



# GEORGIA MUSIC TEACHERS ASSOCIATION



WINTER NEWSLETTER 2025

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## GMTA TEACHER OF THE YEAR 2024

### VICENTE DELLA TONIA JR.

Dr. Vicente Della Tonia Jr., our Georgia MTA 2024 Teacher of the Year, received his Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Piano from the University of South Carolina, where he studied under Marina Lomazov and Scott Price. Prior to this, he studied with Judit Gabos, Sergio Gallo, and Rosa Maria Tolon Marin, and received the Master of Music in Piano Performance (Georgia State University), Bachelor of Music in Piano Performance (Universidade do Sagrado Coracao, Brazil) and Artist Diploma/Certificate (Conservatorio Musical de Lencois Paulista, Brazil).

Currently, Vicente is Coordinator of Keyboard Studies and Associate Professor of Piano at Georgia State University/Perimeter at Clarkston, where he is the founder and director of the Perimeter PianoFest, the Distinguished Guest Artist Masterclass Series, and the Young Artists Recital Series. Prior to GSU, he was a faculty mem-



Vicente Della Tonia at GMTA State Conference

ber at Allen University and University of South Carolina Music School in Columbia, SC; Claflin University in Orangeburg, SC; and Seminario Santo Antonio and Conservatorio Musical de Lencois Paulista, both in Brazil.

Vicente has taught students who have won competitions locally, nationally, and internationally, and many have continued in music and teach in various institutions. He has given lectures and



## 2024 TEACHER OF THE YEAR, CONTINUED

BY KRISTI HELFEN, NCTM, GMTA PRESIDENT

recitals in many local programs and state conferences including Georgia, Colorado, Illinois, Minnesota, South Carolina, Texas, and Washington and has also presented at MTNA Conferences.

Many letters in support of Vicente came in from colleagues, students, and parents. Here are a few excerpts:

“Dr. Della Tonia stands out not only for extensive knowledge and skill in piano performance but also for the ability to make learning an engaging and rewarding experience.”



Vicente Della Tonia and Kristi Helfen

“Vicente excels as a teacher for students at any level and his caring personality is his greatest asset.”

“His professional performances on the global stage have significantly contributed to the prestige of our institution.”

“He has demonstrated an exceptional ability to nurture my passion for piano and possesses a rare combination of technical expertise, creative vision, and an inspiring teaching style.”

“Vicente has always been an absolute joy to work with and a true inspiration. He brings out the best in everyone.”

Steinway and Sons chose Vicente as the recipient of their *Top Teacher Award of the Year* for both 2017 and 2020. He is also in demand as an adjudicator and has served on the jury panel of over one hundred competitions, auditions, and examinations locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. He currently serves as a jury member of the Osaka International Music Competition, Georgia Federation of Music Clubs, and Music Teachers National Association.

In addition to these accomplishments, Vicente recently finished his term as Atlanta MTA President, and we are privileged to have him serving, both last term and currently, as GMTA’s VP of Auditions. He has done outstanding work organizing this event, and we are so grateful to have him on our Executive Board. Our heartfelt congrats to you, Vicente, on being selected as our 2024 Teacher of the Year!

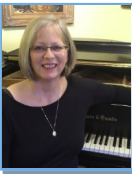
Visit the [GMTA Teacher of the Year Webpage](#) to read more about Vicente Della Tonia. His teaching tips can also be found on [Page 9](#) of this newsletter.

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

KRISTI HELFEN, NCTM, GMTA PRESIDENT

It's hard to believe, but 2025 is already here, and we're off and running. A very happy new year to all of you! As we begin the year and this new term of Executive Board officers, I look ahead with much anticipation of good things to come.

First, I want to thank our Immediate Past President Cathy Thacker and her officers for the tremendous job they have done. Cathy has been a wonderful mentor to me, and I'm sure I will continue to seek out her expertise and wise counsel. It was a joy to see her receive a standing ovation from attendees at the end of the Annual Business Meeting this past conference, as I know we are all deeply grateful for her countless hours of work on behalf of GMTA. Also, a huge thank you to Mandy Reynolds, our Executive Director, for being the glue that holds us together year after year. Her vast knowledge of how GMTA operates and willingness to help a new slate of officers learn the ropes each new term is an invaluable source of support.



Kristi Helfen and Cathy Thacker

I also want to thank the incoming board members for their willingness to serve alongside me this term. As I'm sure you're all aware, these positions are purely voluntary and some are quite time-consuming, so I'm very grateful for each and every one of you. Our desire is always to see GMTA grow and progress, so please let us know of any concerns or suggestions you may have.

