



The Piano Magazine

Clavier Companion

March/April 2014

An interview with
Randall and Nancy
Faber

In This Issue:

Hand position basics

2014 directory of
summer programs

Creative arrangements
for your students

An interview with

Randall and Nancy Faber

by Steve Betts

Whether they reach an elementary student using *Piano Adventures*, a five- or six-year-old playing a composition from *My First Piano Adventure for the Young Beginner*, or a teacher glean- ing information from one of their workshops, Randall and Nancy Faber influence piano students and teachers around the world.

Randall holds three degrees from the University of Michigan, has a Ph.D. in education and human devel- opment from Vanderbilt University, and is a frequent performer; Nancy has studied composition with Joan Tower, William Albright, and Nicholas Maw, and was named the *MTNA Distinguished Composer of the Year*. Her piano studies were at the Eastman School of Music and Michigan State University.

The Fabers graciously answered some questions for *Clavier Companion* regarding their composing, peda- gogical philosophies, and the future of piano study.







for the first time—his or her sense of personal competence. Ability which had been external, the property of talented others, now is owned. It has become personal. The child has moved from observer to actor.

Not only is this emerging sense of personal agency valuable from a developmental standpoint, it also induces the motivation for the hard work to follow. External sources, whether the teacher, an uncle, or peers, give reinforcing messages that reflect back to the student this sense of competence. Self-esteem becomes linked with the skill activity and drives further involvement. More practice brings more competence and the three factors of competence, reinforcement, and self-esteem increase in a virtuous cycle of motivation.

Nancy, what provides inspiration when you compose original pedagogical pieces?

Inspiration often spins from sound, image, or story. Though the underlying teaching concept is always the driver, the title and lyric can play a significant role in guiding the musical composition. For instance, the idea of “sound” guides both title and music in the *staccato* piece “Sounds from the Gumdrop Factory” in the *Piano Adventures* Level 2A Lesson Book. The “image” of clear, smooth water is expressed in “Looking-Glass River” (Level 3A Lesson Book) and an imaginative story is told in “The Bubble” (Level 1 Lesson Book). Teachers can have fun integrating titles and lyrics into the teaching process to inspire expressive playing and other creative activities.



Randy, readers may or may not know that you have a Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University in education and human development. In your dissertation you discuss three important aspects of motivation in the beginning years of piano study: competence, reinforcement, and self-esteem. Could you speak briefly to each of those?

Most of us have heard a child exclaim with a gleam in the eye, “I can do it!” This typically manifests with delightful pride as the child perceives—often

In your dissertation you also discuss three necessary characteristics of teachers for both beginning and intermediate students: friendly, relaxed, and chatty. Can you provide some ways in which teachers can strengthen their skills in this area?

I’m a big believer in self-reflection. It is ever so easy to teach the way we’ve always been teaching. Step back; observe yourself. What did I do well? Where can I improve? Change takes deter-



mination and some information. Music teaching isn't only about the mechanics of technique and the interpretation of music, it involves personal interaction with the individual student. This is typically a ripe area for reflection and improvement. The video camera is a humbling and effective tool.



Often times the music students want to play does not align with our repertoire choices for them. What do you believe popular music's role should be in piano study?

If we don't involve the student in the choice of repertoire, practice suffers because the source of motivation is external. Fortunately, the repertoire is large and we can help the student find pieces the student

desires to play. Popular music has a role in motivation when it follows student interest or invites reinforcement from peers. Popular music also can take a lead role in the application of music theory. The repetitive chord progressions can help a student break music into its simplicity and then build it out creatively.

What role should competition play in piano study?

If a student has a competitive nature and the skills to compete, piano competitions can induce the hard work to excel and provide acknowledgment of work well done. Don't forget the role of local talent contests. I've seen accomplished students get discouraged in the national arena. They first need some local successes. If a student is to compete, offer a chance to win. And if you host a competition, offer an array of awards: best second movement, best improvisation, and honorable mentions of any sort.

Has your role as parents changed your approach to piano study?

It has been enormously helpful to become absorbed in the world of childhood. Without our child, we would not have been able to develop *My First Piano Adventure*. It also is revealing to observe a child's daily practice. Most markedly, we've learned the incredible power of starting young. We're very grateful for the opportunity to immerse ourselves in the process of musical growth at young ages.



You have spent time with piano teachers in Asia. Are there any ideas or practices you have observed that might benefit piano teachers in the United States?

My favorite comes from South Korea, where students attend piano lessons every day, practicing under the supervision of an assistant teacher. The blur between lesson time and practice time underscores the essential role of practice. And those really talented pianists? It is important to realize that, whether in Asia or North America, the teacher of these "gifted" students gives far more than one hour per week. Lessons may be two hours in length and several times a week.

Technology continues to provide new tools for education. What do you see as the constants in piano teaching—those principles that will endure for years to come, and the ways in which piano teaching might be different in 2024?

We are a conservatory profession, so more will stay the same than change. Artistry, technique, practice, the beloved grand piano...these won't change. I believe the power of the one-on-one interaction will prevail. This will not change.

The different landscape of 2024 will stem from ubiquitous information and communication. Distance teaching, interactive learning tools, and instant access to interpretations and tips will supplement the typical lesson. We'll



Inspire the desire to aspire.

"No matter how inspiring the teaching, how engaging the curriculum, and how focused the student practice, assessment rounds out the instructional sequence. Achievement tracking can provide a meaningful acknowledgment of competence gained and a feedback loop that has potential to uplift our profession."

DR. RANDALL FABER

Faber Piano Adventures®, Faber Piano Institute

Find out how you can join the growing community of teachers who are discovering the benefits of the Music Development Program:

- A recognized national standard that supports student success
- An effectively sequenced course of study with built-in flexibility
- Outstanding teacher and student resources including a rich variety of repertoire and etudes
- Professional, detailed adjudications
- Ease of participation – no membership fees, paperwork, or volunteer hours

MusicDevelopmentProgram.org

FOLLOW US:



Royal Conservatory
**MUSIC DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAM™**



An interview with

Randall and Nancy Faber

see students of all ages coming to us for assistance with short-term, targeted projects. Assisted by readily available digital resources, independent learners will seek our temporary services as music learning consultants. In typical fashion, however, these develop into relationships and our studios will fill and flourish.

If you could recommend five non-music resources to piano teachers to educate and inspire, what would they be?

I recommend our PianoAdventures.com Discussion Forum for a wealth of practical information from the many contributors. You can dig into the archives for thousands of postings, or post newly and generate intriguing new discussion. AllMusic.com is an incredible resource that lies under the radar. This group maintains the music information database that feeds iTunes. There are enormous resources under classical. For books, I recommend Donald Schon's *The Reflective Practitioner* and Elkhonen Goldberg's *The Wisdom Paradox*. Nancy has enjoyed Tricia Tunstall's *Note by Note: A Celebration of the Piano Lesson* and *Extraordinary Teachers* by Fred Stephenson. If we



were to extend beyond five recommendations, I'd add *The 80/20 Individual* by Richard Koch and *The Checklist Manifesto* by Atul Gawande—two excellent books on personal productivity. ▲

Ignite & Inspire

Online tools for piano teachers to help your students achieve great results

From Fred Karpoff,
producer of *The 3-D Piano Method*, winner
of the Frances Clark
Keyboard Pedagogy
Award



 **entrada**
PIANO TECHNIQUE

entradapiano.com