heard that? I would hope that it sounded fine in your living room. The goal is to make it sound good everywhere. When they are prepared enough, they can play it in the studio class to see what happens under pressure. When they are prepared at the next level after that, maybe they can play on one of the CAPMT chapter recitals, so that when they get to a more pressured situation, they already know what that feels like—that is arranging the success. It is not arranging the success to say, "Oh, is it ready? Well, go try it in a competition and see." That does nobody a favor, least of all the student. I think that just teaches them to be scared.

LK: Many of your students have done very well in high level competitions. Do you encourage all of your students to compete?

WW: I don't think competition is for every student, and every competition is not for every student. I think they are for those people that want that extra challenge, that enjoy that. For the ones that are really serious about doing those kinds of things, you plan the right one for the right time. It really is about arranging the success, you have to think about it a long time in advance. Sometimes I think: this is a great kid for the Beethoven competition in two years! It's not like I have a grid or anything, but you say, "this one likes Baroque music, maybe next year he'll do Junior Bach."

I think it is just paying attention to each individual student, seeing what their needs are, what they thrive on, how you challenge them in a positive way. I always go back to that phrase of Amanda Vick Lethco: *arrange the success*.

LK: You teach piano pedagogy in the Collegiate at the San Francisco Conservatory. What are the challenges of teaching pedagogy to students whose focus is primarily on performance?

WW: Well, I think perhaps first of all, maybe you have to convince them of the validity of knowing all this! Because they may not think they'll be using it. Actually, I think my greatest challenge in a one semester class is getting in as much as I can! Giving them the idea of some kind of method books, how to build the hand—those vital things. You know, I've heard people say, "oh, I don't teach advanced students. I just teach beginners." And I think to myself, that's the most important and most difficult thing to do! To really build the hand and set it. Also, most college students need to know desperately the pieces that are out there—they don't really know Burgmüller, or Schumann's *Album for the Young*. Which Clementi Sonatina you teach first, and then which Kuhlau... how to arrange that success in the early stages! Even some things that I take for granted, like: "Do you teach all the scales and arpeggios and fingerings?" I agree firmly with that Moriz Rosenthal quote: "I've found that students who don't practice technique, do not have any!" So, we talk about that in pedagogy as well as of course, teaching music and not just the piano.

I had one semester where I was talking about the Mozart C major Viennese Sonata and I said, "does anybody recognize that motive?" which of course is the Jupiter symphony. Not a person in my class had heard, or even heard of, the Jupiter symphony! This was one freaky semester. I would not say this is typical of the students at the San Francisco Conservatory at all, it has never happened since, but I have always checked, every semester! So, I said: "Next class, we need to listen to that symphony. Because if you don't know that Mozart symphony, you can't teach a Mozart sonata because you don't have that sound-world in your head." So, piano pedagogy involves many things sometimes, which is why I find it so fascinating. It was particularly rewarding last spring. One day I went into class feeling particularly tired, and there was one student that came in and said: "Dr. Wellborn, I have to thank you. I got the only Piano Pedagogy scholarship at the University of Michigan for next year and I know it was because of what we learned in class." And then another one came in and said, "I got a job teaching at one of the local piano schools, and I know it was because of all we did in class." So, that was very rewarding to hear! It felt good to know that I had been able to transfer what I had learned, that it had been able to go down the pike and help them as well. Music absolutely is sharing. That's a major part of teaching, I believe. Sharing my love of music.

LK: That's a good way to end, but I'm going to ask one more! You did that wonderful presentation for our San Francisco CAPMT Chapter on "Great Thoughts by Noted Musicians" full of great aphorisms and gems by many famous pianists. So, I'm sure you have your own pithy quotable quotes that your students come away with. What do your students quote you as saying?

WW: Oh gosh! You might have to ask them! I know one of them that my students are going to say is: "Breathe. Breathe." I think this is a very basic thing that we forget to talk about as pianists. Music is music, it doesn't matter if you're playing the piano or a violin, oboe, trumpet, or singing. Music must breathe and I think we forget that as pianists. So many times, I see students jabbing at the piano—they've started without any sense of the music in their head. You asked me earlier about making the students secure on stage—one major part of that is breathing and hearing the pulse before you start, knowing what it is going to sound like. Not just having your hands run and having that be the tempo you have to catch up to, because we've all had that feeling! They would say that for sure. That I'm always talking about breathing with the phrases. They would probably also talk about how I'm always making them sing. Out loud. You know how they love that! I try to get them to sing on the piano. We take legato for granted so much, but legato is really one of the most difficult things to teach on the piano. Oh, and I think they would also talk about how I always use the word "inflect". If there is a repeated note or phrase, how do they listen so that they do not make the same sound? So, I think they would say that most of all, I made them listen. Or that I make them start in different places? Or the thing about the left hand? I don't know! Mostly, I want to sit in on a room of my students when you are asking them these questions! To be a fly on that wall!



