

## Georgia Music Teachers Association

### 2024 Teacher of the Year - *Vicente Della Tonia, Jr. DMA, NCTM*

I am deeply honored and humbled to receive GMTA's Teacher Award of the Year. 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 or 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. 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... 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*