Our conference this past November at Georgia State University, Clarkston Campus, was a great success! We certainly enjoyed the use of Cole Auditorium where Dekalb Symphony performs, and



Kristi Helfen presenting a certificate to a conference performer



Amy Neal presenting at the conference



the great acoustics of the Performance Hall. Thank you to Vicente Della Tonia Jr. and Brian Bonin, professors there, who worked with us on lots of logistics to help the conference run smoothly. A huge thank-you to Jeri-Mae Astolfi for once again securing fantastic headliners and seeing to all the details. The VP of Programs has one of the toughest, time-consuming jobs of anyone, and hats off to her for the amazing work she has done. Michelle Cann, Conference Recitalist, hit it out of the park with her incredible program, which included lots of interesting commentary, and her rapport with students in the master class was outstanding. And our Pedagogy Headliner, gifted composer and arranger Victor Labenske, did superb presentations on performance practice, demonstrating elements of Celtic, Jazz, Gospel, Pop, and Latin music, as well as showcasing his own compositions. A special congratulations goes to Vicente Della Tonia of Atlanta MTA for being awarded as our 2024 Teacher of the Year!



Elena Dorozhkina, NCTM



GCMTA members at the 2024 State Conference

Plans are in the making for our 2025 Conference. Everything was lined up with Valdosta State University to host us, then Hurricane Helene hit and did significant damage to the music building, destroying almost all of their pianos. They have graciously offered to host us in 2026, but we have had to seek out another location for 2025. We will keep you posted on where we'll be as soon as we get confirmation. In the meantime, we hope and pray that the rebuilding process moves along well at Valdosta State and look forward to being there in 2026.

The 2024 MTNA Competitions were organized by Yanni Chan and held on the campus of Piedmont University. We appreciate how Yanni pulled together a great team of workers and judges



Cathy Thacker with Victor Labenske



to successfully carry out this two-day event. A special thank you to Piedmont for hosting us. We also want to thank Jeri-Mae Astolfi and the students at Piedmont for chipping in to help. We love our student workers! Congratulations to all of our students and teachers who represented GMTA in the MTNA Southern Division Competitions.

As we look ahead, GMTA offers Auditions in the spring, and the Georgia Auditions Theory Test (GATE) is still required in order to participate. However, as has been announced, due to teacher concerns about the revised tests, we are not making a passing grade mandatory in 2025 for progressing to the next round. The 2025 test results will be analyzed for moving forward with GATE for next year's Auditions. Please pay close attention to all registration deadlines for these events. You can find complete information online at our website under the Student Activities tab. Always look for your Constant Contact each month to stay up-to-date on important news. Additional information can also be found online within our newsletters at the GMTA website.

The 2025 MTNA Conference will be held in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on March 15-19, so I hope many of you are making plans to attend. Please let me know at [president.georgiamta@gmail.com](mailto:president.georgiamta@gmail.com) if you are planning to attend the Gala, as we have reserved a table for GMTA members.



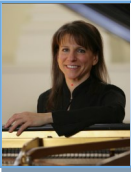
Cathy Thacker presenting certificate to Dawn



Brian Bonin accompanied by Vicente Della Tonia

MTNA provides leadership training to the State Presidents and Division Directors. I was able to attend the MTNA Leadership Summit in Cincinnati, Ohio, last September to learn more about MTNA's resources and to meet with other State Presidents. I found this to be a very valuable experience and was especially surprised to learn how vast the information is on the MTNA website ([mtna.org](http://mtna.org)). I encourage all of you to take some time to explore everything there.

Again, I want to thank Cathy Thacker and all the outgoing officers for their outstanding service to GMTA. I look forward to serving as your President alongside the new board members for this term!



The 2024 GMTA conference was held from Nov. 7-9 on the vibrant campus of Georgia State University–Perimeter College in Clarkston, GA. Many thanks to GSU–Perimeter College, especially to professors Dr. Brian Bonin and Dr. Vicente Della Tonia, Jr., who not only helped to prepare for the event, but who, along with their students and colleagues, were also on hand to assist during the event. Thank you, also, to members of the Atlanta, Decatur, and Gwinnett MTA’s for the wonderful hospitality they provided throughout the conference.



Pedagogy Headliner Victor Labenske

It was a full and inspiring few days for the 100+ attendees (which included almost 50 collegiate students)! Throughout the course of the conference, 16 general sessions were offered by GMTA members and non-members, including five sessions that involved collegiate members. Session topics ranged from studio management tips to pedagogical approaches and ideas to repertoire and composer explorations.

Our Pedagogy Headliner, pianist, composer, and pedagogue, Dr. Victor Labenske, kicked off the first of his three sessions with “Performance Practice in Contemporary Stylings: Strategies for Playing Celtic, Jazz, Gospel, Pop and Latin Music with Confidence” that guided us through essential characteristics of popular styles. The second session, “Hidden Motives: Quotes, Symbols, and Other Compositional Techniques Found in the Works of Pedagogical Composers,” explored methods of quotation, pictorial writing, cultural references and soggetto cavato found within pedagogical compositions. Dr. Labenske’s final session on Friday morning showcased his own compositions, providing us with an opportunity to gain familiarity with the wide variety of styles and levels of his compositional output. Dr. Labenske’s sessions were thoroughly engaging, entertaining, and enlightening.

