

# GMTA TEACHER OF THE YEAR 2005



## **DR. NANCY HILL ELTON**

### **BIOGRAPHY**

The recipient of the 2005 GMTA Teacher of the Year Award is Dr. Nancy Hill Elton. Nancy began her musical studies with piano lessons from her mother and vocal study from Edward Gavin of Columbia, SC. She received the Bachelor of Musical Arts degree from the University of South Carolina where she was the recipient of numerous awards and scholarships including the music school's highest honor, the Music Achievement Award. Nancy doubled majored in degrees through the Doctorate in piano and voice. At USC she studied piano with John Kenneth Adams and voice with Evelyn McGarrity. She received the Masters and Doctorate of Musical Arts degree from the University of Texas in

Austin, where she studied piano with John Perry for seven years and completed the DMA with Nancy Garrett. Her vocal training was with Doris Yarick and Bethany Beardslee. For three summers, she pursued private piano study with Frank Mannheimer, a student of Tobias Matthay, and also attended the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, California, studying piano, chamber music and accompanying with Jerome Lowenthal and Gwendolyn Koldovsky. As a student of John Adams, she was the winner of the SCMTA Pre-College Piano Auditions, and in 1972 was a national finalist in the MTNA Collegiate Young Artist Competition, winning an Honorable Mention.

Nancy has received critical acclaim as a concerto soloist and recitalist. Her reviews include statements such as "an artist capable of amazing fire and brilliance...as well as the most graceful sensitivity", "a dazzling pianist to say the very least...she exhibited technical and interpretive brilliance", "an unbelievable sense of freshness and vitality." (*The State and Columbia Record.*) She maintains an active schedule as a piano soloist, accompanist, chamber musician, lecture recitalist and singer and has performed throughout the Southeast and other areas of the U.S. Some of her performances in recent years have included lecture recitals for the American Matthay Association at Columbus College, Kennesaw State University and the University of Central Florida in Orlando. Recent solo recitals have included performances at Erskine College, Columbia Col-

lege, the University of Georgia, Blue Ridge Community College, Callanwolde Fine Arts Center in Atlanta, Central Congregational Church of Atlanta and Georgia Perimeter College. Her most recent concerto appearances include two performances with the Coastal Symphony of Georgia in St. Simon's, Georgia, playing Beethoven's 3rd Piano Concerto and Rachmaninoff's Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, a performance of Beethoven's Choral Fantasy with the Musica Sacra Orchestra at First Presbyterian Church of Atlanta, and this past November a performance of Grieg's Piano Concerto with the Dekalb Symphony Orchestra. Nancy has also performed as a collaborative artist with many instrumentalists and singers over the years. Of special note was a series of concerts sponsored by the Affiliate Artist Series in South Carolina where she was accompanist for the distinguished opera singer, baritone Adib Fazah.

Nancy has fashioned a dual performing career in piano and voice. After coming to Atlanta in 1982, she pursued private vocal study for 3 years with Irene Harrower. A lyric soprano, she has sung many leading operatic roles as well as art song recitals, and has accumulated an extensive oratorio repertoire. In the 1983-84 season she sang more than 50 performances in the Atlanta area schools, under the auspices of the Atlanta Opera Studio Outreach Program. 20th century literature has played a major role in Nancy's choice of repertoire in both piano and voice. Her doctoral dissertation and lecture recital, which was accompanied by Anton Nel, was a combination of piano and vocal works of Schoenberg and Webern, and she sang the Austin premier of songs by Texas composers, Priscilla McLean and Kathryn Mischell. A recording by Capstone Records released in 1999 features her as the soprano soloist in a song cycle entitled "Fantasies for Adults and Other Children" by Priscilla McLean. She is soprano soloist at First Presbyterian Church of Atlanta and a frequent soloist with the Musica Sacra Concert Series. She has sung with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Chorus and the Chamber Chorus under the direction of Robert Shaw, and was also a featured soloist, performing Rossini's famous aria "*Una voce poco fa*" with the ASO with William Fred Scott conducting in a youth concert.

In addition to performing, Nancy devotes much of her time to teaching. She has held teaching positions at Georgia State University and Clayton State College. Currently she teaches at the Atlanta Music Academy, the Presbyterian School of the Performing Arts at First Presbyterian Church of Atlanta, and in her private home studio. She has taught piano students of all ages and levels, and her students consistently receive high ratings, winning numerous first and second places in many local and state competitions. On the national level she had a second place winner in the Clara Wells Piano Competition sponsored by the American Matthey Association. Many of her students have gone on to major in music.

Nancy is active as an adjudicator and clinician for many piano festivals and organizations throughout the Southeast. She is the Immediate Past - President of Atlanta Music Teachers Association and is currently the Secretary for the Atlanta Music Club. She has chaired many auditions through the years and was a presenter in a panel discussion at the 2004 World Piano Pedagogy Conference in Las Vegas. Upcoming projects include a recording of Elliott Carter's Piano Sonata with other American piano works, and a performance at the Liszt-Matthey Festival in February at UGA.

