



Newsletter

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Fort Worth Music Teachers Association

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September 2022

FWMTA welcomes interim President Spring B. Seals

- a Nationally Certified Teacher of Music in Piano. Spring began studying piano at the age of 7 in her hometown of Grapevine, Texas, and received a Bachelor's degree in Piano Performance with an emphasis in Pedagogy from Oklahoma Baptist University. In the summer of 2009, she traveled to Nairobi Kenya to serve as a guest professor and performer at the Kenya Baptist Theological College. In 2010 Spring won OBU's Concerto/Aria Competition allowing her to perform Saint-Saens Africa Fantasy Op. 23 with an orchestra. Graduating Summa Cum Laude, Spring was also given the award of Outstanding Senior in the School of Music at OBU.

Following graduation, Spring was awarded a graduate assistantship at Texas Christian University where she completed a Master's degree in Piano Pedagogy, studying under Harold Martina and Dr. Ann M. Gipson.

Spring is an active member of the Music Teachers National Association and has presented at several MTNA National Conferences- Oklahoma, Utah, and Texas state conferences, and for numerous local associations in the DFW area. She is a frequent adjudicator for area festivals and competitions. Spring enjoys teaching piano students of all ages and in all stages of study and believes that everyone is capable of creating and enjoying music.

President's Column

Dear FWMTA Colleagues,



It is an honor to step into the role of President of our organization. Dr. Evan Mitchell has done a wonderful job leading us through the challenges of the past three years and we wish him the best

on his new adventure in Florida.

MTNA has been a constant companion to my teaching career and I have learned so much from each of the positions I've been able to serve in at the local, state, and national levels. In my first years as a member of FWMTA, I served as Secretary from 2015-2018. This allowed me to sit in board meetings and begin to learn how our local group runs. Next, I was given the chance to join the TMTA board as Certification Director in 2016, followed by serving as Vice President for Business Activities from 2019-2021. I have also enjoyed being a member of the Editorial Committee for the MTNA journal, *American Music Teacher*, since 2019. I'm not sure I've ever felt truly qualified for any of these positions, but the wonderful leaders who have come before me continue to challenge me to take on these roles as they open up to me.

I'm looking forward to the many excellent events planned for FWMTA in the upcoming academic year. As more

activities return to "normal," we have so many opportunities to grow as teachers and to offer new experiences for our students. I especially encourage you to start making plans now to attend the MTNA National Conference which will be held in Reno, Nevada March 25-29, 2023. This will be our first in-person conference since 2019, and it is sure to be memorable. If you can't make it to Reno, mark your calendar for the TMTA Conference in Waco, June 15-18, 2023. Our TMTA Officers have brought in some wonderful guest performers and presenters to the last several conferences, and I'm sure this upcoming year will be no exception.

At our opening meeting last month, I shared about the idea of "smart" goals. These are goals that are **specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound**. When you look at the upcoming calendar of events, I encourage you to think about what "smart" goals you may set for yourself and your studio this year. You could make a goal to have 5 new students take the state theory test in the fall, or have 8 students play in open recitals. Goals for yourself could include completing national certification through MTNA, or attending the state or national conference this year. Whatever your goals, we hope that FWMTA can be a part of them!

Spring B. Seals, NCTM, President

**FWMT also welcomes Erin Fisher
as interim Corresponding & Recording Secretary**

Editor's Column



There is much to be gained from the article in the April/May 2022 issue of *American Music Teacher* titled, *Facilitating Adult Music Learning*.

The article provides detailed insight into the teaching of adults and the effective traits that a teacher should bear in mind when engaging in the fascinating art of Andragogy.

Our work as teachers brings us in contact with students of many levels of ability. Those of us who teach adults know how important it is to be aware of the needs of this special group of students as they begin their journey into mastering the art of playing the piano, or any other instrument in late maturity.

The first meeting with an adult student provides the setting for a peek into their everyday lives and what prompted this initial step. The variety of revealing answers sets the stage for how we can prepare and guide the adult student on this rewarding quest. Drawbacks can include being shy or introverted or being acutely aware of starting to play an instrument as a mature adult. Perhaps dexterity of the fingers is inhibited by arthritis or correct posture may be stymied by lower back

problems. While mastering the recognition of notes on the grand staff may at first be a daunting task to an absolute beginner, the advantage of having taken lessons in early life is an inestimable boon to the returning student.

