

A PHILOSOPHY OF MUSIC EDUCATION
DESIGNER PIANO
TEACHERS ART MUSIC STUDENT
MOTIVATION FORMS OF DELIVERY THE
Piano Teaching
LEARNING TO EDACISE PUBLIC

A Guide for Nurturing
Musical Independence

PERFORMANCE PRACTICE JOURNAL
PRE-EMPTING DEVELOPING
TECHNIQUE STAGES OF CHILD
DEVELOPMENT THE VERY YOUNG
STUDENT METHOD BOOKS FOR BEGINNERS
ADULT TUITION GROUP LESSONS
PREPARING FOR TEACHING EXAMS
POSTURE USE AND ABUSE OF THE BODY
INTERPRETATION THE STUDIO TUITION
AGREEMENT RESUME THE
ACCOUNTING SIDE THE TRIANGLE -
STUDENTS/PARENTS/TEACHERS
A BASIC LIBRARY REPERTOIRE SELECTION THE
INSTRUMENT PIANO CARE PURCHASING AN
INSTRUMENT INTERNET SITES BIBLIOGRAPHY

Faith Maydwell



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PREFACE

I am not sure that I imagined specialising in piano pedagogy as a young adult but I do remember asking my professor shortly after completing a master's degree at university, "What do I call myself?" His answer was immediate. "Why? You are a MUSICIAN." Thirty years later I find myself feeling passionate about the possibilities of the piano studio and putting forward a way of teaching that emphasises the development of the whole person and the complete musician.

The journey has provided experiences in accompanying, solo recitals, concertos and broadcasts, teaching in tertiary institutions and music specialist schools, orchestral keyboard playing, examining and adjudicating. Not only am I grateful for the rich and varied background but I have seen first-hand how different areas of music making are complementary to others.

When I was completing two performance degrees at university, back in the 1970s and 80s, there were no specific teaching units for the piano students who planned to be studio teachers. This was despite the great majority of performance majors, on their exodus from university, teaching in some capacity to supplement their income. How I first taught was mostly influenced by what I had experienced in my student years. Over the decades, a range of teaching experiences and further study has contributed to a major shift in my approach.

I have always enjoyed teaching, but now look forward with great anticipation to the return of my students after a holiday period and regard music teaching as an exciting and privileged occupation.

Whilst teaching piano pedagogy at university and wading through the dullest of method books on the subject, something new would always be revealed. This is what I love about the subject. It is huge and it is intriguing. For instance, I thought I had the teaching of scales all wrapped up. However, over lunch recently with a piano teacher, I gained new insight by listening to a summary of her approach.

Should you decide to become a piano teacher, be prepared to be fascinated for a lifetime. Reading material is endless and there is always an intellectual or musical challenge to be met.

These pages reflect my observations and lessons learnt over the years.

I realise that people have many different ways of teaching piano. Tertiary teaching, in particular, showed me that important musical concepts need to be addressed in the early stages of a student's development. If this has not happened all is not lost as much can still be accomplished with hard work and good teachers. However it would be so much better if students were helped to be well-rounded musicians from the beginning. I often encounter adult students who do not know, for instance, how to use their body effectively at the keyboard, how to hear inwardly, how to produce a variety of tone colours – even how to learn a Bach fugue.

I hope that piano teaching continues to become more professional and that all teachers come to understand their privileged position.

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Dedication

*To my piano teachers
Miss Piercy, Mr Huddle, Dawn Fisher,
Wallace Tate and David Bollard*

Faith Maydwell

INTRODUCTION

To whom is this book directed? To piano teachers who may be looking for a fresh perspective and to piano students who are thinking about piano teaching as a career. It is a manual that examines the why, how, what, who and when of the subject.

Piano teaching is a profession that is rewarding but also challenging. It suits people who are fascinated with human behaviour and an art form which demands some of the most complicated feats of human coordination. It must be remembered that to know the literature alone is probably too big a task for one lifetime.