Luba Kravchenko teaches piano in the Pre-College of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music as well as in her private studio. She is Director of Liturgical Music at Seventh Avenue Presbyterian Church, and serves CAPMT as a member of the State Executive Board and co-president of the San Francisco Chapter. She is also involved with the Royal Conservatory of Music as a member of the College of Examiners and the Center Representative for San Francisco.

Independent Music Teachers Forum (IMTF)

50 Practical Tips for Music Teachers and Students

Heidi Saario

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of CAPMT, this IMTF blog post offers 50 practical tips for music teachers and their students. It is our hope that you will find some useful ideas here to try out with your students.

10 Tips on Practicing

1. When learning a new piece decide on how many bars/phrases you plan to cover each day for a week and stick to your plan!
2. Divide a new piece into sections and number each section based on the technical challenges they present. Those labeled #1 are in need of the most practice time to adequately address the particular challenges. Over time, adjust the numbering as the playing improves.
3. Practice a challenging section eyes closed or looking away from the instrument while keeping your mind focused on one specific element at a time, e.g. choreography, balance, voicing, fingering, dynamics etc.
4. Increase fluency by trying to play one short section perfectly five times in a row. Do the same with the next section. Thereafter put these two sections together and aim to play perfectly five times. Continue in this way with the rest of the piece.
5. Backwards practice: practice a challenging section by starting at the end and add bars going backwards, e.g. play measure 8 and repeat until fluent, next play measures 7-8 and repeat until fluent, then measures 6-8 until fluent etc.
6. Use your voice to support the practice of demanding sections: sing the note names to internalize a pattern, sing the counts to feel the rhythm better, sing the finger numbers to help secure a challenging fingering, or sing the melody in solfa to hear and sense the phrasing more clearly.
7. Use highlighter tape/stickers to mark notes that tend to be played incorrectly. Remove the markers after the notes have been permanently corrected.
8. Build confidence and security by practicing a challenging spot in different keys, in different octaves, and in opposite directions.
9. Use slow-motion video, available on a smartphone, to capture the movements of your fingers/hands/arms/body to determine whether correct technique was applied.
10. Avoid wasting valuable time by only practicing the easiest or most familiar sections repeatedly.

10 Tips on Memorization

1. Strive to memorize by using a combination of visual, aural, motoric/kinesthetic, and analytical memory.
2. Make a plan to memorize a specific number of measures every day of the week. Each day review the bars memorized from the day before.
3. Memorize fingering patterns carefully – say the finger numbers aloud when playing from memory.
4. Number the sections in a piece and be ready to start at any spot. Play the sections in a different order, or skip a section; e.g. play section 1, skip section 2, play the section 3, skip section 4 etc.
5. Memorize all of the dynamics within a piece by writing out a detailed dynamic map on a separate piece of paper (without notation). Include bar lines to keep it clear and organized.
6. Memorize hands separately.
7. Make a photocopy of your score and cut out the sections where memorization proves to be challenging. Glue them on a separate piece of paper to be used for practice. Focus on these sections until secure.
8. Play from memory at a slow speed.
9. When playing from memory, drop out one hand and let the other continue and vice versa.
10. Play only the note/s that fall on the first beat, then only the notes on the first and third beat (if in 3/4 or 4/4 time), then each beat. This is a good way to practice a brand new piece, memorize, or prepare for a performance.

10 Tips on Creative Teaching

1. Work on achieving greater dynamic variety through storytelling. Ask a student to come up with a story that illuminates the dynamics in the piece.
2. Have students create a picture that depicts or comments on the piece they are working on. Showcase these pictures at the studio recital.
3. Look up a couple of excellent as well as mediocre performances on YouTube of the piece your student is working on. Have him/her assess the strengths and weaknesses of these performances.
4. Let students' other activities and interests guide your teaching: e.g. embrace theory concepts with a student interested in math, use sports analogies with students who are into different sports, dance, etc.
5. Teach some pieces by rote to encourage better listening and greater expressiveness.
6. After a piece is learned, encourage a student to create another "version" of the piece by using some familiar elements and changing others, for example, maintain the left hand accompaniment chord structure, and improvise a different melody line.

7. Switch roles with students and ask them to teach you a familiar concept, e.g. how to improve dynamics in a piece, play a specific scale, or utilize good playing posture.
8. Use a familiar melody from a pop song, movie, or videogame to work on playing by ear.
9. Use lead sheets to encourage students to apply their knowledge of theory and chords to understanding an actual piece of music.
10. Encourage students to write simple, short compositions. Provide them with some guidelines and parameters to get started, e.g. help to determine the time signature and key, have them first write out the rhythm, and start by using the notes of a major/minor pentascale etc.

