

2010 GMTA TEACHER OF THE YEAR

Lois Finlay



The recipient of the 2010 GMTA Teacher of the Year is Lois Finlay. A native of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, Lois received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Piano Performance from the Julliard School of Music as a student of Katherine Bacon and a Master of Science Degree in Piano Performance, also from the Julliard School of Music, as a student of Adele Marcus.

In 1971, Lois moved to Georgia and has been a member of GMTA and the North DeKalb Music Teachers Association ever since.

Lois has a vast array of highly successful teaching experiences. She has been an independent music teacher in Pittsburg, Atlanta, and Clarkesville. Also, Lois has been a music faculty member at Mercer University (Atlanta), the Georgia Governors Honors Program, the

Cambridge Academy of Music (Atlanta), and North Georgia College and State University. Lois has also served as Chair of the Fine Arts Department at Mercer University in Atlanta.

Lois's students have won numerous prestigious awards. Lois has produced three state winners of GMTA/MTNA Senior Performance Competitions, two Southern Division winners of MTNA Senior Performance Competitions, four state winners of GMTA/MTNA Junior Performance Competitions, three winners of GMTA Piano Concerto Competitions, and two winners of GMEA Piano Concerto Competitions. Lois has twice received the North DeKalb Music Teachers Association Teacher of the Year Award.

A fellow GMTA member says the following regarding Lois: "Her students routinely place high in competitions and a good number of them continue their piano studies in colleges or conservatories and have careers in music. She knows just how and when to present the right composition to students. She combines these skills with seemingly endless enthusiasm and energy. She never stops! She is always available to her students, even attending their competitions when they are out-of-state."

A parent says this of Lois: "Our decision to have our son take lessons from Lois Finlay was the best decision we ever made for his musical development. Her approach to teaching always seems to put the students' needs first. She spent many hours preparing and practicing concertos with our son and arranged for him to have duet partners every year. She gave much thought to the repertoire she chose for our son, taking into consideration his tastes and his need to explore literature outside of his past experience. Our son is moving on to study piano performance at college this fall, and we honestly feel we owe Lois a great debt for inspiring him and preparing him so that he not only wants to do this, but is ready for whatever challenges come his way in college."

Lois was nominated for the 2010 Teacher of the Year Award by Peggy Lee. The award was presented to Lois at the GMTA Conference Banquet. As a result of this award, Lois will be considered for the 2011 MTAN Teacher of the Year Award. Congratulations, Lois!

Lois Finlay's Teaching Tips

What an honor it is for me to share my ideas on my favorite subject with all the GMTA teachers. First, KNOW that I wake up every morning feeling how fortunate I am to have chosen the profession which I did early in my life. As a matter of fact, when I was 5 years old, my parents moved to a house in which there was a piano. I saw it and apparently proclaimed that, "Someday I will be a pianist!" About that same time my mother was invited to choose something from her aunt's estate which she would particularly enjoy, and she chose a punch bowl and ladle also proclaiming, "Someday I will need this!" This is the very punch bowl that has graced my recital parties every year for many years now.

TIP NO. 1: Be yourself. Have fun! Be energized by the students. Don't be puffed up and act important. Students recognize honesty and respond accordingly. Respect should be earned and not demanded.

TIP NO. 2: Put your students' interests above those of yourself. They follow your advice because they love you and trust you to plan the best for them that you can. When there is an opportunity to perform, let them enter. In the preparation is the success and the advancement. Winning is just a bonus.

TIP NO. 3: Treat all students as if they have the potential to reach the top of the profession. Don't decide in advance which ones will succeed and which ones will choose to do other things. Also, if they know they have to compete with your other students, they will try harder to achieve greatness themselves. I am often asked by a student, "Is so-and-so in the auditions too? It's OK. I will do my best anyways!" That is a great attitude.

TIP NO. 4: Plan student recitals/performance classes BEFORE not after the competitive and non-competitive events to help students be comfortable performing in public. In my studio there are many recitals every year to prepare students for the many auditions. I use up my time, but that's my calling!!!! AND what a thrill to hear my students play well.

TIP NO. 5: YES, the students must count aloud, practice hands separately, do the phrasing and dynamics correctly, and accurately memorize the pieces. However, ABOVE ALL, they must make a musical statement which is their own response to the written page. I feel that the teacher's primary objective is to help the students find this, not to project his/her own interpretation onto the student's performance. NO ROBOTS ALLOWED! That's the rule in my studio.

TIP NO. 6: Always be in the process of learning new things to share. Recently, when one of my high school students heard me talk about taking a piano lesson myself, his eyes got very big. I said, "Well, don't you enjoy your lessons?" He gave me a huge smile of understanding, and I think he practiced twice as hard that week.

TIP NO. 7: Create an inter-active teaching environment in the studio. Listen to what your students tell you. Their ideas are important. Have them verbalize those things they just don't

want to say. They have to think hard to do so. Just like counting aloud, it helps them create their response to the emotions in music.

Here are a few suggestions from several of my students concerning ideas they felt have been the most helpful to their learning process.

IDEA NO. 1: "I have learned to enjoy music. Music is more than just memorizing lines or playing notes. It's a joy, an art. I have learned to put MY expression into music I play, which gave me my first real love of music." (Age 13)

IDEA NO. 2: "Recognizing and labeling the chords in a piece have helped me to learn and memorize the music." (Age 16) "Learning the fingering and dynamics correctly the first time I play a new piece, slowing myself down when learning any song." (Age 11)

IDEA NO. 3: "Patiently enjoying the process of learning can be just as rewarding as reaching the goal." (Adult) "Learning HOW to practice." (Age 12)

IDEA NO. 4: "To put my heart in every piece of music that I play and especially to have fun with every song." (Age 10)

IDEA NO. 5: "Quit saying I CAN'T and just DO IT." (Age 18)