As fluency in sight reading and an awareness of music's intricacies are gained, the memorization of a piece of music is welcomed by some students and shunned by others. Memorization can be a task to some students and no challenge at all to others. A solid knowledge of the structure, harmony, melody, and rhythm of the piece leads to a successful performance of it during a private lesson. But having to perform the same piece before an audience no matter how small, proves far less successful.

The majority of adult students play for their gratification; when called upon to venture beyond their comfort zone and play for the smallest audience they are gripped by performance anxiety. I chanced upon a way of getting one of my adult students to overcome this phenomenon in rather a simple way. The adult student wished to learn Chopin's Nocturne in E minor, op. 72, No 1, which she informed me was one of the pieces she came across

in the book being read by members of her book club.

When she began working on the Nocturne I suggested that she master it and play it for the members of the book club because of its relevance to the novel being read. Her immediate response was an unequivocal 'no!' Ignoring her negative response I further suggested she play Gershwin's Prelude No. 3 which was memorized followed by the Nocturne with the score. The two pieces could be played at the meeting's conclusion while members socialized. After weeks of thought, she was prepared to play the two pieces; one from memory and one with the score in what was a casual setting.

Months later she performed both pieces as planned; with laughter and conversation as a backdrop, she was completely at ease as she provided a few minutes of entertainment. A few mistakes were made, but no memory lapses. Overjoyed at being able to play for a small group of people, she has, since that first ice-breaker, played for her book club members and their spouses at year-end meetings and enjoyed being the center of attention!

Teaching adult students is without doubt a richly rewarding experience. Hats off to all adult students!

Rosemary Solomons, Editor

News Briefs



Isabella Araujo Jovanović, 11th grade, received a "1" - the highest grade at the State UIL for Solo Voice. She performed "Ständchen" by Schubert. She was accompanied at the piano by Ilka Araujo. Isabella studies voice with Kayla Nanto of the Fort Worth Opera, and Scott Tilley, choir director at Arlington Heights. In May 2022, she also received "Most Valuable Alto," "Future Choir Teacher," and "Assistant Choral Director" (2022-2023) awards. In April 2022, she directed the singing portion of the Musical *Bring It On* at Arlington Heights. Isabella received First Prize at the FWMTA Solo Contest in piano in the Spring of 2022. She studies piano with Dr. Jill Sprenger at the Fort Worth Conservatory of Music and Fine Arts. Congratulations, Isabella!



Evan Mitchell performs Franz List's Totantanz with the **Northeast Orchestra, Friday, October 28, at 7:30 p.m.** at Peace Lutheran Church, Bedford Eules Road, Hurst.

This concert will be a mix of classical, pops, and musical theater, all with a Halloween theme.



The UTA Symphony Orchestra performs Edvard Grieg's Piano Concerto in A Minor, opus 16 at Irons Recital Hall, UTA, **Tuesday, September 27, 2022, at 7:30 p.m.**

The featured soloist is **John Solomons**. The program also includes Gounod's *Ballet Music from Faust* and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's *Symphonic Variations on an African Air*.

Tickets can be purchased at www.utatickets.com The live-stream link is www.uta.edu/music/live.php

News Briefs continued

FWMTA FALL FESTIVAL takes place on Saturday, **October 8, 2022, at TCU.**

For information and guidelines please visit the FWMTA website.

Please contact Jae Kim (ydjaak00@gmail.com or 214-770-6074) at any time with questions or concerns.

This is a Non-Student Affiliate event.

UTA Fall Piano Contest

Saturday, November 5th, 2022, with the application deadline of October 14th, 2022.

The application can be downloaded at: www.uta.edu/music/areas/keyboards

Kawai Piano Gallery, 601 W. Plano Pkwy, Plano presents An Evening with Medallion Educator **Dr. Hando Nahkur** He plays the music of Rameau, Schumann, Adams, and Uusberg, **Friday, September 23, 2002, at 7 p.m.** The concert is free to the public.