10 Tips on Performance Preparation

1. Put the same amount of effort into practicing performing as learning a new piece.
2. Before a performance, a practical exam, or an audition, visualize the whole situation in your mind, seeing yourself successfully through each step; leaving home, arriving at the performance venue, warming-up, walking up onto stage etc.
3. Arrange one or more practice performances. Strive to create a similar atmosphere compared to the future performance: wear the same performance clothes and shoes, print programs, and make sure to record the performance.
4. Aim to get your heart rate up by running up and down stairs, doing jumping jacks etc. Thereafter sit down and try to play the piece while your heart rate is still up.
5. Visualize yourself playing your pieces with excellence including all the details of articulation, dynamics, fingerings etc.
6. Practice with opposite dynamics/articulation/tempo as marked: a legato passage staccato, an allegro passage adagio and vice versa.
7. When working towards achieving a specific performance tempo, use a metronome to make incremental increases in. Keep track of your current metronome speed and keep speeding up slowly by a notch or two. By keeping track of the speed, you will have a better sense of progress at each stage.
8. Find all the sections with the same dynamic level and play them in a row: e.g. play all the mezzo forte sections back to back, then all the piano sections etc. During this exercise compare the dynamics - do you hear the different dynamics clearly?
9. Visualize yourself playing a technically demanding section in a tempo you can manage at the present time. Next, visualize increasing the tempo little by little so that your brain learns to react faster in each new tempo.
10. When performing contrapuntal music, try to memorize all the different voices separately to increase awareness and security of the polyphonic texture.

10 Tips on Ear Training

1. Ask a student to sing and match a pitch you play on the piano (find a comfortable range for the student). Next, have a student sing a pitch and try to match their pitch on the piano.
2. Include a short melody playback/singback into each lesson. For example, play a three to four note melody twice using only the first three notes of a major scale and ask a student to sing/play it back. Provide him/her with the key and possibly the starting note.
3. Have a student practice hearing individual notes of a harmonic interval. First, emphasize the higher note of the two and ask a student to sing it back. Next, emphasize the lower note and do the same.
4. Consider using solfa with movable “do” in your lessons to support ear training.
5. Take an advantage of many great apps, such as Better Ears, Blob Chorus, Bubble Tones, Good Ear Pro, and Tenuto.
6. Ask a student to play a phrase of his/her piece, then stop playing and hear the next phrase only in his/her mind, then continue playing the next phrase, then stop etc.
7. Let singing guide phrasing – ask students to sing a melody line from their piece and pay attention to how they naturally shape the phrase with their singing voice.
8. Using a finger, have a student follow the score of their piece and ask them to try and hear all the details of dynamics and articulation etc. in his/her inner ear.
9. Ask a student to try and play a familiar tune by ear, such as Hot Cross Buns or Mary Had a Little Lamb (pick an easy key for the instrument). After that, ask a student to pick a new starting note and to figure out the pitches for the same tune by ear in the new key.
10. Explore the curriculums of programs such as those of the RCM, ABRSM, or CM to systematically develop ear training skills at different levels.



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Kinesthesia: Learning and Awareness

Dr. Michelle Do

Kinesthesia can be defined as how we perceive our body in movement. Barbara Conable and Thomas Mark, in their discussions about Body Mapping, describe what they call “the “kinesthetic sense,” or “movement sense,” a sixth sense that everyone possesses.¹ This sixth sense is not esoteric or metaphysical; rather, it is what is commonly described as proprioception: our awareness of the position and movements of our own body² that arises from sensory receptors within our muscles, joints, and tendons.³ Like any of our other senses, we can choose to ignore or acknowledge our sense of proprioception. For example, in the course of a conversation, one might be unaware that there is music playing in the background. Likewise, when we are involved in playing music, our kinesthetic sense often goes untapped, or is limited to a very small area of the body, typically the body part in contact with our instrument.

Last year I was suffering from back pain because of long and regular practice sessions. At the time, I believed that the discomfort was coming from the position of my shoulders, and tried every adjustment I could think of to find a sustainable posture. In my effort to correct my posture, I was actually making the problem worse. I later realized that the affected muscles were being overused to compensate for poor alignment of my lumbar spine, and I needed to use an entirely different set of muscles to assume my ideal playing posture.

The ability to attend to, and accurately interpret the information we are receiving from our body takes training and experience: this is what Conable calls “training inclusive attention.”⁴ As the ideal mental state for musicians, inclusive attention means an expanded field of awareness that includes all the things that bear on our playing. Within this field of awareness, we can focus as necessary on whatever requires attention at the moment.”⁵ Ideally, as musicians, we practice awareness everyday; we notice our rhythmic issues or problems with intonation and address them, or we experiment with expressive choices. On a fundamental level, “practicing requires performers to observe, make necessary adjustments, and observe again.”⁶ Expanding our

¹ Thomas Mark, *What Every Pianist Needs to Know About the Body* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2003), 8.

