

GEORGIA MUSIC TEACHERS
ASSOCIATION

2013 GMTA TEACHER OF THE YEAR
LaNelle Nash



The recipient of the 2013 GMTA Teacher of the Year Award is LaNelle Nash. LaNelle earned a bachelor of music education degree from Mississippi State University with an emphasis in piano. She did graduate work at North Texas State University and pursued jazz studies at Georgia State University and the University of North Texas. After college, she taught general music at schools in Mississippi and in the Dallas, Texas Independent School District before moving to Roswell in 1977.

Along the way LaNelle has received certification from MTNA and the American College of Musicians. She is a member of the Piano Guild Hall of Fame and a consultant with the National Piano Foundation where she studied with Robert Pace.

The first thing she and her husband, Tom, bought as newly-weds was a piano – even before they bought furniture. Eventually she added her parents’ piano, which she had played in high school. After moving to Roswell, she added pianos until her studio came to its current size: 3 uprights and two grands.

One former parent of three, all of whom took piano for at least nine years each, recalled a cute story about his youngest son, “a most rascally child” and Tom, LaNelle’s husband. At the older daughter’s first recital, this four-year-old proceeded to put his hand under his armpit and make some rather disruptive and vulgar noises, to the dismay of everyone, especially LaNelle. Tom intervened and held Mark in his arms for the remainder of the recital feeding him hors d’oeuvres at appropriate intervals to keep him occupied. A few years later that child began piano lessons and the father is convinced that he only agreed to take piano because Tom fed him lemonade and donuts when he came for lessons!

LaNelle is hesitant to talk of herself or her student’s successes. With fifty-four years of students, well over 1000, it becomes impossible to prioritize their achievements. However, you do not have to look far to notice the impact she had on the career of her son, David.

LaNelle is more eager to discuss her legacy to the community – growing a generation of music consumers and families who stay in her studio year after year, sibling after sibling.

She lights up a room when you get her talking about the many piano teachers she has mentored.

Whether she is at a GMATA Conference or a North Fulton or North DeKalb MTA meeting, LaNelle has been a quiet leader, always willing to give advice and share wisdom when asked. Whether it was as GAMA (Greater Atlanta Music Alliance) President back in the early 90's, or President of North DeKalb MTA, Chair of the North DeKalb Bach Competition or Publicity or Certification Chair or GMATA Photographer, LaNelle's impact has not been made by grand gestures or control. She has genuinely affected people to be more connected and dedicated to our profession.

TEACHING TIPS

from LaNelle Nash

The 15 Commandments

1. Be business like. I never accept a student without interviewing the parent and giving the child a short aptitude test. (This is disguised as playing some musical games. I still use the Robert Pace Musical Background test.) If the parent decides to enroll the student in my studio, I require a registration fee which is used for buying music and to pay for events during the year. At the end of the year we settle our books. If the student has exceeded the registration, they pay the balance owed. If they haven't used the entire amount, I give them a refund or it can be applied to next year's registration.
2. Make each child a winner! Some will be very good readers, others excellent at memorization, improvisation, perhaps good at remembering facts from the periods of music or of composers' lives. Each has the ability of being outstanding in his own field.
3. Each student should have a goal. Will it be playing for the talent show at school! Working on a scout music badge? Playing for a piano party? Entering Fall Festival? The Bach Competition? Whatever it is, a goal helps the student to achieve this.
4. Build repertoire through Guild auditions, Associated Board Royal Schools of Music, etc. My students frequently ask, "May I play this for the Guild?" "Will this be acceptable for the Baroque category?" etc.
5. Consider the student's personality when selecting repertoire. If they like the music, they will practice. At one of the workshops I attended, the clinician said, "One piece should be for Daddy (or Mommy), one for the child and one for the teacher!"
6. Work that is less than the student's best effort is unacceptable. It is better to have 8 measures prepared beautifully than 32 sloppily done.
7. Teach your students to appreciate good music. Use YouTube. Attend concerts. Many local concerts are very accessible and reasonably priced. If possible, give your students a ride to a concert you are planning or attending. Use classical CDs as prizes.
8. Teach your students proper concert manners-how to bow, how to end a piece properly, when to clap, etc.
9. Each month I have a "Piano Party" for elementary, middle and high school students. Everyone plays a selection. It may be memorized or played with the music. It may be a duet or an original composition. For middle and high school students, an assignment is given in addition to the repertoire performed. It may be a report on the composer of the piece they are performing, information on the periods of music, an original composition, as assignment in modes, preparation of an ensemble number (which we will put

together at the party), analyzing the number they are performing for keys, chord, sequences, repetitions, upper and lower neighbors, etc. Of course we have refreshments and needless to say, everyone looks forward to that! The students enjoy getting to know and support each other.

10. If a student or parent “drains” you so that you are unable to do your best for the next student or your family, dismiss them.
11. Take advantage of every opportunity available to better yourself as a teacher. Attend your local association meetings and actively participate. Go to workshops, attend the state and national conferences, the Pedagogy Conference in Chicago. NFMFTA sponsored a marvelous workshop just this past August. Everyone who attended got a marvelous “shot in the arm.”
12. Include your family in your professional life. My students look forward to seeing my husband at their performances and are disappointed when he isn’t there.
13. Be willing to share your knowledge with other teachers. Give a helping hand whenever possible. Be willing to search for a teacher if you have an inquiry that you are unable to fill.
14. When the time comes that you think you are unable to help a student progress, pass him to a teacher that can take him to the next level.
15. Remember what a precious gift you have been given—a child that you may influence for the rest of his life! To take those squiggly little fingers and train them to play a Beethoven sonata, play in the school jazz band, or play for church or Sunday School. The opportunity is yours! “Carpe Deum.”