On Friday afternoon, following the GMTA business meeting, we were treated to the premiere performance of a mixed media work by GMTA’s 2024 Commissioned Composer, James A. Devor. His work, *dear delightful hollow square* for bass clarinet (James Devor) and clarinet (Paige Amramson), had the audience situated inside the middle of a “hollow square” with the four encircling speakers passing off live modulation of prerecorded vocals, spoken text, and instrumental textures. Inspired by traditional shape-note or Sacred Harp singing,



Yingzhou Hu and Vicente Della Tonia, Jr.



*dear delightful hollow square* got its title from the physical set-up of the four vocal parts: trebles, altos, tenors, and basses. Audience members also had the opportunity to view shape note manuscript and participate in a question-and-answer session with the composer.



Master Class performers with Michelle Cann and Vicente Della Tonia

Our Conference Recitalist and Masterclass Clinician, Michelle Cann, captivated us on Friday evening with her performance of Frédéric Chopin’s Ballade No. 3, Three American Preludes by Joel Thompson, Alberto Ginastera’s Piano Sonata No.1, Florence Price’s Piano Sonata in E minor, and Franz Liszt’s Mephisto Waltz. Cann’s commitment to audience enlightenment via storytelling was evident not only through her choice of repertoire, but also through the passion she exuded while performing and speaking about the music. The following morning, Ms. Cann returned to conduct a masterclass of grades 9-11 student winners from the 2024 GMTA State Auditions.

This dynamic session included a variety of works by Bach, Beach, Chopin, Debussy, Muczinski, played masterfully by our student performers. After both the concert and the masterclass, Ms. Cann remained to interact with conference attendees and sign CDs.

Alongside all of these incredibly inspiring performances and sessions, the conference was peppered with student winner performances, showcasing students from grades K/1 through collegiate who were winners at the 2024 GMTA State Auditions and the 2024 GMTA/MTNA Competitions. A special thank-you to Dr. Vicente Della Tonia (GMTA VP of Auditions) and Dr. Yanni Chan (GMTA VP of MTNA Competitions) for coordinating the many logistical details of these student concerts. Another special thank-you is also due to GSU – Perimeter College’s music faculty for their varied and engaging vocal and instrumental



David Peoples with James Devor and Paige Amramson



performances on Thursday evening with selections which included the premiere performance of Sonata for Piano by former GMTA Commissioned Composer and GSU-Perimeter College faculty member, Greg McLean, masterfully delivered by Dr. Della Tonia.

Other highlights of the conference include those who received special recognition. During the Banquet on Friday evening, which was held at GSU-Perimeter College's Dining Hall, Dr. Vicente Della Tonia, Jr., NCTM, was named the 2024 GMTA Teacher of the Year, Dr. Dawn McCord, NCTM, was named an MTNA Foundation Fellow, Sylvia Beard, Gerri Murphy, Jody Parrish, and David Watkins, were acknowledged as GMTA 50-year members, and David Tahere and Julie Groom were recognized as GMTA's newest Nationally Certified Teacher of Music. At the business meeting earlier in the afternoon, Gloria Cha-Gardiner, Mary Ann McTier, Tiffany Yin, and Yingzhou Hu were each awarded with GMTA Grants. On Saturday afternoon, Gloria Cha-Gardiner was the raffle winner of the Hidrau pneumatic bench (sponsored by PianoWorks).

And of course, throughout the conference, Mandy Reynolds (GMTA Executive Director) and Mary Ann McTier (GMTA Awards Committee Chair and MTNA Foundation Chair) were on hand at the Registration Table and Awards Table, as were all of our friendly exhibitors over in Exhibits Room.



Ethan Goh on Cello accompanied by Grace Tian Meng Fowler

Finally, there is a special trio of GMTA personnel who must be acknowledged and thanked, for without whom, this conference would not have been the success it was: GMTA President, Cathy Thacker, and GMTA President-Elect, Kristi Helfen, who were both instrumental in conference planning and assisting throughout the event, and of

course, GMTA's Executive Director, Mandy Reynolds, who, besides tending to the many conference details associated with her role, kept us all informed and on task – thank you, all!

It has been a pleasure to serve GMTA as VP of Programs. I am delighted to pass the torch to Dr. Josh Pifer who has already been busy planning for the 2025 conference—please make plans to join us next year!





I am deeply honored and humbled to receive GMTA's Teacher of the Year Award. I am grateful to share this moment with you! I would like to dedicate this award to my family, teachers, music colleagues and students—you inspire me!

Teaching, for me, is more than just a profession; it is a passion that I have cultivated since my teenage years. Each day, I feel incredibly blessed to do what I love, regardless of the challenges. A few colleagues have asked me how I avoid burnout. I tell them I simply remind myself to be thankful and truly live each moment of every day. That is my secret to maintaining enthusiasm and energy.

