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# Fall News

Birmingham Keyboard Arts Center

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Heather Byars, Director

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## Fall Schedule

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**September 2:** No Lessons. Labor Day. Make-up day - November 18.

**September 3 - 9:** Fall Quarter Lessons Begin. Tuition Installment #1 Due.

**October 1 - 7:** Tuition Installment #2 Due.

**October 14 - 18:** Fall Flex Week. No Lessons.

**October 26:** Scary Group Class. 10:00 - 11:00 a.m. [Please RSVP.](#)

**November 1 - 7:** Tuition Installment #3 Due.

**November 9:** Group Class - Recital Rehearsal. 10:00 - 11:00 a.m. [Please RSVP.](#)

**November 11 - 15:** Observation Week.

**November 17:** Fall Recital. 2 p.m. Chapel in the Pines Presbyterian Church.

**November 12 - 18:** Last Week of Lessons.

**November 19 - 25:** Fall Quarter Make-Up Lessons. Progress Reports.

**November 26 - 29:** Thanksgiving Holiday. No Lessons.

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## Group Class Schedule

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Group classes are geared towards elementary age students. They are held in the studio on the Saturday mornings listed below, from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. Classes provide piano students with the opportunity to socialize, practice performing, encourage and inspire each other, improve theory, and delve into music history.

Please RSVP indicating which classes you plan to participate in so that I know how many to prepare for. Healthy snacks are provided by parents. Kindly let me know if you would like to volunteer to send refreshments. Due to limited space, only students are invited to attend. Students should come prepared to share music they are working on.

- **October 26:** SCARY Group Class. We'll be performing SCARY Halloween music and eating SCARY snacks.
- **November 9:** Fall Recital Rehearsal
- **December 14:** Holiday Hits Group Class. Get ready to jingle some bells and sing along as students perform their favorite carols.
- **February 8:** Composer Focus: Domenico Scarlatti
- **March 15:** Bach's Birthday Bash
- **April 26:** Spring Recital Rehearsal



## Fall Recital November 17, 2 p.m.

**WHERE:** Chapel in the Pines Presbyterian Church. 2269 Chapel Rd., Hoover, AL, 35226

**WHEN TO ARRIVE:** I will be there at 1:30. Students should plan to arrive at least 15 minutes before the performance begins to be seated.

**DRESS:** Students should wear dressy clothes appropriate for a special occasion. Girls do not wear extremely high heels or platform shoes if you plan to use the pedal successfully.

**MEMORIZATION:** Memorization is optional but highly encouraged.

**AFTER THE PERFORMANCE:** An award ceremony will follow the performance.

**REHEARSAL:** The chapel will be opened up 30 minutes before the performance. Come early if you would like to practice in the sanctuary. Additionally, a rehearsal will be held in group class on November 19.

**PRACTICE TROPHIES:** Practice trophies will be awarded at the Spring Recital only and will reflect a student's practice record for the entire school year. Students who kept a record of their practices every week, including a parent signature, will be eligible for a trophy. Students who maintained an average of seven days a week will be rewarded with a first place trophy. A six-day average will earn a second place trophy. A five-day average will earn a third place trophy. Students can make up for sick and vacation days by practicing more than once a day.

**RECITAL FEE:** A \$5.00 recital fee will be added to the tuition statements in the beginning of the Fall and Spring Quarters. This certainly won't cover all recital expenses, but it will make a dent.

## To Observe, or Not to Observe, **That is the Question:**

In the past few months, several different parents have approached me to ask how I feel about their observing lessons. My answer isn't entirely simple, therefore, it does merit clarification. In general, I believe it is in the student's best interest to have their lesson without a parental audience. Here is my reasoning:

Having other people in the room is distracting. More people equal more noise, more movement, and a greater likelihood for extraneous conversation. I love my studio parents. That's actually part of the problem. If you are there, it's a little too easy for me to strike up a conversation with you, taking valuable lesson time away.

Your presence can also certainly create an authority conflict. If there are two authority figures in the room, then on which one shall the child focus? If the answer is unclear to the adults, then it will most assuredly be unclear to the child. I rarely have any real discipline problems in my studio. However, I do occasionally encounter boundary issues; specifically, instances where a student has unknowingly made a disrespectful comment and needs to be lovingly educated about where the student/teacher boundary is. Of course, all the regularly-occurring mundane piano student offenses need to be addressed as well - forgetting music, not practicing, avoiding theory, etc. If the parent is in the room, "I" feel awkward providing even the gentlest discipline because of the authority conflict. When you send your child in to piano alone, you are delivering a powerful message. You are saying, "I trust you to go into this lesson alone and do your best, and I trust this teacher to be in charge when I am not here."