² *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. “proprioception,”
<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/proprioception> (accessed March 31, 2018).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Barbara Conable, *What Every Musician Needs to Know About the Body* (Portland: Andover Press, 2000), 1.

⁵ Mark, 9.

⁶ Cornelia Watkins and Laurie Scott, *From the Stage to the Studio: How Fine Musicians Become Great Teachers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 55.

awareness to encompass the physical sensations of playing our instrument has many possible benefits.

From the standpoint of injury prevention and playing longevity, the highly repetitive nature of practicing and performing on a musical instrument necessitates that we move well.⁷ Learning and practicing quality of motion is something that can only be accomplished on an individual level. Even though there are generally accepted standards for technique on any instrument, it is very difficult, and at certain levels impossible, to discern quality of a movement only by its outward appearance. What is most important is how the movement feels to the person who is executing it.⁸ This is one of the most important lessons with regard to the technique that music teachers convey to their students. By learning to expand awareness to include more of the body, musicians can discover that “expanded awareness alone can produce improved quality of movement and better playing.”⁹

What happens when we identify a problem in our playing that is holding us back? Almost every musician will struggle with learning new techniques and with unlearning harmful habits. Refining, and correcting one’s technique takes patience and determination; it is a situation in which kinesthetic awareness plays a vital role. Patterns of movement that have been repeated over the course of years represent strong neural connections in the brain. Awareness is absolutely necessary for the replacement of unwanted behaviors, since “a distracted performer is more likely to use the old pattern than the new one,” further reinforcing the incorrect or unhealthy default.¹⁰

Fortunately, there are several notable programs and methods available for performers of all types, designed to increase and refine kinesthetic awareness. One such program is the Alexander technique, developed by F. M. Alexander in the 1890s.¹¹ Alexander was a Shakespearean orator who suffered sudden, inexplicable loss of his voice during performances. He discovered that this was due to his subconscious habit of contracting his entire body prior to delivery, which was causing strain on his vocal cords.¹² Since then, his program has “advocated increasing awareness of subconscious habits that have potentially debilitating effects on performance.”¹³ Teachers trained in the Alexander technique have the ability to detect poor physical habits, and through one-on-one sessions with students, can help students retrain the afflicted muscle groups to develop better habits that will not cause unnecessary

⁷ Mark, 6.

⁸ Ibid., 6-7.

⁹ Ibid., 7.

¹⁰ Watkins and Scott, 57.

¹¹ Kelly McEvenue, *The Actor and the Alexander Technique*, 1st Palgrave Macmillan ed. (New York: Macmillan, 2002), 9.

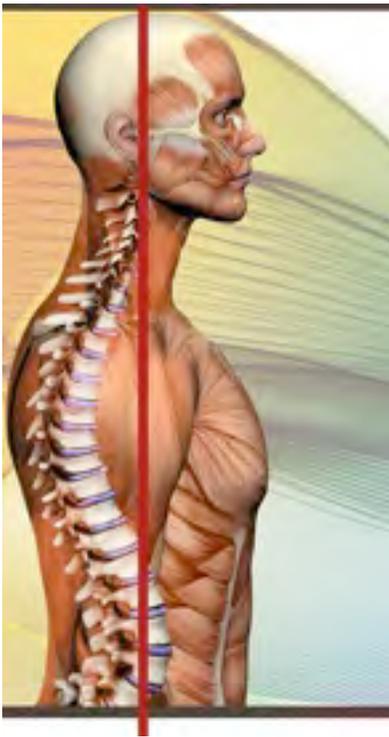
¹² Ibid., 11.

¹³ McEvenue, 12.

strain on surrounding or related parts of the body. Thus, the overall goal of the Alexander technique is to correct debilitating physical habits by retraining the corresponding muscle groups to work in more efficient ways.

One of the main concepts of the Alexander technique is the idea of Primary Control: that almost all muscle relationships are related to the “reflexive system of the head and neck [which is] a certain dynamic relationship – rather than a fixed position. The balance of the head upon the muscles of the neck determines how much stress is being put upon the muscles of the back, which then translates through to the muscles of the arms and the lower skeleton. Primary control maintains that there should be a straight alignment between the back of the occipital curve and the spinal column”¹⁴ (Fig. 1).