As teachers we are extremely fortunate to be working in most situations with one student at a time. This allows for a closeness that is not possible in a group. Those who have been blessed with a good teacher who has unveiled the mysteries of music will understand the tenderness and respect felt for the person who has enriched their lives. I remember Miriam Hyde's keynote address, *Memories of My Nine Piano Teachers*, at the 5th Australian Piano Pedagogy Conference in 2001. She eloquently recalled what each one of her teachers added to her pianism. Reading an article such as *Edwin Fischer – Remembering My Teacher* by Alfred Brendel (*On Music*, p. 328, A Cappella Books, 2001) shows how a teacher affects a person's life. My university teacher often recalled stories of his teachers and great pianists he had heard whilst studying in London. When I recounted this to one of my adult students she was amazed to hear that attending concerts by pianists such as Richter, Cherkassky, Michelangeli, Kentner, Arrau, Serkin, Curzon and Giles could have a profound effect on personal and musical development.

Sadly, from some students I hear accounts of educational experiences that have a negative impact. Recently I spoke to a mother whose daughter repeatedly endured the criticism of a music teacher who, amongst other things, called her unmusical. I don't believe children should be weighed down with criticism, which may cause the wrong preconceptions to be carried throughout life. Musicality is learnt. Even the tiny percentage of students who seem incapable of independent development can still enjoy music by imitation. Playing a piece of music beautifully by rote is more enriching than not to play at all. Piano teaching can build a student's confidence. The experience should be a happy and rewarding one for both student and teacher.

Those who have learnt from certain teachers will also have had the advantage of being part of a great composer/performer line, passing down ideas from generation to generation. Even in Perth, Western Australia – the world's most isolated city – I had a teacher whose lineage, in five steps, goes back to Beethoven via Liszt and Czerny. I had the good fortune to study with David Bollard for three years before he went to Sydney to become a founding member of the Australia Ensemble. He studied piano with Ilona Kabos for about a year and a half and then with Louis Kentner for four and a half years. He talked of the predominant qualities that emanated from their teaching. Kabos emphasised the need for the music to have a sense of direction and for the phrase to breathe in a natural way. With Kentner it was the importance of a beautiful cantabile tone and the awareness of the need to strive constantly to defeat the basic nature of the instrument, whose sound is produced by percussive means.

I have heard piano pedagogues deride musical lineages saying that this is totally irrelevant because teaching evolves with each generation. However, keyboard pedagogy has a close connection to the great masters. If we have the chance to hear at first, second or even fifth hand how a composer wanted his music to be played, are we not better off? David Bollard

told me he questioned Kabos about an interpretive issue in a piece of Liszt, and her reply was, “I *know* darling, I studied with his pupil!”

Sometimes a musician whose main interest is not piano can have a profound effect on a student’s life. A Hungarian musician highly regarded and who had a great influence on Kabos and Kentner, Leó Weiner, is listed in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* as a composer and teacher of chamber music having studied composition with Zoltán Kodály.

It still excites me every time I think of this wonderful line of musicians that I now belong to and the privilege I have of passing my knowledge on to future generations:

Ludwig Beethoven

Carl Czerny

Franz Liszt

Arpád Szendry

Ilona Kabos

David Bollard

Faith Maydwell

We can learn much from our teachers on the subject of teaching whether they are a well-known concert artist or the neighbour next-door. I suggest that a list be made of the qualities admired in your piano teachers as well as the qualities which you do not wish to take with you into your career.

Be prepared as you examine teaching to change your view. Sometimes issues are not black and white. I remember my second teacher Mr Huddle who used to pick me up from school and take me to my home for lessons. The spider webs in the corner of his car used to fascinate me, as did his thick fingers which had the consistency of crocodile skin. He was a stickler for key signatures. I am grateful now for not flinching when greeted by a key signature of six or seven sharps, a skill which has greatly aided my sight reading, though his method of teaching this filled me with frustration and anger at the time. I don’t recall the method but I do strongly recall the feelings. In my teenage years Mrs Dawn Fisher helped me to focus during a difficult time. I remember being inwardly rebellious. Piano lessons during university were the highlights. I would look forward with eager anticipation to each lesson, riveted to the new score and listening intently to David Bollard as we examined music in minute detail.