The piano teacher/student relationship can be a long-standing one. It is frequently my privilege to work with students through multiple stages of their youth. Our senior, Olivia Odom, has been with me since kindergarten! I love to stay in touch with students long after they graduate. I relish attending weddings and receiving updates. When you give your child the space to develop that relationship with me, you are giving them the gift of another trustworthy adult who genuinely loves and cares about them. Couldn't we all use more of those?

Last but not least, it can be a little disquieting for me to be continually observed. When the parents are in the room, I am keenly aware that I have a larger audience. It does take my focus away from the child, to some degree. When I am more relaxed, I also tend to cut up with the children more. Translation: they have more fun!

Is this a hard fast rule? Not necessarily! There are times when it is appropriate and helpful to have the parent there. If a student is so young that they can't self-direct practice and you are unclear about how to guide them at home, then your presence can be very beneficial. If a student has a learning, emotional, or physical challenge that prevents or restricts expected achievement and requires your assistance, please talk to me about potentially attending lessons.

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## Observation Week November 11 - 15

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Studio veterans will notice that we now have an Observation Week on schedule for the week before the recital. Think of this as a piano studio open house. Students are welcome to invite someone to attend their lesson. This will provide us with a practice audience for recital repertoire and allow us to showcase our productive lesson routine.

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## Studio Facebook Page

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To help you feel more connected with our studio happenings, I have created a studio Facebook page. I've been uploading videos of our students playing as well as posting important studio reminders and community performance opportunities.

When a student plays a piece especially well during their lesson, they may be featured on the Facebook page as the Video Star of the Week. If you tag yourself in that video, then all of your extended family and friends can view it and extend support and congratulations to your budding pianist. The Facebook page is also the perfect place for parents to post and share photos taken at recitals.

When I first conceived this idea, I didn't realize how far-reaching the site would be, or its potential for improving our sense of studio community. I love seeing students receive positive affirmation from studio parents and loved-ones far and wide. It's an extraordinary way to counteract the lonelier aspects of mastering a solo instrument.



You can find the page by searching Facebook for our studio name or typing in this direct address:  
<https://www.facebook.com/BirminghamKeyboardArtsCenter>

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## Progress Reports

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You are going to love this! I am planning to start issuing quarterly progress reports for all students, during the school year. I want to help you feel connected with your child's progress. Even though piano education is a self-paced

endeavor, there are certain aspects of student development that can be measured and reported on. Watch your inbox for progress reports during the Make-Up Week of each quarter. Adult students will be included!

As always, I am ready and willing to discuss your child's progress at any time. The fastest way to reach me is usually by email.

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## I have an app for that!

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This is the perfect time of year to help your children learn how to budget their time to accommodate all of their responsibilities including, you guessed it, piano practice! Practice sessions need not be lengthy endeavors, but they must be regularly-occurring ones. The most common excuse I hear after a lackluster practice week, is "I didn't have time." I often suspect that there was time, but it just wasn't prioritized to include piano. Our ultimate goal is to train students to be responsible for their piano practice of their own accord, without nagging. As a studio parent myself, I share this aspiration. While contemplating solutions for my family, I considered all the things my child loves and responds to. What do today's kids love? They love their devices! They love being able to see their accomplishments accumulate. They love getting our approval. Thinking along those lines led me to some tools that have proven to be a godsend.



At first glance, the **Home Routines app** (\$4.99), compatible with all iThings, appears to be designed for scheduling routine home-maintenance. I bought it for myself and quickly realized how useful it could be for my child.

Because it is completely customizable, you can use it to create checklists of your child's responsibilities. We have a weekday checklist that includes all schoolwork, household chores, pet maintenance, reminders about making healthy eating choices, AND piano practice. We also have a weekly checklist for less frequent responsibilities and chores. It works wonders for us. If the checklist has to be finished before free time, it doesn't take long to learn how to budget time wisely. Visit the Home Routines web site to learn more: <http://www.homeroutines.com>



One of the greatest challenges facing piano students (and their parents) in this fast-paced world is the lengthy commitment required for mastering the instrument. Piano takes time and LOTS of it. If you take shortcuts by skipping vital repertoire, the student will pay the ultimate price with constricted technique and lack of fluency. Children are notorious for struggling to grasp the concept of passing time. Something happening in the Spring of 2014, like practice trophies being awarded, might as well be happening in the year 2054. In the **Aspire Goals app** (\$2.99), you can customize long-term goals for your child so that they can easily see themselves closing in on their achievement.

First, decide how many practice sessions per quarter you believe your child should complete. I think five practices per

week is adequate, more if you can. (That would be a minimum of 50 practices per quarter.) Keep in mind that we want to create lifelong music participants. To avoid burnout, please do make the goal reasonable. If it helps your child, you can design a reward system to use in conjunction with the app. For example, you could offer them an appropriate reward when they complete 50% of their goal.