Figure 1¹⁵



The muscles of the front and the back of the neck should be of equal length; if either group is shortened, it will result in tension in surrounding muscle groups. “Primary control is one of the first concepts introduced to students; once they are aware of the relationship between the head and neck, other habits can be addressed accordingly.”¹⁶ During an Alexander lesson, a teacher

¹⁴ Andrea Matthews, “Alexander Technique and Aging Well,” <http://www.alexandertechnique.com/articles/aging> (accessed March 31, 2018).

¹⁵ Figure 1, Retrieved from http://erikdalton.com/images/Fig142lbHead_W.jpg (accessed March 31, 2018).

¹⁶ John B. Harer and Sharon Munden, *The Alexander Technique Resource Book: A Reference Guide* (Scarecrow Press, 2008), 24-26.

will ask the student to perform simple tasks, such as standing up from a chair, or sitting down. The teacher will lightly place his or her hands on the student as the student is completing these tasks, and will ascertain through touch which of the student's muscle groups contains the most tension. Certain physical habits can cause this tension. For example, a teacher could point out to the student that he or she unconsciously raises one shoulder and unnecessarily tilts their head forward whenever sitting down, which puts stress on the deltoids and back muscles. This series of habits could be the reason why the student feels tension in their arms; the back muscles are pulling on the muscles of the arms, which could be the cause for pain in the forearms and wrist.¹⁷ Over the course of several Alexander lessons, the student can eventually develop awareness of what good alignment feels like, and how to recognize the feeling of improved posture and physical habits. This awareness can eventually improve their playing habits, leading to better sound production, and injury prevention. By retraining muscle groups to move differently, the Alexander technique can help facilitate ease of movement in performance, prevent injuries before they occur, and heal injuries that may have been caused by inefficient playing habits.

The Feldenkrais method is another system that can build kinesthetic awareness. While Alexander technique focuses more on retraining muscle groups to form new, tension-free habits by replacing bad habits, the Feldenkrais method aims to develop a simple awareness of the body through mental conditioning.¹⁸ Feldenkrais classes are not goal-oriented. Instead, they are process-oriented and aimed at creating new neuromuscular patterns designed for integration into everyday tasks. Feldenkrais lessons can be divided into two phases: Awareness Through Movement, and Functional Integration.¹⁹ During the first phase, the teacher "will attempt to instill kinesthetic awareness in the student through a series of directed exercises, usually performed supine, to allow the student to experience the relationship of movement and gravity."²⁰ Examples of such exercises include slowly raising one's index finger while thinking keenly about the muscles of the arm that need to flex to accomplish the task. The student is encouraged to be aware of the brain as the center of movement control as it sends signals to the body through the central nervous system. Once the teacher has given the student several Awareness Through Movement lessons, the second phase, Functional Integration, begins. Functional Integration is designed to take the awareness that the student developed in the first phase of lessons and apply it to everyday movement. The student will be asked to perform tasks such as writing or walking, or in more advanced cases, experimenting with balance exercises like standing on one foot. Though both methods teach heightened kinesthetic awareness through the use of simple exercises, the Feldenkrais method teaches awareness for

¹⁷ W. Cacciatore, et al., "Improvement in Automatic Postural Coordination Following Alexander Technique Lessons in a Person With Low Back Pain," *Physical Therapy* 85 (6): 520.

¹⁸ Moshe Feldenkrais, *Awareness Through Movement* (London: Thorsons, 1991), 29.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁰ Yochanan Rywerant, *The Feldenkrais Method: Teaching by Handling* (Boston: Basic Health Publications, 2000), 34.

the sake of everyday use, while the Alexander method is “geared more toward injury prevention and application in [music or other] performance.”²¹

Body Mapping is another valuable tool for musicians. It is based on the concept that accurate knowledge of the anatomy and movements of the body facilitate ease and freedom of movement. The Body Map is one’s own mental self-representation, and the process of Body Mapping involves the “conscious correction and refining of one’s Body Map to produce efficient, graceful, and coordinated movement. Body Mapping, over time, with application, allows any musician to play like a natural.”²²

In addition, there is a growing body of scientific literature focused on human biology, physiology, and neuroscience as they apply to music performance. These diverse sources present useful information in easily understandable and interesting ways and provide performers with knowledge that is applicable to their craft.

For example, with regard to understanding sensory information, there are two types that are crucial to musical performance. First is the exteroceptive, or external sensory information. This is sensory information that originates outside of the body and is related to touch. Second and most important for musicians is proprioceptive information (discussed earlier), which is the internal information we receive from our muscles and joints, consciously or unconsciously, about the relative position of our body and the forces being exerted on a given position. We use this sense to assume our playing posture and find balance. Awareness of this information allows us to make adjustments to the amount of pressure used to play our instrument to create volume, or “to become aware of postural imbalances that might cause certain muscle groups to become overactive.”²³

The various types of learning processes that are involved in playing a musical instrument are complex and interrelated. Watson has collected information from various studies that deal with the mechanical aspects of skill acquisition. These primary studies, which are based on subjects who learn simple patterns of finger movement, are applicable to the processes of learning technique on an instrument or passages of music. The results of these studies show that learning movement patterns is a process that takes place in stages. First there is an initial stage, lasting a few minutes, where significant improvement takes place. This is followed by a period of consolidation that, interestingly, happens after practicing has stopped. Lastly, consolidation of certain types of motor learning is dependent on sleep. This means that “improvement in the execution of movement patterns continues to increase, at least initially, in the absence of

²¹ Rywerant, 40.

