



# Newsletter

1 of 8 pages

**Fort Worth Music Teachers Association**

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## President's Column



**Dear FWMTA Colleagues,**

Happy New Year! You've made it through the gauntlet of 2020 and into...well, more of the same. I remain thankful for my health, family, and professional successes. However, the news is often hard to ignore, with a worsening public health crisis, civil unrest, and a level of division within society not seen since at least the Vietnam era.

We no longer gather around the lone television set in the house for updates from "Uncle Walter" Cronkite, or consume one print news source, once per day. Rather, in a social media-driven, 24-hour news cycle, we choose our own facts. How can we restore civil debate when we inhabit different information bubbles, when we don't acknowledge the same basic facts as true?

Of course, we need ways to substantively engage with one another and our political leaders on current issues. But just as

importantly, we need to have something in common as a starting point for discussion. Otherwise, we will continue to talk past one another, our differences seemingly insurmountable.

Luckily for all of us, creating and teaching music can forge deep and even unlikely human bonds. It affords us an opportunity to connect with something larger than ourselves, and to pursue ideals that we know to be true, even if we never quite attain them. Any similar pursuit – religious devotion, service, scientific research – inspires the same passion and camaraderie.

Humans across the centuries have felt inexplicably moved by the same combinations of pitches, rhythms, and timbres in a Vivaldi concerto or a Haydn quartet. Since the advent of music, people have sought to experience its emotional power, as well as to produce it; when we challenge ourselves in the practice room – "how can I play that scale more evenly, that decrescendo more beautifully? – we share an experience with anyone who has ever played music and grappled with its difficulties. Our connection to a body of repertoire, and to our craft, is our way of wading into a universal stream that transcends time or place, which has existed for much of recorded human history and will outlive us, too.

In teaching as well, we wrestle with timeless questions of empathy: How can I get inside the mind of another? How can I clearly convey the shapeless thoughts within my own mind? The goals may be

fixed, and beliefs about best practices held fast, but the actual means of connecting with each student can never be preconceived. When we fail to question our own stubborn prejudices or tendencies, we come up short. We're lecturing or commanding, not listening and communicating. Instead, we must remain open to changing our minds, a lesson in humility that would do a lot of good in society more broadly.

On a more immediate level, haven't you noticed students who light up (even if it's through the light of your device screen) when they greet you for a lesson, who lose themselves in deep focus while attempting to master the dynamic balance between their hands, or who have recent achievements and newfound beauty with which to distract themselves during a truly distressing time? Haven't you felt a connection to music produced, even in solitude, with your own hands or voice, or that has wafted through speakers or across a socially distant setting and into your ears?

I believe we all have much to look forward to this year, and that the situation will be much improved by the time our next Newsletter is published. Until then, we will continue to do what we do best: to reach others through our own "essential activity".

**Evan Mitchell, President**

## Editor's Column

The events that took place at the Capitol building on January 6, 2021, as with 9/11, will forever be etched in the minds of us Americans. We were traumatized physically and emotionally as we watched the hands of those radicalized individuals follow their base instincts while within the walls of the Capitol – a site that stands as the symbol of American democracy and especially the freedom it represents. As the hatred and violence was unleashed that morning, I dwelt on the faith of millions of us, who, removed from this horrific, despicable crime, seek to live in peace as citizens of a nation that prides itself on embracing people of every creed and color and from every walk of life.

The truth in recent years has been splintered; if we are to repair the damage this has caused, we need to seek the truth and place our faith in it. As I pondered on the turmoil, the loss of life and the uncertainty of the immediate future of our beloved country, I turned to the writings of the theologian, **Thomas Aquinas**. "...it would be impossible for men to live together, unless they believed one another as declaring the truth one to another. Hence the virtue of truth does in some sense regard the truth as something owed." (*Summa theologiae*).

As my mind dwelt on the profundity of these words, my faith in the repair of splintered truth and a return to truth as something owed seemed distant but nonetheless, possible.

