

## GEORGIA MUSIC TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

### 2014 GMTA TEACHER OF THE YEAR

Susan Naylor



Susan Naylor, Associate Professor of Music and Coordinator of Undergraduate Studies in Music at Reinhardt University, received the Bachelor of Music Degree in Piano Performance from Converse College in South Carolina, where she played with the Spartanburg Symphony for 3 years, and was featured soloist with the Symphony on its Concert Series in 1972. She received the Master of Music Degree from Georgia State University where she studied with William Masselos on a scholarship received from the Atlanta Music Club. In 1991, Ms. Naylor received lifetime National University Faculty Certification from Music Teachers National Association. She has been an active member of that organization since 1975, holding offices in the Cobb County and Cherokee Local Associations, serving on the National Certification Board, and as President of Georgia Music Teachers Association, 2000-02. She

currently serves as Collegiate Chapters Chair for GMTA and Master Class Chair for Cherokee MTA. At the GMTA State Conference in November of 2002 she presented a lecture entitled "THIS Is Your Brain On Music", and performed in the world premiere of "Psalm 70" by Dr. John Morgan.

Under her direction, the Student Recital Series and the Faculty and Guest Artist Series were established at Reinhardt University in 1976. In 1984, she coordinated the founding of Cherokee Music Teachers Association. In 1993, she organized the MTNA Collegiate Chapter at Reinhardt University, an active group of music students who attend the Georgia Music Teachers Association each year and participate in other college and community activities. She continues to serve as the Advisor for this organization. In 2009, she established the Reinhardt University Instrumental Concerto Competition which gives winning students a chance to perform on a solo instrument with the Reinhardt University Symphony Orchestra on its spring concert.

Ms. Naylor has continued to perform extensively as a solo and ensemble musician in "classical" and religious concerts, and has continued her education through participation in workshops, seminars, master classes and state and national conferences, often serving as a presenter. She is in demand as an adjudicator for music auditions, festivals and competitions and her students have excelled in local and state competitions, winning awards and scholarships for the past thirty-eight years.

She has been actively involved in the Cherokee County Arts Council since its inception, having served twice on the Board of Directors of that organization. She has served as church pianist at various churches since she was 13 years old and currently plays the piano at Lake Arrowhead Church in Waleska, Georgia.

**Georgia Music Teachers Association  
Teacher of the Year, 2014-15 - Susan E. Naylor, NCTM  
Teaching Tips**

There are so many excellent teachers in GMTA, and I have learned so much from all of you! My hope is that the following thoughts and ideas which I have accumulated over many years will be useful to you.

My first advice is to “trust yourself”. Here are 5 steps to reaching that goal:

1. **Learn all you can** through attendance at every workshop, masterclass, conference, seminar, etc. that comes your way and through continued study. A college education only sets the wheels in motion – it doesn’t get you very far in the grand scheme of things.
2. **Listen to, practice, and perform music on your level.** The more you practice, the more you will continue to make discoveries in the processes of learning and performing music, and will gain deeper levels of understanding of style, interpretation and the art of expression. This is the only way that you can relate to the problems and successes that your students are having and stay at least one step ahead of them. Also, you will be teaching by example.
3. **Questioning yourself can be a good thing.** It can be inspirational and can motivate you to do 1 and 2 above. I have always questioned my having the knowledge and wisdom to guide my students in “the way that they should go”. This has made me search for answers and value the advice of teachers who seemed to “have it all together”. It made me strive harder to be the best teacher that I could be.
4. No matter how scary it is, **be open-minded and tough-skinned** enough to put your students in events where they (and you) will be critiqued. There are few things worse than having a masterclass clinician pose a question to your student and, during the ensuing silence, you are thinking one of two things: “Come on, we **talked** about this” or “Oops, we didn’t talk about **that**. ” Our reputations are on the line every time our students perform. Even though that may seem unfair, it is reality. The bottom line is that you want to give yourself and your students every opportunity to learn, even if you have to swallow your pride sometimes.
5. Once you have fully prepared yourself, **use your own judgment and feel confident in your decisions.** Nobody has all the answers, and many times, “experts” present conflicting ideas. If you have done your best, you can feel good about the influence you have on each student and remind yourself of the joy and fulfillment that comes with teaching.

My second advice speaks directly to practice habits for you and your students. I find that a majority of students either don’t know how to practice or choose to ignore what they do know. One of the best articles I have found on this subject is in the October/November 2014 issue of American Music Teacher Journal published by MTNA. The article, written by Janet Horvath, is titled *No Pain, All Gain: Strategies for Healthy and Happy Musicians* and is found on p. 26. I will simply list her “10 Do’s for Injury Prevention” and encourage you to read her explanations along with the rest of the article. Actually, the entire magazine is superb!

## “10 Do’s for Injury Prevention”

1. Do Warm-Up.
2. Do Take Breaks.
3. Do Sit With Good Posture.
4. Do Increase Your Practice Load  
Gradually and Vary Your Repertoire.
5. Do Some Stress-Reducing Relaxation  
Activity and Get Exercise.
6. Do Take One Day Off A Week.
7. Do Be Easier On Yourself When  
You Are Under Duress or When  
You Are Overtired.
8. Do Move (as opposed to sitting very still).
9. Do Breathe Deeply.
10. Do Practice Away From The Instrument.

My last category is a potpourri of general observations:

General observation #1: One of the **most basic and important** skills which you can teach from day one is the ability to **feel** relaxation in the muscles while playing, which requires constantly switching between tension and relaxation. I was shocked when one of my peers in college pointed out my “tensioness” at the piano. I didn’t believe her at the time. Years later when I realized that she was right, I began to observe pianists who seemed to play effortlessly and I went to every workshop I could find on relaxation. I practiced close to 4 hours a day for 2 years with relaxation as my only goal and I discovered that my body does what my brain tells it to do. A more astute person might have discovered this in a year or less. I had to train my brain to tell my muscles to “let go”. **Without relaxation, no technique is going to work to its fullest potential!** It’s not easy to convey the concept of a physical “feeling” because it must be experienced to be understood. Begin by asking the student to let the arms hang at the side and drop the shoulders, then to transfer that feeling to the keyboard. You will probably have to remind them approximately every five seconds throughout the lesson – **every** lesson.

General observation #2: Work **with** your students to help them find the ways and means that work for them. We all have different ways of processing information, producing sounds, and expressing our thoughts or feelings and I find that I have to be flexible in my approach and assessment. When I conduct a lesson with too many pre-conceived ideas I usually end up disappointed and the student frustrated. There **are** some hard-and-fast rules, but getting students involved in the decision-making will inspire them to think for themselves, a necessary habit for successful practicing at home and for promoting a desire for life-long learning.

General observation #3: A successful teacher has to be able to “get inside” the student’s mind to know what he or she is thinking, feeling, and experiencing. Only through careful observation can this be done. Only then can appropriate suggestions be made and the desired results achieved.

General observation #4: Be honest in a kindly way. Most of the time one can find a nice way to let the student know that the attempt made was less than adequate. Teaching is one of the most rewarding and challenging professions, in my opinion. The private teacher is called upon to fulfill many different roles in students’ lives, and the responsibility can be overwhelming. I think that you and I are very special and that we must take this challenge seriously because each student is worth our best effort and our influence in their lives is far reaching.

My best wishes for your continued success!!