²² Conable, 5.

²³ Alan H.D. Watson, *The Biology of Musical Performance and Performance Related Injury* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2009), 238-239.

practice.”²⁴ Memory consolidation is the process by which practiced skills are refined and enhanced even in the absence of further practice. This is an unconscious process, wherein additional learning takes place during the hours following practice. Furthermore, “the consolidation of certain types of procedural memories has been shown to depend on sleep.”²⁵ As stated above, most of the researchers in this area conducted studies with subjects who learned simple patterns of finger movement. Clearly, learning a technique or musical passage is much more complex. Recent studies by Duke and others replicate these studies in the context of music. The only differences were the complexity of the task and the experience level of the learner to see if “experienced learners performing a music skill obtain similar sleep-dependent improvements.”²⁶ The results of these studies reflect a general consensus and demonstrate that “sleep-based consolidation of procedural skills results in performance enhancements that develop in the absence of practice.”²⁷ The role of sleep is only partially understood,²⁸ and it may be too early to extrapolate the information from these studies and make recommendations about the way musicians practice.²⁹ However, it is clear that “the conditions under which learners practice skills may influence the extent to which the naturally occurring processes of memory consolidation and enhancement take place.”³⁰ No one can argue against the benefits of a good night’s sleep. Time and rest are necessary components for developing as a musician.

Including a kinesthetic approach to music learning is just one of many tools that music teachers can utilize. This approach can be used to enhance many of the skills involved in music performance, and can be extended to “explore emotions and life experiences with gestures and physical responses that can be applied to music.”³¹ One program that integrates kinesthetic learning with music from a specifically pedagogical perspective is Dalcroze Eurhythmics, founded by Emile Jacques-Dalcroze in the early 20th century.³² During his time as a professor at the Conservatoire de Geneve in the late 1800s, Dalcroze noticed that only a few of his young students displayed innate rhythmic understanding; the others were in need of extensive rhythmic training, but this was often too abstract for them to comprehend. Dalcroze subsequently developed Eurhythmics, which marries kinesthetic learning with musical rhythms

²⁴ Watson, 250-252.

²⁵ Sarah E. Allen and Robert A. Duke, “The Effects of Limited, Restricted Music Practice on Overnight Memory Enhancement,” *National Association for Music Education* 32(1): 67.

²⁶ Amy L. Simmons and Robert A. Duke, “Effects of Sleep on Performance of a Keyboard Melody,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* Vol. 54, No. 3 (Autumn, 2006), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4151346> (accessed March 31, 2015).

²⁷ Robert A. Duke and Carla M. Davis, “Procedural Memory Consolidation in the Performance of Brief Keyboard Sequences,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* Vol. 54, No. 2 (Summer, 2006), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4101434> (accessed March 31, 2018).

²⁸ Watson, 217.

²⁹ Duke and Davis, “Procedural Memory...”

³⁰ Allen and Duke, “Effects of Limited, Restricted...”

³¹ Watkins and Scott, 93.

³² Emile Jacques-Dalcroze, *Rhythm, Music & Education* (London & Whitstable: The Riverside Press, 1967), 2.

and language. His goal was to seek the “connection between instincts for pitch and movement...time and energy, dynamics and space, music and character, music and temperament, [and] finally the art of music and the art of dancing.”³³ Geared toward younger children but with the flexibility for application toward intermediate and advanced students, Dalcroze Eurhythmics attempts to integrate kinesthetic learning with rhythmic concepts. Students perform specific exercises that involve movement with their entire bodies to develop a feel of the musical rhythm throughout their bodies. Younger students can engage in “playtime” exercises that allow them to further acclimate to learning rhythm through kinesthetic awareness. For example, children gather in a group and toss around a ball to create certain rhythmic patterns.³⁴ Teachers can also develop rhythmic awareness by having their students write down rhythmic dictation, gradually increasing the degree of difficulty. Through a series of rhythm-directed exercises and further integration of rhythmical “playtime” exercises, students can eventually learn to analyze and become familiar with the rhythmical aspects of music through this system of kinesthetic learning.