My mind turned from the surreal events of a very recent past and entered a world that unfailingly lifts the spirits and calms the mind; my eyes rested on a charcoal sketch of **Beethoven at his piano...**



As I continued to gaze at that sketch, I thrust aside the horrific scenes that had in recent days affected me physically and mentally. I began listening to a recording of Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte*. In this "ring of song" the theme of the first song is recalled in the sixth and final song, hence forming not a cycle but a ring. Was this a token of his love to his distant beloved? Was it meant to join one loving heart to the other?

As I pondered on the idea created by the ring, the names of a small group of women this unusual genius had immortalized through his dedications entered my mind as did the pieces of music and the names of the dedicatees.

The romantic relationships formed between Beethoven and the women to whom he was irresistibly drawn remained unrequited; he framed his memory of them through his dedications.

The first of the women that came to mind was Therese von Malfatti of Brunswick; she is associated with the little gem, *Für Elise*: Bagatelle in A

minor WoO 59; the Sonata No. 14 in C sharp minor, subtitled *Moonlight*, bears a dedication to Countess Giulietta Guicciardi; the dedicatee of Beethoven's two Piano Trios, Opus 70, is Countess Marie Erdödy. The gifted pianist Dorothea von Ertmann had Beethoven as her teacher. She later championed the music of her mentor and close friend. The piano Sonata, Opus 101, is dedicated to her. The enigmatic woman encountered in Beethoven's Liederkreis *An die ferne Geliebte* (To the Distant Beloved), remains inexplicable to this day.

**The one woman** who played a significant role in Beethoven's life yet stands removed from the women romantically linked to him, is **Nannette Streicher, née Stein** (1769-1833). Nannette's father, Johann Stein, was a renowned piano and organ builder in Augsburg, Germany, in the 1700s.

Nannette is said to have been a talented pianist, but this talent was paired with a love for the building of pianos. She and her brother, Andre, honed their skills in their father's workshop as his assistants. At the death of their father, Johann Stein in 1792, Nannette and Andre were in the enviable position of keeping the

manufacture of **Stein** pianos in operation.

Nannette married Johann Andreas Streicher in 1794. Not long after, the young couple moved from Nannette's hometown, Augsburg, to the Landstrasse suburb of Vienna; this was where Nannette gained renown as a craftswoman of high caliber.

Andre went on to create his own company by 1802. The company and pianos now bearing the name **Nannette Streicher, née Stein** came to be ranked among the finest instruments manufactured in the Imperial city of Vienna at that time. The Streicher company ultimately came to be considered piano builders of eminence in Vienna.



Nannette Streicher by Thomas Helmick

Nannette's relationship with Beethoven can be traced to when, as teenagers, they chanced to meet in Augsburg. He was returning home from Vienna where he had hoped but failed to meet with Mozart. A brief stop in Augsburg led to Beethoven visiting the Stein piano workshop. Nannette and Ludwig found they had a common interest: music. It led to a friendship that spanned their personal and creative lives until the death of Beethoven in 1827.

Over sixty letters written to Nannette by Beethoven attest to this. Nannette Streicher catered to Beethoven's financial, personal and emotional needs rather like that of a surrogate mother although they were just a year apart in age. Nannette Streicher's success as a businesswoman in the 1800s and

early 1900s, is a rare instance of a woman in control of the production, design and finish given the pianos bearing her name. The visible presence of women in charge of a business at that time is rare; Nannette remained engaged in every aspect of building pianos until her death in 1833. Her husband Johann's death occurred the same year; they had been married thirty-nine years. They lie buried across from Beethoven's grave in the Vienna Central Cemetery.

Nannette Streicher built pianos to meet the individual demands of pianists of the day, but it was her friendship with Beethoven that greatly impacted the construction of Streicher pianos.

The Streicher company, taking Beethoven's advice, produced pianos of greater resistance and elasticity

than those in use in Vienna at the time. Beethoven, in a letter to Nannette and Johann Streicher, thanked them for sending him a piano "that was truly admirable...it allows me the freedom to create my own sound."

The 250<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Nannette Streicher on January 2, 2019, was not observed in her native Augsburg or in Vienna. The day passed by unnoticed. Her achievements in the construction of pianos have yet to be fully recognized and annotated by historians. Perhaps they found it inconceivable that a woman was the master mind behind the pianos that bore the name: *Nannette Streicher née Stein*.