I also believe that having a curious mind and a hunger for knowledge keeps us youthful and drives us to continuously learn. For example, some close friends know that I am fluent in several languages, but I keep striving to learn new ones. This thirst for knowledge is something I live by and try to impart in my students. It is my teaching philosophy that everyone can achieve their goals if they truly desire them. This is why I stimulate my students to pursue their dreams with dedication, passion, and respect for what they do. Learning music reflects this philosophy—we devise a plan with clear goals and deadlines, ensuring that the process is focused and careful, and that music is polished. My ultimate goal is for students to embrace patience and fully commit themselves to the art of effective practice. Breaking down pieces into manageable chunks, focusing on trouble spots, analyzing, researching, along with slow and mental practice, for example, are a few techniques that hopefully will lead them to develop a system when practicing.

As a teacher, respecting everyone's voice is crucial, and providing honest feedback is key to fostering growth. Another fundamental belief of mine is that artistry must be nurtured from day one. How can we expect students to fall in love with the process if we allow them to play mechanically? We must help them access their emotions and life experiences to transmit their message through their playing. Therefore, listening to music with informed ears, engaging in research, singing, dancing, as well as developing critical listening skills, and providing honest and humble feedback are essential.



[www.ndmta.net](http://www.ndmta.net)

### **NORTH DEKALB MUSIC TEACHERS ASSOCIATION**

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Likewise, engaging in performance is an integral part of their curriculum. For that, choosing a diverse repertoire for each student to help them achieve specific goals while developing their musicianship skills is vital. Lastly, for me, life is an art in itself! That is why I encourage students to fully live life, talk to their neighbors, play outside, look at the sky, enjoy nature, and attend concerts, plays, art exhibitions, travel, etc. These experiences will enrich their lives, and will hopefully reflect in the art they make.

To conclude, I would like to quote Tchaikovsky: “Where the heart does not enter, there can be no music!” Let us continue to teach with passion, believe in our students’ progress, and always strive for excellence in the beautiful art of teaching.

*“Music is the heart of life. It speaks love; without it, there is no possible good and with it everything is beautiful.” - Franz Liszt*

*“Music lives and breathes to tell us who we are and what we face. It is a path between ourselves and the infinite” - Yehudi Menuhin*

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JOE CAMILLO, GMTA AWARDS CHAIR

**GMTA GENERAL AWARD FUND RAFFLE:** Teachers were excited to gather for the raffle on Saturday at the State Conference following the master class by Michelle Cann. Our Local Associations provided a table filled with baskets, gift cards and other great prizes. Our new GMTA President, Kristi Helfen, enjoyed drawing names and the winners quickly approached the table to make their choices. Our sincere appreciation to everyone who purchased raffle tickets and supported our GMTA Awards fund. GMTA auditions and MTNA competition student awards are provided by these funds. The senior winners from the 2024 MTNA competitions were Seunghoon Pi, String and Chloe Park, Woodwind.

**GMTA NOLTING AWARD IN COMPOSITION:** This award is given at the GMTA State Conference each year to the first-place winners in the MTNA Student Composition Competitions for the state-level in each age category: junior, senior, and young artist. Each student receives \$200. This year's winners were Luka Gekic, Junior Representative, Mitchell Kuang, Senior Representative, and River Sawchyn, Young Artist Representative.



Teacher Award Winners

**GMTA BROADHURST AWARD IN PIANO:** This award is presented annually at the GMTA conference to the winners of the MTNA Junior and Senior Piano Performance Competition. Each student receives \$200. This year's winners were Kaiden Lee, Junior, and DaTong Liu, Senior.

**GMTA BETTY H. WHITE AWARD FUND:** This award, in the amount of \$400, was given to MaryAnn McTier. Congratulations to MaryAnn!



Conference attendees waiting to hear raffle results

**MTNA FOUNDATION RAFFLE:** Through the generosity of Piano Works, we were able to raffle a hydraulic piano bench for our MTNA Foundation Raffle. The ticket holder receiving this year's bench was Gloria Cha-Gardiner.

**EDUCATOR GRANTS:** The GMTA annual budget provides for several teacher grants each year. Members submit an essay outlining their desired use for the monies should they receive them, and the executive board reviews the essays and determines the winners. Our GMTA teacher grant recipients are Gloria Cha Gardiner, Teacher Professional Development. Tiffany Yin and Yingzhou Hu, Collegiate Grants. Congratulations to these teachers!



## GMTA is excited to announce Ian Evans Guthrie as the 2025 GMTA Commissioned Composer

Ian Evans Guthrie is a composer, performer, researcher, and collaborator, composing for acoustic and electroacoustic media from soloist through large ensembles. He has received the Mile High Freedom Band 2021 Commission, 1st prize for the Noosa-ISAM and Arcady Composition competitions, 2nd prize for the American Prize, a nomination from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and other accolades. His works have been performed worldwide by the Mile High Freedom Band, Northwest Symphony Orchestra, fEARnoMUSIC, Ensemble Offspring, Interlochen Arts Camp, and others. His works will be featured in upcoming concerts in The Philippines, New York, and elsewhere. His most recent commissions include ones from Northwest Symphony Orchestra, Keum Hwa Cha, and others.



Guthrie maintains an active piano career, and has won 2nd prize in the Great Composers Competition: Music of America and many other awards. Additionally, he is a collaborative pianist for the Interlochen Arts Camp and other organizations.

