

2023 GMTA TEACHER OF THE YEAR Joe Chapman



I began my teaching career fifty years ago when at the age of sixteen I inherited a handful of piano students from my oldest sister who had just graduated from college. I'm not sure what, if anything, those students learned over the next couple of years, but I learned quite a bit about pedagogy, psychology, and perseverance. My teen years were enriched by participation in a well-established music program at Hixson TN High School, where I marched in the band, performed in musicals, and toured Europe as the choir accompanist. After high school I commuted to the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga where I earned my first of three degrees in piano performance. While at UTC, I continued teaching piano, served as pianist at Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, and accompanied two college choral ensembles and the Chattanooga Boys Choir.

My graduate school experience at the University of South Carolina featured piano study with noted Canadian pianist, Raymond Dudley. My assistantship as the arranger and assistant director of Carolina Alive, the university's pop choral ensemble, provided further opportunities to tour both domestically and to Central America and Africa. After completing my master's degree, I returned home to Chattanooga where I balanced four part-time music positions for the next two years. In 1983, I accepted a full-time teaching appointment at the University of North Georgia - then North Georgia College - where I remain today. During my early years at North Georgia, I completed course work, recitals, and dissertation for a doctorate in piano performance at USC. Those were the hardest years of my life, career, and marriage [they don't call it a terminal degree for nothing].

Over the past forty years at UNG I have taught music theory, conducted choirs, bands, and orchestra, and served as the instructor for a variety of piano-related courses. I am the founder and director of the All American Piano Celebration [now in its 36th year] which provides an opportunity for pianists of all levels to participate in the promotion of live performance of American piano music. Additionally, I have directed various church and community choirs, accompanied numerous soloists and ensembles, and presented over one hundred solo piano concerts for arts associations, schools, churches, and colleges throughout the state of Georgia. I have served the profession in a variety of roles, including a term as president of GMTA. I am currently the president of the Northeast Georgia Music Teachers Association and an advisor for the Georgia Musicale Group. My wife, Janey, and I have five adult children with diverse careers: firefighter, research analyst, mechanic, and two music teachers. My teaching goal - now as always - is to make a positive impact on the next student who walks through my studio door.

**Georgia Music Teachers Association
Teacher of the Year, 2023
Joe Chapman's Teaching Tips**

Three R's

“What do I need to do to get my student ready for college?”

Having taught piano at the University of North Georgia for forty years now, I have developed an appreciation for this earnest question arising from the heart of a dedicated studio teacher. And having been the recipient of a plethora of new students with wildly varying backgrounds over the years, I can truly say – as far as I am concerned – that there is no such thing as a “typical” entering freshman pianist. Occasionally I find a well-rounded student but more often than not, that eager face gracing my door is one-dimensional:

“The entire focus of my piano lessons was prepping for that next competition.”

“I don't read notes very well, but I'm perfectly happy if you put me in front of a chord chart.”

And more recently . . . “Hey dude, I'm just like totally into video-game music, you know.”

Whether the student is looking for a music career as a teacher or performer or whether the academic goal is elsewhere and music is intended only to provide an expressive outlet for lifelong enrichment, my Christmas wish as an instructor would be to find a stocking filled with a variety of small goodies, rather than one beautifully wrapped package, no matter how big it may be. With that in mind, here are my “teacher tips” for pre-college teachers of piano and - by extension - teachers of any medium. For rememberability, I borrow from the age-old academic principle of covering all of the Three R's of education.

Reading – Help me avoid that disheartening audition moment after listening to a well-played sonata, only to discover that my new student can't sightread his way out of a paper bag. Please, please, please teach your students to sightread. For best results, do not allow them to look at their hands while sightreading. Cover the keys with a foam board or poster paper lodged between the keyboard lid and the music rack. Give students lots of material to digest by having them read through an entire method book (a grade or two lower than the student's level) in one week. Tell them to play each song only once, no matter how good (or bad) it is and then turn the page and move on. Encourage them with whatever incentives you have available.

wRiting – In addition to encouraging students to try their hand at writing their own compositions, this category could include music theory training of any kind. Entering students in GMTA theory events, preparing scales, arpeggios and chord progressions (musicianship phases) for Guild, and including discussion of form and analysis in weekly lessons are all great ways to expand musical horizons. You would be surprised to learn how many college freshmen don't fully understand how musical expression is affected by things like non-chord tones, chromaticism, and cadences. Further, learning the art of improvisation can provide a great complement to theory and composition study. Encourage your students to go beyond the printed page – unless of course you're working on Mozart at the moment.

Repertoire – Yes, I am perfectly aware that 'Rithmetic is the third R, and yes, I acknowledge that a certain amount of mathematical acuity is necessary for musicians to be able to negotiate

rhythms and meter, but it seems more appropriate here to end with a discipline-specific finale. A richly-rounded repertoire consisting of a broad mix of popular music (perhaps including the aforementioned video-game soundtrack), church music, classical selections from different periods, and student compositions and improvisations provides a wonderful preparation for an aspiring collegiate musician in my opinion. Spreading the love around to a variety of genres probably means that the student arrives at my door having learned sonatinas rather than sonatas and mazurkas rather than a ballade, but I (for one) am never disappointed when I inherit a learner with a diverse background of intermediate literature experiences who is ripe and ready to roll.