**Rosemary Solomons, Editor**

## FWMTA Calendar for February – May 2021

**Please check FWMTA website concerning possible changes to these events due to COVID-19.**

### JANUARY

**TBD** State and Local Piano Ensemble Team Intent Form and Fees Postmark Date

**TBD** Original Composition Contest State Deadline

30 Open Recital

### FEBRUARY

1 State and Local Piano Ensemble Team Auditions at Texas Wesleyan University

1 State Publication Contest Deadline

1 State Video Contest Deadline

**TBD** Spring Theory Testing window

5 World of Music Test registration postmark deadline

9 Joint meeting with MCMTA and Forum, presentation by Dr. Evan Mitchell

13 Youth Duo Piano Competition at Texas Wesleyan University

13 Local Performance Contest at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

### MARCH

5 World of Music Testing, Location TBA

6 Open Recital with Forum, Martin Hall at Texas Wesleyan University, 4:30pm  
Local Chamber Music Ensemble Contest registration postmark deadline  
Solo Competition registration postmark deadline  
Local Chamber Music Ensemble Contest, location TBD  
MTNA National Convention, VIRTUAL ONLY

### APRIL

1 Senior Scholarship Award application postmark deadline

3 Open Recital, Martin Hall at Texas Wesleyan University, 4:30pm

17 Solo Competition ONLINE submission due date (\*Jan. '21: registration form available soon)

24 State and Local Piano Ensemble rehearsals

### MAY

1 "Meet the Composer": Martin Hall at Texas Wesleyan University. 2:00pm-4:00pm, presentation and masterclass by Mona Rejino, composer

1, 15, 22 State and Local Piano Ensemble rehearsals  
Outreach performances

### JUNE

5 State and Local Piano Ensemble rehearsals

## News Briefs:



Zoe House



Katelyn Montgomery

**The annual Fall & Jazz Festivals were held online during October 12<sup>th</sup> - 29<sup>th</sup>.** This event was extremely well organized by co-chairs Katelyn Montgomery and Zoe House. The report that follows is from the event's co-chairs.

The annual Fall and Jazz Festivals held as an online festival in October of 2020 turned out to be a great success. In addition to the jazz entries, students were invited to perform pieces from the Contemporary era. We applaud the 227 students who participated. A total number of 296 compositions were performed by them! Congratulations also to the 34 teachers represented at this event. Participating students were adjudicated by John Fisher, Mike Springer, Resa Carrell, Mina Kramer, Erica Vosburg, Josh Green, and Jennifer Clarkson. The performers earned the following ratings:

263 Superior, 27 Excellent, and 2 Good. The Fall Festival co-chairs and committee would like to thank all teachers, students and judges who went the extra mile to help make the very first online Fall Festival a complete success.

**December 3, 2020 marked our most recent FWMTA Outreach performances.** This event consisted of a virtual recital broadcast internally to patients and families at Cook Children's Medical Center in Fort Worth. Twelve teachers submitted recorded performances by well over 20 students on the theme of "Seasonal Greetings!". Along with many of the usual popular holiday tunes, students included other "seasonal" repertoire selections, such as "Summer" by Joe Hisaishi and "Now the Leaves are Falling Fast" by Benjamin Britten. Bravi to all

who participated in this virtual recital and thank you to these students and teachers for sharing your time and talent to brighten the day of others in the community!

After virtual Outreach events in the spring and fall of 2020, we hope to offer live performances in our spring 2021 Outreach event. Watch for details in the coming weeks as we finalize plans for an outdoor, in-person event to occur in May or June.

*-Evan Mitchell*

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Thomas Woods, owner of DFW Piano Tuning has been servicing pianos for almost 2 decades.

Woods' love of music can be traced back to when he began lessons in piano as an elementary school student, which continued unbroken throughout his high school years. His fine sense of musicality and achievements earned him a scholarship to TWU. His musical journey upon graduation began with his forming his own jazz ensemble; he later joined a group that was much in demand which led to performances throughout America and the Caribbean. These experiences eventually led to his performing with some of America's finest musicians. He continues to work with top artists in the DFW area on various recording, production and mastering sessions.