Shigeru Kawai Chamber Music Series Presents **Duo Erti**. Gary Levinson, violin, and Baya Kakouberi, piano, play the music of R. Strauss, Stravinsky, Kreisler, and Ravel. **Monday, September 26th, at 7 pm.** The concert is free to the public.

FWMTA Calendar - September 2022 – January 2023

SEPTEMBER

10 Fall Festival: Jazz and Classic Registration Deadline

15 Student Affiliate Enrollment Deadline

15 Fall Theory Test Registration begins

24 Open Recital, 4:30 p.m. Martin Hall
at Texas Wesleyan University

OCTOBER

8 Fall Festival: Jazz and Classic, Ed Landreth Hall at TCU

12 Fall Theory Test Registration Deadline

15 Original Composition Contest Deadline for Entry

16 Open Recital, 4:30 p.m. Martin Hall
at Texas Wesleyan University

30 "BookNotes": The Inner Game of Music
by Barry Green & W. Timothy Gallwey.
(Available on Amazon.)

2-4 pm, Lou's Place at Texas Wesleyan University.

Chamber Music Festival registration deadline.

Joint event with Mid-Cities MTA and Tarrant County
College-Northeast. Register at <https://mcmta.org/>

NOVEMBER

3 Student Affiliate Late Enrollment Deadline (Fee Assessed)

4 Fall Outreach Registration Deadline

5 Fall Theory Test (makeup date Nov. 10)

at Broadway Baptist, 305 W. Broadway Ave, FW

5 Chamber Music Festival: piano and instrumental
at TCC-NE. For more info and registration,
please visit <https://mcmta.org/>

DECEMBER

1 Youth Duo Piano Competition Registration Deadline

1 Local Publication Contest Deadline

1 Local Video Contest Deadline

3 Open Recital, 4:30 p.m. Martin Hall
at Texas Wesleyan University

4 Fall Outreach Performances, 1:30 and 3:00 p.m.
James L. West Center, 1111 Summit Ave., FW

8 Student Affiliate Extended Late Enrollment Deadline
(Fee Increased)

15 Spring Theory Test Registration begins

JANUARY

12 Spring Theory Test Registration Deadline

12 Local Performance Contest Registration Postmark

12 Joint meeting with MCMTA and Forum
TBD Original Composition Contest State Deadline

28 Open Recital, 4:30 p.m. Martin Hall
at Texas Wesleyan University

We welcome our most recent sponsor - the ABRSM (Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music)

ABRSM, an examination board and registered charity based in the United Kingdom is one of five examination boards accredited by Ofqual to award graded exams and diploma qualifications in music within the UK's National Qualifications Framework. 'The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music was established in 1889 and rebranded as ABRSM in 2009. The Royal Schools referred to in ABRSM's title are The Royal Academy of Music, The Royal College of Music, The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, and The Royal Northern College of Music.

More than 600,000 candidates take ABRSM exams each year in over 93 countries. The syllabi, first published in 1890, includes Piano, Organ, Violin, Cello, Harp, Viola, Double Bass, and Woodwind instruments. Since the post-World War II years, the ABRSM saw an increase in overseas exam applications. The curriculum also expanded, with the addition of Guitar, Harpsichord, Voice, (with the option of specific exams for "musical theatre" singing in grades 1-3), Percussion, Recorder, and all Brass instruments. The 1990s saw Percussion and Jazz added to the syllabus. For more information, please see the ABRSM advertisement that follows.



We inspire musical achievement

Music exams | Publications | Practice apps | Events | Courses

Local Texas Contact

Natalie Voogt

832-303-9307

SouthCentral@ABRSM-USA.Org



ABRSM supports the teaching and learning of music
in partnership with our four Royal Schools of Music

www.abrsm.org

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Martin Blessinger is a Professor of Music Theory and Composition at Texas Christian University. He holds a DM in Music Composition from Florida State University where he was a University Research Fellow, studying with Ladislav Kubik and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich.

He received undergraduate and master's degrees from the State University of New York at Stony Brook, studying with Sheila Silver and Perry Goldstein. Prior to arriving at TCU, he worked as a Lecturer in Music Theory at the Ithaca College School of Music.

