

# Who Is *The Piano Adventures*® Teacher?

BY RANDALL AND NANCY FABER

**W**elcome to the inaugural issue of *The Piano Adventures*® Teacher!

We are launching this newsletter to support piano pedagogy programs in higher education and to assist piano teachers in field practice. We invite you to discuss and debate the content, and also to share your responses. Our objective is to engage you in a discussion of ideas that will improve the quality of piano teaching. We thank you for teaming with us in this regard.

The newsletter title suggests a specific method series, but it also suggests a certain spirit of music teaching. *The Piano Adventures*® Teacher refers then, not just to the choice of method materials, but to a teacher who shares the philosophy the method embodies. In this symbolic sense, we take the liberty to use *The Piano Adventures*® Teacher as a metaphor for a teacher who puts the personal development of the student in the fore—for the 21st-century piano teacher. In this article, we illustrate the metaphor by asking, “Who Is *The Piano Adventures*® Teacher?” In this way, we attempt to share with you our philosophy of music teaching.

*The Piano Adventures*® Teacher is someone who has

- ◆ a clear mission for music teaching
- ◆ a special attitude toward the student and toward teaching music
- ◆ a manner of delivery that engages student participation.

## Mission

Most of us grow to recognize the potential for profound influence on our students’ personal development. Piano lessons can be considered a vehicle for developing a host of valued outcomes that lie outside the realm of musical skill. Among these are:

- confidence
- self-esteem
- discipline
- work habits
- patience
- sensitivity to nuance
- understanding of process to product

While the ostensible focus of a lesson is to develop musical proficiency, we have the opportunity to develop these other valuable outcomes along the way. *The Piano Adventures*® Teacher has an eye on these secondary outcomes, ensuring they unfold with positive value, and understanding that they are sometimes more important than the musical skill we attempt to impart.

## Attitude

*The Piano Adventures*® Teacher puts the student first, even above the music. We share with students our awe of the art form, but



King’s Keyboard House, Ann Arbor, Michigan

refrain from letting this respect for art overwhelm the student. We let music ennoble the student by developing the student’s appreciation for musical artistry and by conveying the skills with which to embrace it.

We teach the student music,  
rather than teach music to the student.

*The Piano Adventures*® Teacher recognizes that his or her own ego is subordinate to the teaching goals. Piano lessons are for the student, not to bring glory to the teacher. Though teaching skill and reputation may (and should) be used to inspire, the focus is not on the teacher, but on the student and on the music.



Photo: Bob Cassen www.humanaturephoto.com

From the studio of Mary Toy, Kirkland, Washington

### Teaching Process

It is necessary to recognize that fun is an important motivator for children. In fact, the need to have fun carries into all ages. Consequently, the piano lesson should be conducted with a spirit of play. This does not imply inefficiency or ineffectiveness. To the contrary. Because the playful character of the lesson engages the attention and energy of the student, more learning is accomplished. The degree of student participation predicts the degree of retention and application.

*The Piano Adventures® Teacher* avoids “being serious” because seriousness can impede communication with young students. Instead, we invite student talk. It is the relationship and the dialogue between student and teacher that provide

- a foundation for long-term learning
- a platform for resolving motivation issues that may arise in the future
- a vehicle for the non-musical outcomes.

We engage the student with a sense of adventure and discovery. There is purpose and direction in the lesson and lots of hard work. But work can be “fun” when one’s attention and senses are fully engaged. This blurring between work and fun is

precisely what we intend because it can lead to effective learning habits and a healthy work ethic.

### Teaching Materials

Our discussion of *The Piano Adventures® Teacher* would be incomplete without mention of teaching materials, not just because of the *Piano Adventures®* implication, but because the choice of music and method can dramatically influence the success of piano lessons. The teacher, the student, and the music form a lesson triangle. The method is a partner with the teacher in the lesson, and a partner with the student at home. Consequently, the importance of the music and method cannot be overstated. They are vital in retaining student interest and in building lasting skills.

A good teacher chooses teaching materials wisely and knows the materials thoroughly. This enables the teacher to provide a good fit between teaching material and student need. But matching a student with appropriate teaching materials does not imply a mixing of methods. The latter is a risky practice because mixing methods can sacrifice the synergy that is designed into a comprehensive and multifaceted method. A hodgepodge of teaching materials is a poor substitute for a well-conceived curriculum.

#### *The Piano Adventures® Teacher*

- ◆ allows the chosen curriculum to unfold, staying the course when all is well
- ◆ intervenes appropriately when a skill falters or motivation flags
- ◆ provides aural feedback, physical modeling, and effective supplements that accentuate individual student interest and accommodate individual student need.

### The Newsletter

The above discussion recaps the primary mission of this newsletter, which is to share ideas for the best teaching practice and to convey a deeper understanding of the teaching materials. It is also the aim of the newsletter to support you by offering regular columns on subjects that affect you as a teacher, subjects that are outside the scope of teaching materials and how to use them.

Our educational psychology column, “We’re Psych-Ed,” is intended to communicate pertinent and up-to-date theory from the psychology and education fronts. Piano pedagogy is essentially a marriage of keyboard performance expertise and issues of education. Considering that the field of education is itself an applied art with foundations in psychology and sociology, it is no surprise to find many complex issues interwoven in the piano teaching context. We hope to bring clarity and focus to important issues.

In “Talking Tech,” Edwin McLean discusses ways in which technology may affect you and your students, and Beth Gigante Klingenstein makes it all relevant to your studio in “Taking Care of Business.” Marienne Uszler traces the historical roots of our field in “Family Tree.”

Whether you are a college student, a new teacher, an accomplished teacher, or university professor, we hope you join us by reading and responding to these newsletter issues. We are confident that you will apply the ideas presented with an infusion of your own personality and your own authenticity. What else would one expect from *The Piano Adventures® Teacher*? ■■■