Guthrie received his DM from Florida State University, where he studied composition with Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, Stephen Montague, Clifton Callender, Mark Wingate, and Ladislav Kubik. He is an Assistant Professor of Music at Calvary University, and serves on the boards of SCI, NACUSA, and CFAMC.

For more information, please visit [ianguthriecomposer.com](http://ianguthriecomposer.com).



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## MTNA COMPETITION REPORT

YANNI CHAN, GMTA VP OF MTNA COMPETITIONS

The 2024 MTNA State Competitions were held at the Piedmont University Conservatory of Music on October 25-26th. Special thanks to Dr. Jeri-Mae Astolfi, Kimber Kwiatkowski, Grace Li, and Dr. Yingzhou Hu for their tremendous support in organizing the competition and help with hospitality and on-site duties.

This year we had 79 contestants competing in the Georgia MTNA competitions back in October, and a total of 45 teachers across all categories who enrolled their talented students in the competitions. We are grateful to have such a huge number of students and teachers actively involved in the competitions.

We were pleased to have a great Winners Recital with 5 performers during the GMTA conference at Perimeter College in Clarkston, GA, back in November.

Congratulations to Kaiden Lee, student of Liza Stepanova, who won the Junior Piano Performance and Celine Park, student of Katherine Emeneth, who won the Junior Woodwind Performance in the Southern Division round. These two winners of the Southern Division will proceed to the final round at the National Conference, March 15-19, 2025, in Minneapolis, Minnesota.



MTNA Competitors



## GMTA AUDITIONS REPORT

VICENTE DELLA TONIA, NCTM, GMTA VP OF AUDITIONS

Congratulations to all GMTA Audition teachers and students who showcased their talents at the conference this past November! The performances, including both masterclasses and recitals, were exceptional—bravo to everyone involved!



Vicente with auditions pre-college winners

We are excited to announce that the State Auditions will be held on April 4 and 5, 2025, at Piedmont University in Demorest, Georgia. Regional Auditions will continue in a virtual format, and Local Auditions will be organized at the discretion of each Association, so please check with your specific Association for details.

Also, be mindful of the new policies, requirements, and registration deadlines:

[GMTA Website](#)

[GMTA Theory Information](#)

We look forward to your students' participation!

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## MTNA CERTIFICATION

RWEI HAO, NCTM, GMTA CERTIFICATION CHAIR

Many thanks to Robin Engleman, our long-time and immediate past GMTA Certification Chair, for featuring me in the Fall 2024 newsletter. In the past two decades, she has been a friend, a mentor who guided me through the MTNA Certification process, and a past GMTA President, who introduced to me many topnotch musicians through GMTA to refresh my teaching philosophy. I am very excited about being your new Certification Chair and would love to help you become a Nationally Certified Teacher of Music.

As of November 30, GMTA had a membership of 548 and of those, 78 are nationally certified. We tied with South Carolina for being ranked 28<sup>th</sup> at 14.2% of our members certified.

Congratulations to Julie Groom, the newly certified NCTM in Piano. After graduating from West Georgia with a Bachelor of Music Degree in Piano Performance and Pedagogy, Julie has taught piano and voice for over 20 years; in the past five years she has devoted a full-time schedule for teaching piano, voice, beginner guitar/ukulele, as well as performing and accompanying. She has been a member of MTNA for many years and is the current president of the Western Georgia MTA. In April 2023, she decided to begin her national certification process in Piano, and on February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024, she received her National Certification. There are two ways to become nationally certified: [Teacher Pro-](#)

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Friday, November 15  
Saturday, February 22  
Friday, March 7  
Saturday, March 22  
Saturday, April 19

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AUDITION INFO 

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[file Projects](#) and [Administrative Verification Process](#). Julie applied and was certified by the former.

She generously shares her process below.



Julie K. Groom, NCTM

*“One required project is the written teaching philosophy, and there are five key characteristics.*

***How do you know if you are a successful teacher?** There are many ways to assess this, and I encourage you to read Dr. Martha Baker-Jordan’s book, *Practical Piano Pedagogy; The Definitive Text for Piano Teachers and Pedagogy Students*.*

***What goals and expectations do I require from my students?** I communicate my expectations concerning practice and performance requirements through weekly lesson practice sheets addressing Lesson, Performance, Theory, Technique and Sight-reading.*

***Does my studio environment provide a space for continued growth?** One way in which I do this is through a monthly newsletter featuring a “student of the month.”*

***Am I adaptable?** My tag line for my studio is encouraging music education for the next generation. I am a conceptual teacher—I observe and meet my students where they are at.*

***What do I need to do for ME to continue to be a successful teacher?** I make a point to attend either a workshop or conference at least two times a year. I also focus on webinars, articles, composer biographies, etc.*

*I aspire to create lifelong learning, critical thinking skills and expression, and growth through music. What is your teaching philosophy? For any questions, please feel free to reach out to me at [bellagstudio@aol.com](mailto:bellagstudio@aol.com).*

Please visit the [MTNA Certification webpage](#) to explore the possibility of becoming certified. Feel free to contact me with your certification questions at [rhao@bellsouth.net](mailto:rhao@bellsouth.net) or 678-570-6340.