*Blessinger's works have been performed around the country and abroad by distinguished soloists, collegiate ensembles, professional groups, and community organizations, as well as on conferences and festivals at the national and international level. His orchestration of Jessica Grace Wing's score for the critically-acclaimed off-Broadway musical **Lost** won Best Music in the 2003 New York City Fringe Festival. In 2014, Blessinger served as guest composer for the Talis Festival & Academy in Saas-Fee, Switzerland and has since been a featured composer on the Cliburn Foundation concert series (Fort Worth), the Basically Beethoven concert series (Dallas), and with the Texas New Music Ensemble (Houston). Further, he was an invited composer at the 2018 Beijing Modern Music Festival/International Society for Contemporary Music World New Music Days Festival in Beijing, China and was named the 2020 Texas Music Teachers Association Commissioned Composer.*

Blessinger's compositions have been performed by the FWSO under the direction of Miguel Harth-Bedoya.

FWMTA greatly appreciates Dr. Blessinger's contribution to this edition of the Newsletter.

Does Setting Aside Valuable Lesson Time for Composition Slow Down Technical Progress?

By Dr. Martin Blessinger



I say this with all due respect as a composer myself: composition is not a real job. Or at least it didn't use to be. For many hundreds of years in the Western world, composition was

not a professional identity but rather an integral part of being a practicing musician, a much more all-encompassing view of the business of music-making. This typically included a basket of skills such as multi-instrumental fluency, improvisation, arranging, and, yes, composition. In 1753, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, son of Johann Sebastian, wrote one of the first comprehensive treatises on keyboard pedagogy, *Versuch über die Wahre Art das Clavier zu Spielen* (Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments). Tellingly, the second and by far heftier part of the treatise focuses on composition. In the introduction, Bach extolls the virtues of keyboard instruments, while simultaneously asking:

“At the same time, who is not aware of the many demands that are made upon it; how it is considered insufficient for the keyboardist merely to discharge the normal task of every executant, namely, to play in accordance with the rules of good performance compositions written for his instrument? How, beyond this, he must be able to improvise fantasias in all styles, to work out extemporaneously any requested setting after the strictest rules of harmony and melody; how he must be at home in all keys and transpose instantly and faultlessly; and play everything at sight whether designed for his instrument or not...?”

Years later, in an open letter in the *Hamburger unpartheiischer Correspondent* addressing a raft of charlatans who had plagiarized, excerpted, or otherwise

misused his treatise, Bach was even more direct:

“In a word, no one can put his trust in a keyboard instruction book if the author has not previously made himself known and proved himself worthy to be considered an accomplished composer through his good compositions.”

CPE Bach's treatise formed the basis of much 18th and early 19th-century keyboard instruction, influencing composer-performers and pedagogues like Czerny, Beethoven, Clementi, and Haydn, the latter of whom called the *Versuch* the “school of schools.” But as the 19th century progressed, these skills were siloed into specialty fields. Composers became engulfed in the lonely cult of the misunderstood genius; performers their oracles. Our current pedagogies, particularly in the realm of performance, have never recovered from this great Romantic schism.

Of course, not all of our students will (or want to) become Haydn or Beethoven. But when we ignore the larger swath of creative skills involved in music-making, more is lost than the archaic ability to realize a figured bass or improvise counterpoint. Many students—particularly advanced students—face a crisis of “why?” Why continue to run the high-stakes high wire act that competitive music programs often indirectly or directly promote? Why devote countless hours to the replication of something that a century of recording and streaming technologies have bequeathed us for free and at the highest level? The answer is simple but the path is arcane. To succeed in such a saturated environment, it is necessary not just to recreate but to create—to bring a unique, individual voice to the art. That requires an exquisitely creative perspective, and the path out of the wilderness is to adopt a composer's mindset.

It is important to instill this perspective early, and not just in those whose future plans include the concert stage. Children are practically born with a composer's mindset as they seek to explore and organize the world around them. This can often be at odds with the repetitive practice and memorization required of music instruction.

