



Focus on...

Nancy Faber

Along with her husband Randall, Nancy Faber has written over 200 publications including the acclaimed Piano Adventures® method.

Here's an in-depth look at one of today's leading supporters of the piano teacher.

FJH You were trained as both a flutist and a pianist. Which instrument did you begin to study first?

NF I was very lucky in that my mother was a choir director and piano teacher. She played games with me at the piano and gave me mini-lessons at a very young age—4 or 5 years old. I began lessons with another teacher at age five. We lived in Helena, Montana at the time. My earliest recollections of these lessons were sitting at the teacher's piano underneath a large bear head with gleaming teeth that was mounted on the wall over my head!

My family later moved to Tennessee for my elementary school years. I continued studying piano and was thrilled at the idea of taking percussion in the sixth grade school band. Much to my dismay, the music teacher informed me that girls did not play percussion. What a disappointment! So, how did I arrive at the flute? Well, my best friend played in the flute section. That was good enough reason for me. Playing in school bands, wind ensembles, and orchestras through high school was a tremendous musical experience. I always highly encourage my piano students to play in the school orchestra or band. Reading the grand staff in piano music makes reading a single line instrument comparatively easy. Wind and string players who also study the piano tend to be highly proficient sight-readers.

FJH When did you become interested in composing?

NF For me, composing music is one of the most wonderful activities I can imagine doing. I began writing little songs at age seven or so, and my mother was my biggest fan, always encouraging me. Oddly enough, my piano teachers after her were not particularly influential in my compositional development. Composing projects were not suggested in my private piano lessons, so creating music at the piano was something that really had to come from within me. Looking back on this makes me realize how important teaching harmony and composition is for today's piano teacher. Engaging the student through composition is a way of taking a personal interest in the student—perhaps on a deeper level than learning only to perform pieces.

FJH You studied as an undergraduate student at the Eastman School of Music. Did you focus on performance or composition?

NF I was admitted to the Eastman School as a composition or performance major. I chose performance, which I'm not sure, in retrospect, was the best choice. However, it provided the opportunity to immerse myself in practicing the piano. I do believe that as one increases their ability at their instrument, they also broaden their tools for composing.

FJH When did you decide that music would be your career path?

NF Fortunately, I went to college at a time when the mindset was to pursue what you really loved, rather than what would be financially remunerative. In my mind, I was simply "getting an education," rather than pursuing a career path.

FJH Who were your greatest mentors or influences?

NF My mother, who was always there, always encouraging. She sang, played the piano, directed children's choirs, and taught piano into her seventies. Music was a deep part of her soul and I think a child senses this reverence for beauty. Also, my high school piano teacher, Estelle Titiev, was a wonderful musician and teacher who instilled a deep love of the piano and its music. For composition, William Albright was a pivotal teacher for me. I studied with him in Ann Arbor, Michigan and will always treasure those lessons.

FJH What led you to composing for pedagogical purposes?

NF Is there any answer to this other than one's students? For me, composing for my students stimulated an intense interest in the pedagogy and psychology of the piano lesson. What are the reading challenges, technical limitations, and musical opportunities available at each point of musical development? How does one work with this compositionally, and at the same time educate, inspire, and expand the student's musical sense? Even if the student knows only a handful of notes, I become enthralled with the learning process—not only the student's learning, but also my own knowledge of how a student learns.

FJH What is your ultimate goal in creating a piece for a young pianist?

NF In short, to enhance the student's self-esteem. That's really it. To create a feeling of "I did it," or "I know I can do it," or "I really like this a lot." If the young student's sense of self is enhanced week after week in piano lessons, we are more likely to develop a fine musician. Self-esteem can be enhanced through several avenues: learning to fluently read music through pieces the student loves, creative activities that draw on the student's own imagination, and a sense that the teacher cares for them personally.

FJH You are such a prolific composer of all types of music. In 1998 you were named the MTNA National Distinguished Composer for your piece *Tennessee Suite* for piano and string quartet. Do you have a special interest in chamber music?

NF Yes. I've written a great deal for flute quartet and have recently completed a suite for flute, saxophone, and piano. I love the clarinet and muse about writing for it. Similarly with the bassoon, or string trio—and then there's the voice! Most of the CDs I own are chamber music. So perhaps that's an indication of my preference.

FJH What new projects do you have planned for the future?

NF Randy and I are hard at work on our adult piano method. I look forward to writing more solo piano pieces at all levels and I have a few chamber music pieces waiting to be written.

FJH What advice would you give to new or young composers?

NF Listen, listen, listen to music and study scores. Scores are the great teachers for composers. Become as proficient as possible on your instrument. And give attention to any "little voice" that speaks inside you with an idea. That's your own personal magic at work.