This author advocates for the belief that students should develop kinesthetic awareness in conjunction with music-making as early as possible. At the most fundamental level, music is produced via physical actions. The more aware students are of the physiological demands of their instruments, the more control they will have over their own sound production and technique. It is difficult to be aware of every unconscious movement of one’s muscles, but with specific training and integration through systems such as the Alexander and Feldenkrais techniques, one can gain more intimate knowledge of one’s body, while also preventing injuries and prolonging endurance and stamina during performance and practice. Physicality in practicing and performance deserve as much importance as learning the intricate details of pitch and intonation. By developing students’ kinesthetic awareness, a teacher may bridge the gap between the intent to make music and the actions required to bring forth the actual sounds. Music teachers can apply these concepts in both group and private settings using ideas from ideas from Dalcroze Eurhythmics. They have a responsibility to communicate clear information when articulating beneficial practice habits and identifying physical potential problems that arise. The importance and potential benefits of having a basic understanding of human anatomy, especially through the application of Body Mapping, and understanding the importance of sleep in skill acquisition, are essential to students’ understanding, as well as to their playing health, development, and longevity in music.

³³ Ibid., 26.

³⁴ Elsa Findlay, *Rhythm and Movement: Applications of Dalcroze Eurhythmics* (Evanston: Summy-Birchard Company, 1971), 42.

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Coda

8 Tools for Teaching Technique to Young Pianists

Gayle Kowalchuk

As a piano pedagogy instructor, I am constantly examining and questioning how I teach my own private students. Am I “practicing what I preach” when it comes to teaching principles such as rhythm, reading, technique, and musicianship? These are topics that we cover in piano pedagogy classes, and I draw upon my own teaching experiences in our class discussions.

One question asked frequently is, “When do you start teaching technique?” My answer is, “From the very first lesson!” One of my goals as a piano teacher is to give my students the tools that will enable them to enjoy music and play for their entire life. One of these tools is technique. There are basics of technique that can be introduced to the youngest students. I call these “Technique Coins.” These “coins” can be introduced, used, and then deposited into a “Technique Bank Account” from which the student can withdraw them at any time and continue to use them as he or she progresses as a pianist. For the youngest pianists (ages 4-6), there are eight Technique Coins that are essential to their technical growth. Let us examine these techniques by discovering how to make the “deposit” (how to do it) and what the “payoff” (how we can use it) will be.

Technique Coin 1: Relaxed Shoulders

You may be wondering – is this even technique? Yes! Think of the whole body as a technical tool. The way we sit at the keyboard, place our feet on the floor, hold our arms and hands – all of these affect the way we play. Posture has an important role in playing the piano. Relaxed shoulders are key to good posture. They affect the position at the keyboard and the position of the elbows.

The Deposit: Relax the shoulders by first sitting up tall with the arms hanging by the sides. Next, breathe in deeply and raise the shoulders up towards the ears. Finally, relax the shoulders as the breath is let out, allowing the shoulders to fall back down into a natural position. This can be done at the first lesson.

The Payoff: Relaxed shoulders are important. Raised shoulders lock the arms by our sides. This affects hand position, arm weight, and freedom of movement. I tell my young students that raised shoulders create dinosaur arms (by locking in the elbows). Dinosaurs cannot play the piano! Relaxed shoulders help us play faster tempos with ease and also play big chords with a full, warm sound.

Technique Coin 2: Moving Freely

The keyboard equals security for young students. They do not want to let go of it! Because of this, they tend to play horizontally with, what I call, “the hunt and peck method” – moving straight across the keyboard and then pushing down on the key. This often results in getting to the necessary key too late or too early and playing it with a harsh sound. By moving freely, students are able to play rich, full sounds and not push on the keys and sound harsh.

The Deposit: With the left hand, gently trace a curved arch like a rainbow to find all of the two black-key groups moving down the keyboard. Repeat, using the right hand, moving up the keyboard. This technique can be introduced immediately upon learning the two and three black-key groups.

The Payoff: This is a great technique to use in slower pieces in the beginning so that students can feel comfortable making big arch-like movements. As they play increasingly faster pieces, their arches will become smaller, helping them move around the keyboard.

Technique Coin 3: Arm Weight

Effective use of arm weight is critical for the sounds we make on the piano. It creates the difference between warm and harsh sounds and is an important technique for creating beautiful sounds on the piano. To use arm weight, students have to let go and drop into the keys.

The Deposit: Close the keyboard cover and place both hands on it in a playing position. Slowly raise the hands up to chin level. Let the arms feel heavy and let go, dropping the hands onto the lap. Do this again, but this time drop the hands onto the closed keyboard cover.

The Payoff: The final notes of elementary pieces are sometimes loud. Take advantage of intervals or single notes that are marked *forte* to use arm weight to create full sounds that are not harsh. Later on, arm weight and moving freely can be combined for rich-sounding chords with three or more notes.