As someone who has taught keyboard students of many levels, particularly early in my career, one of my guiding principles

was to insulate the youngest students from the perfection trap—the stultifying idea that music-making amounts to the endless pursuit of an ever-elusive ideal. Instead, and here’s where my compositional training kicked in, I liked to revel in (some of) my students’ mistakes. “Ooh, that was interesting!” I would say. “That’s not on the page, but do you like it better? How does that change the feeling of the piece? Can we plant that seed elsewhere, so it doesn’t just happen once? What if we played it up an octave? Or down?” Sometimes students would even come to lessons saying “I’ve been practicing it this way because I like it better.” Not a problem. We would then work on two versions of the piece—the one on the page and the one that they had modified. Was the student’s modification better? Most often not. But better was not the goal, understanding was. Ask any budding engineer: you can learn a lot by disassembling and reassembling your toys (much to the chagrin of parents), even if they no longer work afterwards.

I also liked to set aside time in lessons for improvisation. It can feel daunting to those who haven’t had much experience in that area (If I had a dime for every pianist who’s ever told me categorically “Oh, I don’t compose” or “I can’t improvise” ...), but there are some easy entrees. Enter: the pentatonic scale. Though we often think of the C major/A minor scale as the most basic of constructions, the pentatonic scale has it beat by a mile when it comes to user-friendliness. The fact that there aren’t any half steps means that no combination of notes will ever sound too harsh, and a version of the pentatonic scale entirely conforms to the black notes of the piano keyboard. Plus, it’s a natural fit for many

non-classical styles of music including popular and folk. Try playing a simple accompaniment in the key of G-flat major or E-flat minor. Any note the student chooses will sound “right,” which frees up the conversation for things like rhythm, meter, motives, balance, proportion, dynamics, texture, range, opening and closing gestures, etc. without worrying about right or wrong notes. This doesn’t just have to happen with the student at the keyboard, either. Improvised singing provides a kind of freedom from the mechanics of performance that can be revelatory.

With guidance, attractive improvisations can be notated, either in homespun ways for the youngest students who may not be ready for the complexities of Western notation or through free software like Muscore for more advanced students. Then, notated improvisations can be practiced and performed, reinforcing the virtuous circle of theory and application. And, of course, as students advance, so can their compositional schema and the attendant theoretical concepts. To help, there is a myriad of supporting resources online—for example, free backing tracks in every key with various chord progressions suitable for improvisation.

Another way to engage young musicians in creative exercise is to think programmatically, whether explicit in the music or not. Crafting imaginative stories around the pieces they are learning instigates all kinds of good conversations. “You think this moment is surprising? Why? How do we perform ‘surprising?’” It also makes the experience of learning music deeper and more fun and assists with memorization. Turning back to composition, the act of overlaying musical

phenomena onto extra-musical imagery is a great tool for understanding the composer’s mindset, as well as stealthily sneak in some music theory. One of my favorite exercises was to have a student write or draw a short narrative story away from the keyboard. We would then discuss how to translate those characters, events, emotions, and moods into music. Highs, lows, louds, softs, fasts, slows, dissonances, consonances – when these become tools of creative expression, they stick, and further they build a vocabulary for talking about the music the student is learning.

Does setting aside valuable lesson time for composition slow down technical progress? It’s possible, though I doubt it. And for sure, the way to Carnegie Hall is practice, practice, practice. But most piano students aren’t going to have fabulously lucrative concertizing careers—even those that make it as far as university degree programs. Instead, they will become music teachers and nurses and lawyers and businesspeople and, with any luck, patrons of the arts. The best service we can perform for them—and ourselves—is to lead them towards an appreciation for and a deeper connection with music-making, the lifelong benefits of which are no secret to those blessed to teach it. And if a concertizing career is on the horizon, not only will these qualities serve young artists well, but they might reveal answers to some of the nagging questions of purpose and help them chart innovative courses in their nascent careers. In short, the skills gained through contact with composition and improvisation train innovative performers as well as smart audiences, neither of which can ever be in excess.

-Mark Your Calendar-

**“BookNotes”: The Inner Game of Music
by Barry Green & W. Timothy Gallwey
(Available on Amazon.)**

October 30, 2-4 p.m.

**Lou’s Place
at Texas Wesleyan University.**

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