## JOEY JACQUES, PRESIDENT

Cobb County Music Teachers Association has had a successful year and is looking forward to our spring activities.

In early December, we sponsored Pianothon at Town Center Mall in Kennesaw. This is our biggest fundraiser of the year and a fun, low-pressure opportunity for our students. They love performing at this event! For the teachers, we celebrated a successful teaching year with a holiday luncheon.

Planning for Local Auditions, Winner's Recital, and Theory Testing is underway. This event will be held at Kennesaw State University in mid-February. We were able to get a head start on the theory portion by having Diane Boyd visit our chapter and give us her presentation on the updated test.

In March, we again look forward to a combined meeting with the KSU MTNA chapter. The highlight of this event is a performance given by the students. It's a great opportunity for us to get to know the students better as well as introduce them to CCMTA with the hope that they will continue on within the organization after graduation. We will finish out the year with an April luncheon.



## LOCAL ASSOCIATION HIGHLIGHT—AUGUSTA MTA

## AMY PHILLIPS, PRESIDENT

We had our Kickoff meeting on Friday, September 5th, 2024, in the cafe at Columbia County Library. We invited members and non-members (future members). Coffee and donuts were served. We went over our calendar for the year and Colette Keogh explained the revised GMTA/GATE theory curriculum. We had our next meeting scheduled for October 4th. We called it "The Great Exchange." These meetings are where we as teachers exchange ideas, music, methods, policies, etc. We look forward to this each year. However, this year's meeting was cancelled due to Hurricane Helene, which wreaked havoc on Augusta and the surrounding areas. There is still so much clean up to be done. Most teachers were unable to teach for at least a week due to the devastation. Thankfully, all of our AMTA teachers were safe and didn't lose their homes. Our most recent meeting was Saturday, December 7th, at Augusta University. We had a "Progressive Master Class." Two of our own members (Dr. Martin Jones and Dr. Clara Park) did an amazing job leading this class. We had 7 students from various teachers play. They were all at varying levels of progress. Our next event will be our Winter Workshop on February 8th at Augusta University. Jerico Vasquez will be our presenter in the morning, and he will lead a master class in the afternoon. Our annual Piano Festival will be held on March 8th.

## TRACY XIAN, PRESIDENT

CMTA is proud to share recent accomplishments from our dedicated teachers and their students:

### From the Studio of Dr. Esther Park

Schwob School of Music students gave several recitals, including all-Bach programs featuring Partitas, English Suites, and French Suites. Four students achieved top results at the 2024 Georgia State MTNA Young Artist Competition: Yiduo Zhao (1st prize), Jerry Zhang (Alternate), and Jungmin Park and Xintian Shen (Honorable Mention). Schwob pianists also celebrated the season with a Friendsgiving, sharing international dishes.



### From the Studio of Dr. Tracy Xian

Rainey-McCullers School of the Arts piano students presented a Silent Film Piano Recital in August, earning much praise from the audience. Rainey also hosted the CMTA Student Recital on October 18 and the GMTA Music Theory Exam on October 19.



### From the Studio of Trudi Norman

Trudi attended The Piano Pantry Retreat in Bluffton, IN, in June and shared organizational strategies at the September CMTA luncheon. As GMTA Theory Tests Administrator, she played a key role in revamping the exams this year.

### From the Studio of Kathy Morris

The Music Studio reinstated its annual Christmas Tea, offering adult students time for fellowship and encouragement in their musical journey. Younger students performed at a local retirement home for their Christmas recital.



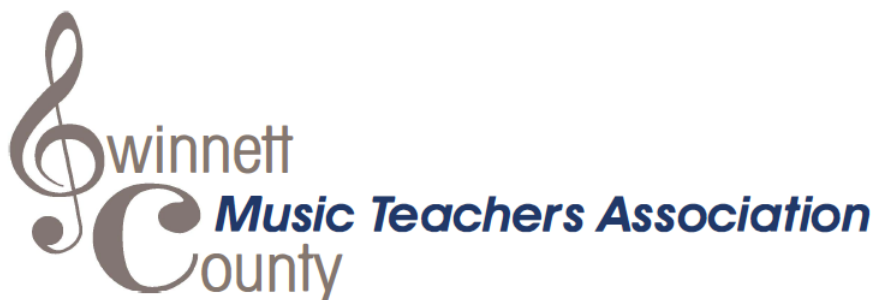
We celebrate these successes and look forward to 2025!



## GEORGIA'S OWN

NANCY NORMAN, GMTA ARTS AWARENESS & ADVOCACY CHAIR

Did you present at the 2024 GMTA Conference? Consider adding your presentation to Georgia's Own, a list of members who are willing to present their program or workshop to local GMTA associations. To add your presentation to the list, email Nancy Norman at [nancynorman53@gmail.com](mailto:nancynorman53@gmail.com). To view a list of current GMTA members who are willing to present topics through workshops and programs, visit the [GMTA Website](#).