Learning the mechanisms of piano building and repair, and the proper tuning of the instrument, was yet another component of the world of music that for years remained of interest to musician and enterpriser, Thomas Woods. This interest eventually led to his creating a company that provides the tuning, moving and repairing of pianos, and the selling of pianos while yet in the home of the seller.

Please consider using the services of DFW Piano Tuning, LLC - a sponsor that graciously agreed to place an advertisement in our newsletter. See advertisement on page 5.

Thomas Woods is the former piano student of newsletter editor, Rosemary Solomons.



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*Jill Sprenger is the founder and Director of the Fort Worth Conservatory of Music and Fine Arts LLC, which opened in the Fall of 2019, and maintains a large private studio. She is also currently on the Board of Directors of the Fort Worth Music Teachers Association. Jill Sprenger received her B.M. from Oberlin Conservatory, M.M. from Indiana University and D.M.A. from the University of California, all in piano performance.*

*The Fort Worth Conservatory of Music and Fine Arts combines equal parts of excellence, inspiration, and fun. Individual private lessons for all ages and levels in piano, violin, viola, cello, string bass, flute, clarinet, winds, brass, voice, and guitar.*

*The journey begins with Kindermusik classes for infant-4, keyboard exploration classes ages 4-6, group beginning piano classes ages 7-9, adult music appreciation classes and individual lessons, and private lessons*

*for all ages in piano, strings, winds, voice, and guitar.*

*The Fort Worth Conservatory is a participating school of the Royal Conservatory certificate program and a proponent of the Suzuki program.*

## **IT'S ALL ABOUT GOALS**

**By Jill Sprenger**

Especially during these very extraordinary and trying times, we all acknowledge the importance of music study for our students, and the energy we have all put into to keeping the music going. Congratulations to us all on our oftentimes heroic efforts these past 10 months!

It seems appropriate to write this article in light of our times. Here are some ideas for you of what I have done to survive and even thrive during the pandemic with my students and conservatory.

Again, it's all about goals. Outsiders might think that the pandemic has allowed me time to sit at my piano and happily practice for hours at a time. Not so. The steep learning curve for becoming quickly proficient at Zoom technology produced a daily tiredness which has sapped energy to devote to individual practice but, realistically for me, the problem existed long before COVID. If I don't have a performance goal I don't practice...never have. You may have a different personality.

That having been said, why do I think MY students are any different? That they can show up week after week for their lesson and I expect them to sustain the daily practice without an overarching goal? My 50 years of teaching has taught me that they cannot, especially given the number of competing activities these days. So here are some goals I have systematically instituted in my teaching

for many years, some long before the pandemic.

We have all enjoyed the benefits of students working towards the semester-end recital as a wonderful short-term goal. We also engage our students in other appropriate level short-term goals, chosen for their level of "threat" such as the easier going Fall Festival or the more challenging Solo Contest. Others would work towards the TMTA Competitions or outside high-level advanced competitions.

For me, however, I look at these events from a larger perspective. First, I look at them all from the "stepping-stone" mentality. I pick a large, year-end goal, and I group the events for each student into multi-tiered steppingstones. Example., one of my favorite large goals is a Royal Conservatory Certificate Program exam which is comprehensive and extensive. I take a student's repertoire through various levels to "season" it. I call it a hierarchy of performance – we as performers wouldn't dream of practicing in our practice room for hours and then stepping directly out onto a concert stage to perform, so why do we think our students can do that? I intentionally think of each of my student's three exam pieces as moving through stages: successfully playing for an informal monthly repertoire class, then a non-threatening semester recital, then a higher-level competition or guest masterclass. Finally, they "own" the piece and can play confidently in my larger exam goal. It takes repeated performances of a piece to produce a seasoned performance. With my competitive advanced students, I actually

have them learn and season the piece the semester before and then give it a rest period. When they bring it back it is always possible to take it to a higher level of technical and artistic maturity.

