

Recital Etiquette

April 15, 2015

After taking note of a growing need to reduce distractions during our piano recitals, I've written some guidelines for performers and audience members alike. It's important to adapt performance etiquette to the specific needs of the event. What may be perfectly acceptable at a rock concert or football game, could be very problematic at a piano recital. My goal is to improve the experience for everyone in the audience, while affording students the best possible opportunity to concentrate on their own performance. Please take the time to review these etiquette guidelines with your piano student.

PERFORMERS:

- In the weeks leading up to the recital, prepare much more than you think you need to, and then prepare a little bit more. Perform your piece for a practice audience. Prepare like a professional by creating a back-up plan for handling mistakes.
- Do NOT attempt to change your recital piece at the last minute. Great performances are not thrown together in the final hour.
- Do NOT attempt to play by memory for the first time on stage. Thorough memorization takes time and thoughtful preparation.
- Make sure you warm-up immediately before the recital.
- Arrive at the requested time in order to learn where you are to sit and receive instructions for the performance. Be on time, rushing in at the last minute will throw off your concentration.
- Performers should wear appropriate attire. Girls in knee-length or longer dresses or slacks, boys in dress pants and buttoned dress shirts with ties preferred, or suits. Nothing overly revealing, no platform shoes, flip-flops, or athletic footwear. Please do not wear dangling, jingling jewelry. Costumes for the costume recital are an obvious exception to these guidelines.
- Of course, no one should feel obligated to spend money for new clothes. The overriding principle should be to simply do the best you can with what you already have on hand, and remember that proper attire shows respect to your audience, as well as to yourself, and what you have accomplished.
- Remember to practice in your outfit, shoes included.
- Once it is your turn, rise quickly and walk up to the stage. Adjust the bench, pause and collect your thoughts, and begin when you are ready.
- Performers must bow at the beginning and at the end of the performance. Instructor and student will practice bowing properly.
- Once the recital begins, please listen and be quiet.
- Respect the other performers. Unnecessary noise from whispering, talking, candy wrappers, etc. during a program is not acceptable. Reading, studying, playing video games, and doodling on paper during a program are also inappropriate.
- Rather than burdening yourself with the objective of playing "perfectly", your goal is to confidently present a fluent and dynamic rendition of your piece. What is perfect? In terms of musical evaluation, I think you will find the answer to be highly subjective. My goal is for my students to continually improve and grow, raising the bar for themselves ever higher. To me, that is perfect.
- Congratulate the other performers after the program. Tell them specifically why you enjoyed their piece. Pats on the back, hugs, and hand-shakes are appropriate, respectful, and encouraging.

AUDIENCE:

- Recitals are a special occasion, and so it is customary to dress nicely.
- Please arrive a little early in order to find a comfortable place to sit. Make sure all your invited guests understand the importance of arriving on time. If they arrive late, it makes it difficult for those performing.
- Please invite as many friends and family members as you'd like. Our recital hall has lots of room, and can likely accommodate as many as you'd like to invite.
- Turn off all cell phones and any electrical devices that may produce sound.
- Once the recital begins, please listen and be quiet.
- We welcome families with children of all ages. However, if your child is too young to understand and follow etiquette rules and will potentially be distracting for the audience, please sit with them in the back of the audience near the rear exit. That way you can take them out quickly if they become disruptive.
- If you arrive late, please wait to enter between pieces when you hear applause.
- Do not enter or exit the recital hall or switch seats while someone is performing. In case of an emergency, please use the back door only and hold it carefully so that it doesn't make a banging noise as it shuts. Never enter or exit from the side door during the program. This is very distracting for performers and audience members.
- The soloist will bow, and your response is to applaud politely and with enthusiasm!
- No whistling, yelling, or other loud methods of congratulations, especially prior to the performance please. If a performer is focused and ready to play, but becomes distracted with the "cat-calling" and "whooping" it can really throw off his or her performance. While boisterous congratulations are meant to show support for the performer, it may actually cause unintended problems instead. The best way to show appreciation for the performance is with thunderous applause, and an occasional "bravo" at the end of an especially great performance.
- Compositions that have movements or suites are, in general, performed without applause in the middle.
- Respect the performers. Unnecessary noise from whispering, talking, candy wrappers, cell phone usage etc. during a program is not acceptable.
- Please stay until the performance or event is completely over. Attending a recital so that other families will serve as audience to your student, and then leaving before the other performers have finished is inconsiderate. Only students who are juggling multiple conflicting performances should consider this an option.
- Flash photography is not appropriate during a performance. You may videotape and/or take flash photography as the performer is approaching or leaving the piano.
- After the program, please congratulate the performers. They need your encouragement and appreciation. Many of these students are making a great effort to overcome stage fright. As an empathetic exercise, take a moment and imagine yourself in their place!
- If you anticipate that your piano student will struggle with stage fright, please notify me in advance so that I may strategize with them to help them deal with it.
- In general, encourage your student to prepare much more than they think they need to and to accept that despite their best effort, mistakes are common on stage. It's imperative to have a plan for overcoming mistakes without losing concentration. Back-up plans give students the confidence they need to perform well even in the face of mishaps. When students are taught to overcome mistakes rather than view them as performance destroyers, they have a much higher likelihood of maintaining composure. This is how professionals prepare!
- Enjoy! Your presence is the greatest affirmation!