*Where teachers come together to encourage and build*

President: Gloria Park  
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## THEORY REPORT

DIANE BOYD, NCTM, GMTA THEORY CHAIR

The updated curriculum for the GMTA and GATE Theory Tests was presented at the end of the summer of 2024. The 12 levels of curriculum and first set of practice tests and some informational files are on the GMTA website. The curriculum is posted on the “GMTA Theory” page of the website because the curriculum is the same for both the GATE tests and the GMTA tests. The GATE practice tests are posted on the “GATE Theory” page and the GMTA practice tests are posted on the “GMTA Theory” page.

The GATE 2024-2025 tests are required for participating in the GMTA Auditions. These tests are to be returned to the GATE Administration Chairman, Colette Keogh, NCTM, by March 1, 2025, in order for students to be eligible for participation! This year the grades will not count and the information gathered by the theory committee will be used for future tests. This fall there were 65 students registered to take the GATE theory test and 158 registered to take the GMTA theory test. All of the tests have been graded and teachers informed of the results. The exemption list will be updated in January and posted on the website.

Please email me at [dianelboyd@comcast.net](mailto:dianelboyd@comcast.net) if you find corrections that need to be made to the exemption list after it is posted. Registration for all GATE and GMTA Theory tests for the “spring” is Jan. 15, 2025. No registrations will be accepted after that date. Please note that registration is online so don't wait until the last minute to register your students in case of a system crash or problem. Again, remember that GATE tests are required to be taken and returned to Colette by March 1, 2025, for eligibility for competition. As always, call or text me at (912) 414-5972 if you have any questions.



It's rare in my experience as a teacher to find a pre-college student who is not familiar with Beethoven. What is surprising and shocking to many of my students, is that he was deaf for the final 20 years of his life and yet managed to write many of his masterpieces during that period.

Music is primarily an auditory experience and our enjoyment of this sound is dependent on good hearing acuity. As music educators, perhaps the story of Beethoven gives us a segue into a discussion with our students, on the topic of hearing protection.

Noise induced hearing loss (NIHL) affects 40 million adults aged 20-60 years in the USA and is preventable. NIHL is the only type of hearing loss that is completely preventable. The third leading cause of chronic disease in the USA, NIHL is on the rise. The CDC estimates that the incidence of NIHL is expected to double by 2060.

Recently, one of my students exclaimed that he experienced ringing in his ears (tinnitus) for three days following a school music event. Several of my teen students who attended this event complained about the noise levels, yet the only student who wore protective earplugs was an elementary student in the company of her parent.

I became concerned when through discussion with various parents and students it became evident that this was not an isolated incident but that many of the recent school events had similarly damaging noise levels.

According to the CDC, 50% of the population aged between 12 and 35 years is at risk of hearing loss due to excessive sound exposure in recreational settings.

In the past, it has been difficult for the average person to quantify noise levels but thanks to cell phone apps, this is no longer the case.

The free "NIOSH app" will appeal to our teens who can use it to monitor decibel levels at events. This app can provide our students with the knowledge required to evaluate noise levels and exposure duration. A good rule of thumb is to avoid noises that are too loud, too close, or last too long.

With increasing recreational use of headphones and earpods, levels of exposure due to prolonged us-



MARIE LANG, WELLNESS CHAIR

age have increased significantly. The CDC now rates 70dBA as the safe upper limit for prolonged exposure (more than 8 hours per day).

Noise levels at which damage occurs:

- 85 dBA and last a few hours.
- 100 dBA and last at least 14 minutes.
- 110 dBA and last at least 2 minutes.

Short term exposure at levels above 100dB can cause longterm damage. Many concerts and events produce sound at 110dB or even higher, so it is essential that our students be prepared and carry foam earplugs with them.

Another useful cell phone tool is a function located in 'sound and haptic settings' for headphone safety which allows one to monitor sound exposure due to headphone usage. This will send warning notifications when weekly safe exposure levels are exceeded, based on WHO recommendations. The smart watch also has a similar feature. Yesterday one of my 13 year old students demonstrated the audio safety features of his apple watch.

Of course, there are several other environmental sources of noise exposure at damaging levels.

Imagine my surprise on a recent transatlantic flight when I put my newly downloaded NOISH app to the test only to find the continuous noise range of 95dBA to 100 dBA. Adults often use noise cancelling headphones on flights, but are parents aware of the risk of this prolonged exposure to their children's hearing.

Dr. Ruth Reisman (audiologist) remarks that it is surprising that in today's world where prophylactic care of children's teeth and eyes is routine, the ears are mostly overlooked. Hearing is only addressed when problems arise.

Hearing loss contributes to a significant decrease in quality of life in the 21st century, as in the time of Beethoven. As music educators we can effect change by first educating our students and their parents.