Second, I think of goals which go beyond the current year and into the next as group goals. At the beginning of last summer, I sensed a great COVID weariness with my students. We all thought we would quarantine for 6 weeks in March/April and then return to life as normal. NO... As the summer session began, I came up with a Conservatory-wide composer goal which looked forward to September and the fall semester. To celebrate Beethoven's birthday, all Conservatory students learned a piece by him during the summer session which they played in a Beethoven "Gala" concert in September. I grouped my older students into complete sonatas/sonatas and had them play for each other in joint Zoom lessons to hear the whole "work." Having a group project and spirit provided a meaningful sense of common goal for the students. We ran 2 competitions as well to support the project (suggested by my Conservatory teachers!): we had a concert poster contest for who could design the best advertising flyer, and a contest of "10 fun facts" about Beethoven. Students then voted during the first week of the fall semester on the winners and they got a gift certificate. I never underestimate the motivation of group fellowship in achieving a common goal. This helped students keep their eyes on the future fall semester activities during the summer months (and also required them to continue lessons in the fall).

Another “group” goal I implemented this past semester and will surely use again, was to focus on a set of students of similar level. One of my early advanced students wanted a Chopin challenge piece last summer. As she worked on her Nocturne it occurred to me that I had 3 other advanced students who could form a group, so I gave one a Waltz, one a Prelude, and one a Scherzo. They worked towards a guest artist masterclass with a colleague, on December 18th during Christmas break no less. Each student gave a short talk before they played about different facets of Chopin – his life, his work, his times, etc. My colleague was so inspired that the class went 2 hours. An unexpected side bonus - one student upgraded from a digital to a baby grand for the event, and another of the students did the same this past week, both buying from Collora Piano of Dallas who so kindly supply our Conservatory pianos free of charge in order to make them available for sale to students.

From the perspective of teacher objectives, my goal is to provide a comprehensive music education to all of our Conservatory students as we turn them into literate musicians, enabling them to enjoy a lifetime of music making.

To that end, again, I support the goal of an RCM exam. While my students don’t necessarily participate every year, I find that if I get them involved with the Program at the prep level, they and their parents are then sold on the many benefits of the Program. It is tricky even for experienced teachers to keep all facets of students’ development at the same level – some are better readers, some have technical difficulties, some want to play by ear and “guess” at note names. Having a comprehensive exam goal where students and myself are accountable for all areas such as repertoire, technique, ear, and sightreading provides the needed structure and motivation.

Finally, the spark of creativity as students connect with the music from an inner sense of engagement is the most motivating goal of all for both teachers and students – it is at the core of why we do what we do. Our Conservatory students have always played an annual “Creative Animal Concert” with the fun costumes, posters, etc. But this pandemic year we challenged our students and ourselves to make lemonade out of lemons as we embraced technology and the simultaneous live Zoom/in person recital format. Students were encouraged

to actually consider using the new technological possibilities to ignite that creative spark – and we were amazed as they figured out how to upload and display a larger-than-life eagle background behind them during their piece, have fluttering “buzzing bees” going back and forth across the Zoom screen. But perhaps the most amazing example of creativity was from my student Frederic who edited together scenes from Tom and Jerry cartoons to tell the story of his simultaneous performance of Copland’s “Cat and Mouse.” May it be a lesson to us all in the power of music to help us rise above the times! I have included the link here: <https://youtu.be/Y-Y08h1yErg>

We piano teachers are in a strategic position to make a profound difference in our students’ lives. Whether through zoom or in person, the weekly interaction as we come alongside our precious students can reap rewards of personal and musical joy for a lifetime. We are in difficult times, but music can serve as the very thing that sees us and our students through by providing structure and nurturing our souls. Blessings to you all dear colleagues!

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## A Trip to the Performing Arts Medicine Doctor

Dr. James Aston, DO

*Dr. Aston is a neuromusculoskeletal medicine specialist in Fort Worth, TX. He currently practices at University of North Texas Health Science Center.*

After all the turmoil and division our society has endured through the recent past, we can at least agree on one thing- no one likes to go to the doctor’s office. I’m a doctor, and I don’t enjoy trips to the doctor’s office! To reduce your uncertainty about going to see a Performing Arts Medicine (PAM) doctor, however, I’d like to answer some basic questions about what to expect from the average visit. My goal in answering these questions is to help you,

a teacher, a student or a performer, become comfortable with the thought of coming to see me. We can then work together as a healthcare ensemble to keep you healthy, performing at your best, and safely stage ready at all times.