Technique Coin 4: Finger Weight

Strong fingertips with knuckles that do not collapse are essential for keeping the hand curved. By imagining that each finger has a weight on it (think barbell), students can play *forte*. By taking the weight off, students can play *piano*. In reality, these images allow the student to change the speed at which the key is depressed and this subsequently alters the speed of the hammer. A faster key descent and hammer translates into a louder sound and vice versa. In this way, students can create dynamics and good tone at the piano.

The Deposit: Place rounded hands on the closed keyboard cover. Keeping joints firm, imagine that each finger (2-5) has a weight on it. Tap each finger firmly several times, starting with finger two. Now imagine that the weight is no longer there. Tap each finger lightly several times. You can also stack small bean bags on the student's hands so that he or she understands the sensation of feeling weight on the hand. This visual gives students a way of creating dynamic contrasts right from the beginning.

The Payoff: Start with pieces that have just two different dynamics so that students can imagine a weight on and off their fingers. As students progress, you can begin to work on dynamic shading. Finger weights will help with legato lines, balance between the melody and accompaniment, and voicing within the hand.

Technique Coin 5: Rising Wrist

Lifting the wrist up and away from the keyboard is an important, yet easy, technique to learn. The wrist affects much in piano playing – it helps with arm weight, phrasing, and slurs.

The Deposit: On the closed keyboard cover, place the hand in a rounded position. Gently raise the wrist until the 3rd finger is the only finger touching the keyboard cover. Let the wrist lead the hand gently up into the air.

The Payoff: This technique can be taught from the very first lesson. At the end of every piece, have students let the wrist(s) rise and then have the hands gently float down to the lap. I use the words "lift up and float down." The rising wrist is very important in lyrical playing. The way a phrase is ended determines how the next phrase begins. The rising wrist combined with arm weight and finger weight creates long and fluid passages.

Technique Coin 6: Rock It! (Part 1: Body)

Rocking the body is the gentle rocking side to side that allows students to move around the keyboard. Students like to scoot left and right on the bench so that their hands are always in front of their bodies. However, if students are scooting on the bench, they cannot move freely. Also, it takes balancing the body to play very low or very high on the keyboard. Rocking the body should start from the very first lesson.

The Deposit: Start with the feet firmly on the floor. Smaller students should use a pedal extender or stool. Gently lean to the left and keep the body behind the hands as they play low. Gently lean to the right and keep the body behind the hands as they play high.

The Payoff: The payoff comes in pieces with faster tempos where scooting around on the bench and keeping the tempo steady are impossible to do at the same time. Smaller rocking movements are helpful in pieces where one hand crosses back and forth over the other.

Technique Coin 7: Rock It! (Part 2: The Hand)

Rocking the hand is a gentle rock. Some teachers call it rotation. Young children do not really understand that term. Other teachers refer to “turning a door knob.” I believe this analogy can cause tension in the hand. Gently rocking the hand helps to relieve tension.

The Deposit: Place the hand in a rounded position on the closed keyboard cover. Check to make sure the wrist is level with the hand and arm. Gently rock the hand back and forth from 1 to 3. Repeat with fingers 2 to 4, 3 to 5, and then 1 to 5.

The Payoff: Rocking the hand will help keep the hand from getting tight when playing staccato, ostinato figures, Alberti bass, and later on, trills.

Technique Tool 8: The Ear

Even our youngest students need to know whether or not they are making beautiful sounds. They need to learn how to listen to what they are playing. How do we teach this important technique?

The Deposit: Play for your students. Let them hear what beautiful music sounds like. Do not be afraid that they will copy you. It would be wonderful if they copy us! Incorporate “play backs” into the lesson. See if your students can imitate the sound you play. Have them copy your dynamics and articulation. Record your student playing a piece and listen to it together. Then ask questions. “Do you like what you did?” “What would you like to do differently?” Include ensembles in your curriculum so that students learn to listen to one another.

The Payoff: I substituted for one of my colleagues when he was ill and had the pleasure of teaching one of his high school students. She played a Chopin waltz, and the left hand was exquisitely played with just the right lightness and balance. When I asked her why she thought she was able to play this piece so well, she said, “Well, I think it is because my mother is a piano teacher, and I’ve been listening to beautiful music my entire life.” This is a testament as to why we need to have our students listen.

Conclusion

Artistic performances involve four things: having a natural physical approach to the keyboard; moving freely around the keyboard; using the ear, the hands, and the body to create a beautiful tone, and putting all of this together to play artistically. By creating a Technique Bank Account for our youngest students and depositing basic Technique Coins into their accounts, we are preparing them for a lifetime of beautiful music making.



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