Before the question of why one would want to be a piano teacher is addressed, let’s look at why we are attracted to this instrument in the first place. Over the past few years we seem to

have had a glut of piano books and piano films such as *The Piano Shop on the Left Bank*, *The Piano Tuner*, *The Pianist* and *The Piano Teacher*. It has always been an instrument associated with the high life. I have a folder full of accumulated advertisements of the keyboard and the grand piano's wing shape to help sell designer pens, restaurant meals and watches. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation's survey, "What's the one piece of piano music you can't live without?" attracted 10,000 entries.

The piano has been and remains a popular instrument. Why? Here are a few suggestions:

- For many of us the piano was part of the furniture in the family home.
- A lucky few were taken to recitals as children.
- When striking a chord, we can feel the vibrations physically. For many people, the piano's main attraction would be its response to touch. It needs a touch full of nuance and subtlety.
- Dynamics on the piano vary according to the touch – not achievable on the harpsichord or organ. Sound matches body movement, so playing the piano can be intensely expressive.
- The ability to produce melody and harmony at one time can be exhilarating. The piano can be a whole orchestra if need be.
- To produce the sound is relatively easy. One does not have to use a lot of breath or need to tune the note. Nearly anyone can produce a satisfying result fairly quickly. (Of course this does not imply that it is an easy instrument to master.)
- It may be the piano literature that is attractive. It is the largest for any instrument covering many periods and styles.

It is interesting to ask students why they learn the piano. For the majority who take it up in childhood, it is the parents who make the decision for them because they in turn had learnt or owned a piano. One student desired to play the piano from the age of five, was given a piano when nine years of age but did not agree to lessons until she was twelve because peers had told her "piano teachers shout at you". It was the choir mistress who inspired her initially but also the fascination with the piano sitting in the corner of the classroom under the crimson quilt, undressed to be played for hymns at the commencement of the school day and grace before recess.

Adults' responses are more varied when asked the main reason why they commenced or recommenced lessons; curiosity as to why they could not play well as a child, to make up for the childhood years when they could not play, pianism is an essential part of their life, fascination of the piano sound, enjoyment of good music, a help for analysing and understanding good music, a need to be involved with beauty, career development and of course to be able to advance their pianism.

In our love affair with an extraordinary instrument, some of us are prepared to go to extraordinary lengths to obtain the best sounds on the best instruments. Does this necessarily make such a person suitable for the teaching of music? Well, it is a good starting point but much more is involved with successful teaching.

A PHILOSOPHY OF MUSIC EDUCATION

Why is music important in a child's education? What music should we be teaching? How should we be teaching it? What is the main goal of the piano teacher? How do we achieve this goal on a week-by-week basis? The answers are involved in building a solid understanding of piano teaching.

Here are some of the areas that playing the piano affects:

- Articulating ideas
- Concentration
- Confidence
- Coordination
- Emotional language
- Historical knowledge
- Knowledge of the other arts
- Listening
- Memory
- Posture
- Reading
- Relationships
- Self-discipline
- Understanding of aesthetics
- Understanding other genres of music – symphonies, string quartets, etc.

The writings of Kodály stress the importance of music to the emotional, intellectual, aesthetic and physical development of the child. He even suggests that music should be at the heart of the school curriculum. We should be asking, “Why, when it is so beneficial to the child, has

our society allowed music to be pushed to the sidelines with little resources given to its study?”

It is clear that music study can have a great effect on a person's life and on society in general. A father of one of my students confided to me that at the tea table his six-year-old had declared, “Piano is very good because it makes you think and it makes you smart.” This alone would seem to justify piano for every child who wishes to learn. Add to this all the appreciation of beauty that enters life through it.

One of the most convincing philosophies of music I have read is David Elliott's *Music Matters* (Oxford University Press, 1995). So long as you can put up with words such as *musicing* and *praxial* this challenging book presents many convincing arguments on the importance of music education. He shows how and why the study of music leads to self-growth, constructive knowledge, enjoyment and increased self-esteem. Reading works such as this should not be avoided. When you see the big picture you are able to articulate your goals and explain why music teaching is an essential part of society. It is then relatively easy to answer many of the smaller questions such as what materials to teach and in what manner they can be taught.