Nancy's husband, John, is a computer scientist for Pegassus Imaging Corporation and also a Math Professor at Georgia Tech. Her son Johnny is a junior at Georgia Tech majoring in Physics.

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## NANCY ELTON'S TEACHING TIPS

### *HEART AND SOUL*

I love teaching. Perhaps I inherited some of that affection from my teachers whom I know also loved it. My teaching is based on many things: it is a combination of all that I have been taught as well as an assimilation of my own concepts; it involves tested methods and musical thoughts based on many successes and some failures; and it is an amalgamation of knowledge, hard work and an optimistic spirit that stems from my own intrinsic musical desires and instincts. The motivating factor for me is my love for the music, and I have a passionate desire to share my knowledge of the great repertoire with others.

I think one of the most important qualities a teacher can possess is that of staying in touch as much as possible with the individuality and the natural musical instincts of each student. My teacher, John Perry, recently made the following statement in a lecture: "Learning in this field is a constant synthesis of what we have learned, but it only works if somehow we can keep in touch with the primitive desires and the primitive feelings that we had when we were attracted to music in the first place". I think it is important that we as teachers, in our endeavors to develop the talents of our students, find a way to not lose sight of each student's unique qualities.... these 'primitive desires' that initially brought them to music...I think one could call it - their heart and soul!

The great pianists that have preceded us knew the literature of the piano and were marvelously broad in the scope of their knowledge. They made themselves familiar with every phase of musical advancement and sought real musical knowledge that went far beyond a mere technical display. I believe that in order to be the best teacher and pianist that I can be, I must continually strive to broaden my musical knowledge in every area of music, and I attempt to pass this desire and passion along to my students. It is often so difficult for them to get out to hear the symphony or go to the opera or go to a chamber music concert ... but I think it is vitally important that we as teachers continue to encourage our students to attend wonderful live performances. I can think of no better way to develop their musical and aural sensitivity and broaden their musical knowledge.

I can so well remember when I was growing up, hearing certain pieces for the first time being played in the music room in my home where my mother taught piano. What an impact that had upon my ears - but more importantly – what an impact upon my heart and soul!..... In high school when I heard Mimi's aria from *La Boheme* for the first time, and later in college when John Adams played a most incredible performance of the Schubert Sonata in Bb Major - I had NEVER heard anything like it before... and years later when I heard John Perry playing *Gaspard*

*de la Nuit* - I was absolutely flabbergasted and completely overwhelmed! These were all moments in my life that had a monumental effect upon me, and I always think about these times and many others, as I am trying to relate to my students, and hopefully inspiring them to get to the heart of the music. I play for them as much as I can, and try to have most of the repertoire they are playing in my fingers (or large portions of it) in order to demonstrate passages for them. It sharpens their ears and the look in their faces is so rewarding. There is nothing like hearing music performed live and well! It seems self-evident, but perhaps we sometimes lose sight of the fact that the most important way to develop the musical ear is to HEAR music, especially in the young years! And to experience the many tonal colors and timbres of a great orchestra will spark the imagination of the student and hopefully lead to his attempts to find a pianistic way to develop his tonal palette and to think orchestrally at the piano.

The development of the ear can be helped along if students become involved in other musical activities such as singing, especially in a choir, or playing another instrument and participating in orchestra or band. Hearing all of these separate parts being put together as one whole is great training for understanding polyphonic music and the demands of good voice leading. Singing, in particular, is perhaps the best. (I am a little prejudiced in this area!) After all, the pianist is always striving to produce a singing tone at the piano. As we know, in all instruments except the piano, the tone can grow, but with the piano it begins to die away instantly. This is certainly one of the greatest challenges of the instrument. I am constantly demonstrating at the lessons by singing. I try to instill in my students that they should eventually be able to sing all the melodic lines - not just the main themes but all the inner voices, etc, and hear in their mind's ear, every note of the piece. Singing (or listening to great singing) is also an excellent way for the student to improve his skill for sustaining the long musical lines of phrases. They won't usually sing at lessons! But I encourage them to try it at home. It is helpful to imagine the flow of breath through the tone, and to learn to listen to the tone AFTER the key is depressed as well as the moment of contact with the key.

In conclusion, I think it is important to let students know that, even though we are constantly working in great detail in the lessons to achieve the highest artistic level within the student's ability, there are so many things that no teacher can ever hope to teach. These are the intangible qualities of the music that every student must penetrate deeper and discover for himself. To quote Leon Fleisher, "We're all in a very real sense the servants of music...we have to get outside ourselves, beyond ourselves; the artist transcends self; the artist is on a quest, a search for what the heart of music is all about."

***Nancy Hill Elton***

Atlanta Music Academy

Private Teaching Studio

Doctorate of Musical Arts, Piano and Voice

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