### Question 1: What is a PAM doctor?

A PAM doctor has special training in the care of performers. They usually come from a few select medical backgrounds including family medicine, sports medicine, rehabilitation, orthopedic surgery or ENT. Fortunately, UNTHSC has started the world’s first PAM fellowship, from which I am the first fellow to graduate. We are taught to recognize the nuances of different performers and the health conditions unique to their field. Understanding these

nuances allows us to better tailor the care we provide our patients.

### Question 2: Why should I go to a PAM doctor?

Our community undoubtedly has many good, competent primary care and specialist physicians. Despite their high levels of training, their medical schooling does not adequately prepare them for the unique needs of performers. A physician who is unfamiliar with a dancer’s practice routines, the demands of a pianist’s repertoire or a vocalist’s singing style will be hard pressed to develop complete care plans that address specific needs. They may not have specialist connections readily available for referrals that need care, either. A PAM doctor has the extra experience, training and network to provide the care you need!

**Question 3:** What does a PAM visit look like?

Although PAM visits share many common characteristics with a regular doctor's appointments, there are some very important differences. A PAM doctor is interested in both your medical history and your musical history. Be prepared to answer questions about your instrument,

practice schedule, musical style, technique, gigs and more! You will be asked to bring your instrument if you are a musician and to play it (please don't bring your piano with you!) If you are a dancer, you may find yourself dancing at the doctor's office!

When I see performers in the clinic, I work with them to develop a treatment plan to

help them achieve their performance goals. A variety of approaches are considered including manual treatments, physical therapy, medications, imaging, labs and specialty referrals. A performer's personal and professional medical needs are the primary consideration. While it's true that the show must go on, it can go on safely with minimal risk of injury!

*In the article that follows Anne Smith, co-vice president of programs, provides a summary of the discussion led by Dr. Ann Gipson on **Grit, the Power of Passion and Perseverance** by Angela Duckworth. This Zoom meeting was held on November 13, 2020 – The editor*

## **BookNotes Discussion**

***Grit, the Power of Passion and Perseverance*** by Angela Duckworth  
Summarized by Anne Smith

What is grit? Very simply, it is a "never-give-up attitude." In *Grit, the Power of Passion and Perseverance*, Angela Duckworth writes that "in the long run, grit may matter more than talent." From there she goes on to write an intriguing, engaging, and practical book on developing grit in ourselves and in those we influence. Dr. Ann Gipson tailored our BookNotes discussion on this inspiring read in November to apply to us as piano teachers. By taking an optimistic approach with our students, choosing vocabulary that sparks growth and grit, and creating a culture of grit, we can

positively impact our students not only in music development but in life skills.

Ms. Duckworth contends that grit involves both passion and perseverance. She writes, "Enthusiasm is common. Endurance is rare." Grit is "sustained, enduring devotion" to a goal combined with "dogged persistence." Grit challenges us to be better today than we were yesterday, to press on to more difficult things. As teachers, we discussed that helping a student tackle a short piece just beyond their level is an incremental part of developing grit.

When we know what interests our students, we can motivate them. We build passion as we select pieces, they or their family love, involve them in group classes, duets, chamber music, competitions, special events, or even something as simple as games. We discussed the importance of social interaction for inspiring enjoyment in students. All along the way we give them tools for practicing that develop excellence, teaching them to think and ask questions of themselves (like, "What can I do to make this better?"), leading to

self-evaluation and eventually independence. In essence, we direct them in building habits of success. Success breeds more success; and, over time, grit is developed.

One does not have to be a genius or naturally talented to be at the top of their game. In fact, high achievers are just that, high achievers because they never stopped pursuing their ambitions, not because they began as exceptional. Dr. Gipson encouraged us that we have a high calling in molding and mentoring our students, influencing them one on one over a period of years. Treating every student as though they are our best student, believing they have the potential to become exceptional, we can use our unique role as music teachers to train them in skills that lead to noteworthy accomplishments in music and in life.

Our optimism, kind but firm instruction, and our own grittiness are key to developing passion and perseverance, and grit, both musically and personally in our students.

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