Philosophy on music education needs to be strong because it is closely related to three areas of a piano teacher's life. Firstly, on a personal level, the job must be regarded as important. Teachers need to be convinced about what they want to achieve and how to achieve it. Without this strong direction and because of the isolated nature of the work, it is easy for the music teacher to become demoralised with feelings of doubt creeping in. If they understand that piano teaching is sharing one of life's most enriching art forms then the enthusiasm they have towards the subject will carry them through the tougher times.

Secondly, in the music studio there needs to be a clear long-term goal so the details of the week-by-week decisions will be made with a sense of purpose.

The third area where piano teachers can be a force for good is the community. If they have a chance to put forward an opinion in the public arena on the value of music education then they should do so. Recently, the university where I was teaching piano pedagogy halved the course due to economic considerations. Because of my sessional staff position I did not have any input into the decision, but I still used the opportunity to wave the flag for good teaching in this area. It felt as if my voice was weak on this occasion, though I believe we should always be willing to speak up on the subject of music education. Every opportunity that has the potential to help enrich and strengthen the arts in society needs to be taken.

If you can say “I want to be a teacher of piano because I think it is one of the most useful skills that I can help impart to humankind” then you are in a wonderful position.

Next, what is your major objective? What do you think is the main goal of the piano teacher? When I ask this question of first-year classes I always receive a variety of answers. Here are a few:

- To help students enjoy music
- To make great pianists
- To help students pass exams
- To have fun

These are worthy objectives but, for me, the main objective of the piano teacher is:

TO HELP THE STUDENT BECOME MUSICALLY INDEPENDENT
AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE

Heinrich Neuhaus puts it similarly in *The Art of Piano Playing* (p. 172, Barrie and Jenkins, 1973). It's worth reading.

Independence implies musical maturity with the pupil brought to a stage of knowledge and understanding to be able to make good musical judgements. My goal is never to produce pianists but to help produce musicians. Pianists with fast fingers and a smooth action can still be inadequate musicians, lacking in interpretation and expression. Rounded musicians will understand their instruments as well as technical and posture issues. Better to be able to tackle any score accurately and expressively than to be able to play only a handful of masterpieces precisely. It is the former skill which will provide the opportunity for continual musical growth.

Why do I write "independent as quickly as possible"? It is easy to coast along thinking that piano playing is a long haul, so what's the hurry? We should be making that journey towards independence as short as possible because we never know when circumstances may change. If the student departing has not arrived at a certain level, then years of work could be completely lost. A teacher who had a studio for 50 years told me that she had never been able to get her students to sight read. I found this distressing. Was there no help for the teacher to find the key to developing this skill? All her students apparently went into adult life without one of the greatest joys of music – to be able to play new scores readily.

Of course, in the music field we rarely *arrive* – and are always travelling towards perfection. We may choose to have mentors for feedback throughout our life. However, there is a stage where we can feel comfortable with our musical decisions and are able to articulate the reasons for them. There may be only an occasional student we see arrive at this stage. Nevertheless, this is no reason to stop aiming for the goal.

Elliott (*Music Matters*, p236) succinctly answers these two important questions.

- Should piano lessons be offered only to the select few?

"... people are born with the capacities of attention, awareness and memory that enable them to learn to think musically – to make music and listen for music competently, if not proficiently. Musicianship is achieved through music teaching and learning; it is neither a gift nor a talent. True, some people seem to have high levels of musical intelligence and high levels of interest in learning to make and listen for music well. These factors may enable such people to develop musicianship and musical creativity more deeply and broadly than others. Nevertheless, the vast majority of people have sufficient musical intelligence to achieve at least a competent level of musicianship through systematic programs of music education."

- Why is learning music (piano) of such benefit to human beings?

"... for the values inherent in knowing how to make and listen for music intelligently are central to making a life; self-growth, self-knowledge, self-esteem, creative achievement, humanistic and cultural empathy, and enjoyment are central life goals and life values in all human cultures."