I do love this app. It even has options for designing a motivational slideshow to help you visualize yourself reaching your goal. This is sound psychology. I bet you are already thinking of countless other uses for it. Visit their web site to learn more: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/goal-setting-aspire-goals/id488685303?mt=8>

If you do not use apple products and can find something similar for your device, I would be delighted for you to share that information with our studio community on our Facebook page.

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## Alumni Updates

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**Nathan Spicer** was just hired to be the guitarist for Katy Perry. If you are unfamiliar with the pop music scene, take my word for it, this is VERY BIG!

Nathan is the son of family friends. He began his music education as my piano student. After making it to the intermediate level in piano, and developing a firm grasp of music theory, he discovered his passion for the guitar. He graduated from Vestavia High School and attended Belmont, in Nashville. With his winning personality and unmistakable talent, he quickly carved out a niche for himself in the music scene. We applaud Katy Perry for her exemplary taste in guitarists.

Years ago, I commissioned a non-specific oil painting from Nathan's gifted father, Noel Spicer, by bartering piano lessons for his sons. For the subject matter, he borrowed a crystal bowl that was a gift from one of my students. When he unveiled the completed work, he said that he chose to feature the shadow of the dish prominently because it symbolizes the influence I have on my students, effectively illustrating that you never know how far-reaching your influence will be. The painting is hanging in my studio today.





**Jennifer Grimes Craig** has just completed the final requirements for UAB's Optometry School and is now officially Dr. Jennifer Craig. After attending school in Hoover, she earned her Bachelor's Degree at the University of Alabama, in Tuscaloosa. I had the pleasure of attending her marriage to Mark Craig during the summer of 2010. Jennifer and her mother met me for lunch a few weeks ago. Having once aspired to a career in veterinary medicine, she was eager to become acquainted with my daughter's private zoo. In a rare and cherished moment of affirmation, her mother thanked me for teaching Jen discipline, which she credited with helping her get through Optometry School.

**Meredith Collins DeVore**, from Hoover, majored in Music Education at Auburn University. I attended her musically sumptuous wedding to Elliot DeVore in December of 2009. She is currently the choral director at Clay-Chalkville Middle School and is very active in the music ministry at Hunter Street Baptist Church, where she teaches 4th grade KidChoir and sings in the Adult Choir. She is also the director of the Birmingham Girl's Choir, Intermezzo Singers.



**Did you know?** Your beloved piano teacher is now the **Vice President of the Birmingham Music Teacher's Association**. This is great news for you. Now I can tailor the extended education programming to meet our studio needs. I've already lined up new music reviews, a motivational speaker, a piano composer, a gifted jazz pianist, and a show-stopping classical recitalist. The new position is also prodding me into finishing some of my own research.



**Emily Short**, from Hoover, majored in Spanish and Pre-Med at Auburn University. She is nearing the finish line of medical school at UAB and will soon attain her goal of becoming a pediatrician.

**Katie Carroll** also graduated from Hoover High School where she held the honored position of drum major in their acclaimed band program. She majored in Biology at Samford, during which time she spent one semester studying in London. After college, Katie taught English in Seville, Spain, for one year. She is currently on staff at the campus ministry for the University of South Florida in Tampa.



# Help Your Child Be Successful in Piano Lessons!

- 1. Provide a good in-tune home instrument** - Having a decent instrument at home is paramount to the success of your piano kid's lessons. Without a way to properly practice at home, your child will feel inadequate come lesson time and will rapidly lose motivation and interest.
- 2. Attend lessons regularly with all needed materials and a well-rested child** - Regular attendance ensures that your child progresses. Progression leads to feelings of self-confidence and achievement. Piano students need their books at every lesson as well as any other materials suggested by the teacher. Keep books organized at home and teach your child to be responsible for their materials.

Children learn best when they are well-rested (not only in terms of sleep, but also in terms of "extracurricular overload") and when they are healthy. Sick piano kids don't retain very much... and result in sick piano teachers!

**3. Establish a consistent and daily practice routine** - Piano lessons are one of the few extracurricular activities that require daily attention. Choose a specific time of day that works for your family (before school, after dinner, after the bath, etc.) and make piano practice a regular and consistent event every single day. Avoid times that are hectic or rushed, remove distractions (like the TV or smaller siblings), and try to be in the vicinity to offer encouragement and/or help with piano practice.

**4. Be Positive... provide constant encouragement** - Comment often on your child's progress. Remember the names of the pieces they are working on and make requests as you go about your day to encourage regular visits to the piano. Show your pride by sharing videos, photos or musical phone calls with friends and family. Help your child to identify themselves as a "pianist".

**5. Stay involved!** Show that you value music by providing live-music opportunities, encouraging your child's participation in recitals and performances and being a part of their daily practice in some way (even if it's only as a happy listener). Seek out opportunities to involve music in your daily routines.

By being an active member of the "Piano Teaching Triangle of Success" you ensure that your child gets full advantage of the many, many benefits of piano lessons.