Download and print the following poster for use in your studio:

<https://www.noisyplanet.nidcd.nih.gov/sites/noisyplanet/files/Documents/Publications/HowLoudTooLoudBookmark.pdf>



Share this file with parents of young children regarding the use of hearing protectors:

<https://www.noisyplanet.nidcd.nih.gov/sites/noisyplanet/files/Documents/Publications/HearingProtectorsNoisyPlanet-2020.pdf>

Questions to ask our local and state representatives include: Who should be responsible for providing 'noise level warning' notices? Who should provide ear plugs at events? Should industries be held to standards that prioritize hearing safety for children and the public in general? Should there be legal noise limits at concerts and events? Can city ordinances set noise limits for machinery such as leaf blowers, etc.?

**Sources and suggested further reading:**

National Institutes of Health

<https://www.noisyplanet.nidcd.nih.gov>

[Noise-Induced Hearing Loss \(NIHL\) | NIDCD](#)

[Hearing Loss Statistics 2023: More Common Than You Might Think - Hear World Communications](#)

**Creating musicians, one student at a time.**

**Where will your musical journey take you?**

**MusicLink FOUNDATION**

[musiclinkfoundation.org](http://musiclinkfoundation.org)

The GMTA Teacher of the Year Award is presented annually to a member of GMTA in recognition of lifetime achievement as a music teacher, with excellence in teaching, musicianship, professional activity, and service to the community and/or state. Any GMTA member may nominate any other GMTA member for the Teacher of the Year. The GMTA Teacher of the Year will be selected from nominated applicants and entered in the MTNA Teacher of the Year competition.

## The online submission form will require the following information:

- Teaching/professional achievement
- Number of years of teaching experience
- Evidence of teaching excellence (i.e. students' successes)
- Accomplishments/contributions to MTNA
- Participation in local, state, and/or national MTNA programs
- Community involvement
- Former student and/or parent letter(s) of support
- Professional colleague letter(s) of support
- Nominating letter from the state organization

Nominations must be submitted by **Monday, September 8, 2025**. The online form is available [here](#). The winner will be recognized at the 2024 GMTA Conference Banquet. With so many excellent teachers in Georgia, please consider nominating one of your favorites!

For a list of past Teachers of the Year, and to read their Teaching Tips, visit the [GMTA Website](#).  
Nomination questions? [presidentelect.georgiamta@gmail.com](mailto:presidentelect.georgiamta@gmail.com)

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## January 2025

- 15 Registration deadline for local auditions, GMTA Theory Test, and GATE
- 15 GMTA State Auditions Registration Deadline for Pre-College Piano Concerto, Piano Grade 12, Piano Duet

## February 2025

- 24 Deadline for local associations to submit local ratings and GATE scores to GMTA Executive Director
- 26 Deadline to pay Teacher/Student Regional Audition fees

## March 2025

- 3 GMTA State Auditions registration deadline for College Piano, Voice, and Instrumental
- 7 Regional Auditions video submission deadline
- 15-19 MTNA Conference in Minneapolis, MN
- 16 Postmark deadline to mail GMTA Theory Tests to Trudi Norman
- 20 GMTA State Auditions volunteer form/fee due

## April 2025

- 4-5 GMTA State Auditions, Piedmont University

## May 2025

- 1 Graded GMTA Theory Tests (not GATE) and Certificates mailed to participating teachers
- 1 Deadline for Presenter Proposals for 2025 GMTA Conference
- 15 Deadline for articles to be included in the GMTA Summer Newsletter

## June 2025

- 1 Deadline for all GMTA Expense Reports to be submitted to the GMTA Executive Director for reimbursement
- 30 Membership renewal deadline: Membership year runs July 1-June 30

## August 2025

- 15 Deadline for articles to be included in the GMTA Fall Newsletter

## September 2025

- 1 Deadline to apply for GMTA Commissioned Composer Award
- 8 Application deadline for GMTA Teacher of the Year
- 8 Application deadline for GMTA Teacher Grants
- 30 Student Membership renewal deadline: Membership year runs October 1-September 30



## Executive Board:

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The Georgia Music Teachers Association (GMTA) is a member of the Music Teachers National Association (MTNA) and memberships are jointly held in both organizations. Members receive subscriptions to *The American Music Teacher*. Membership is open to individuals professionally engaged in any field of musical activity and dues should be sent to MTNA, 1 W. 4th St., Ste. 1550 Cincinnati, OH 45202. MTNA is available toll-free at 1-888-512-5278 to answer your questions regarding membership dues or on the web at [www.mtna.org](http://www.mtna.org).

## Notice

The GMTA Newsletter is an information journal focusing on matters directly related to MTNA, GMTA and local associations only. It does not promote the studios of individual teachers or institutions by publishing articles regarding the accomplishments of teachers, students, or an institution's activities. Paid advertising is available for this purpose. GMTA expressly reserves the right to refuse publication of any article, photograph, or advertisement contrary to the objectives of MTNA or the Associations. All articles are subject to editing due to size or content.

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## Submittals

GMTA publishes its online newsletter three times per year. Publication dates and their respective deadlines are as follows: January 15th (Deadline: December 15th) June 15th (Deadline: May 15th) September 15th (Deadline August 15th)

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