

SPRING NEWS

"The gift of music lasts a lifetime, transcends all generations, and is an investment in the future!"

Spring Recital

May 4, 2 p.m.

Chapel in the Pines

Our Spring Recital will be held at 2 p.m., at Chapel in the Pines Presbyterian Church, in Hoover. Students should dress for a special occasion. The church will be opened up for practicing at least thirty minutes before the performance begins. Plan to be in your assigned seat fifteen minutes before showtime. Recitals usually last about an hour.

There will be an award ceremony following the recital during which participation awards, AMTA certificates, and practice trophies will be presented.

At the beginning of the Spring Quarter a five dollar per student recital fee is applied to tuition. This helps cover the expense of renting the church, printing programs and awards, and purchasing trophies. If you have not yet paid your recital fee, please do so.



Happy Birthday Bach

We celebrated J. S. Bach's 329th birthday in our group class on March 15. In addition to performing, students listened to some of Bach's greatest hits while learning about the composer, the Baroque Era, and playing themed party games. Check out my super silly Bach Fan Club in their Baroque wigs.





Remaining Spring Quarter Schedule:

April 1 - 7: Tuition Installment #2 Due.

April 26: Group Class - Recital Rehearsal. 10:00 - 11:00 a.m. Please RSVP.

May 1 - 7: Tuition Installment #3 Due.

May 4: Spring Recital. 2 p.m. Chapel in the Pines Presbyterian Church.

May 12 - 16: Last Week of Lessons.

May 19 - 23: Spring Quarter Make-Up Week. Progress Reports.

Summer Quarter Schedule:

June 20 - 26: Lessons Begin, Tuition Installment #1 Due.

July 4: No Lessons

July 14 - 18: Tuition Installment #2 Due.

July 28 - August 1: Last Week of Summer Lessons

August 4 - 8: Makeup Week

Heather Byars, Director

Avoiding Inclement Weather Debacles

In order to avoid absences whenever possible, I invite you to experiment with a back-up plan for dealing with inclement weather days. Most of you have a portable device or webcam that you use for Skype or FaceTime. If treacherous weather or mild illness has stranded you at home, but communication lines are still functional, we may try out the *option* of having the lesson over video chat.

Please go ahead and send a connection request to my Skype name, [heather.byars1](#), and add my cell phone number, [253-9671](#), to your contacts (for use with FaceTime). This way we'll be ready to roll when the occasion arrises.

A word of caution: Before anyone makes the giddy leap to believing that you no longer need to drive to piano for lessons; know that this option has some significant limitations. Students need to be in my presence so that I may mark mistakes in the score, physically point to music when tracking is a challenge, gently thump steady beats on little backs, maneuver hands to demonstrate technique and correct hand positions, and convey nuance of sound. I could go on and on. Video call lessons are *potentially* a **fantastic alternative to missing lessons altogether**, but should never be considered a first choice scenario.

I have thoughtfully labeled this option *experimental*. If after a trial period it is working successfully, then I will continue to offer it to you. If it proves ineffective, it gets the ax.



Spring Practice Challenge

Our Spring Practice Challenge provided students with some mirthful motivation. Five practices a week earned them a flower for their flower pot. Students who practiced all seven days earned a visitor for their garden. (Practice gardens are coming home this week.) Next week I will unveil a new challenge to help nudge us through spring fever. Come prepared with the minimum five practices recorded in your notebook so you won't be left out.



AMTA District Auditions

April 12, Samford University



The Alabama Music Teacher's Association District Auditions are for piano students, age six through eighteen, and are held in March or April of each year. They are composed of a Performance component of three pieces of contrasting style and a Theory component (scales, arpeggios, cadences, etc.) Students, age 10 and older, who receive an *Outstanding* rating in both Performance and Theory can progress on to the State level of this competition in May.

District Auditions will be held at Samford University on April 12. Our district participants this year are: **Anusha Mukherjee, Sarah Mather, Theo Simonton, and Sarah Buchanan.**

The State Auditions will take place at the University of Montevallo on May 9 and 10. A handful of winners will be selected from the State Auditions to participate in a Winners Recital.

Recital Preparation

In the weeks leading up to the recital, I will be sending home some handouts to help students self-assess their preparedness. We'll be utilizing Joanne Haroutounian's strategic method designed to train students to listen and evaluate their own playing by focusing on specific aspects of musicality, set goals for correcting their problem areas, and track their improvement. I hope this will improve the quality of practice that takes place at home.

Recital Rehearsal

April 26, 10:00 a.m.

Our group class on April 26th will serve as the rehearsal for our Spring Recital. Classes are held in the studio from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Please RSVP so that I may know how many students to expect.

Observation Week

April 28 - May 2

Observation Week is scheduled 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.

Honoring Olivia



Our beautiful senior, Olivia Odom, has reached that bittersweet age when we must hug her tightly and then wish her well as she makes her way in the world. She has been an exemplary piano student for nearly twelve years, earning a first place trophy every single year by going above and beyond the practice requirements. In all this time, I have never seen Olivia unhappy or troubled. She is one of the most positive, optimistic, gracious, and courteous individuals I have ever known. Her parents have consistently extended the sort of trust and respect to me that compellingly answers the



question, "Why did I choose to teach?" - while simultaneously inspiring me to be worthy of their valuation. It has been my privilege and honor to be part of her life and to witness her considerable musicianship taking wing. My sadness at letting her go is surpassed only by the confidence I have that our society will be so much more vibrant and kind with Olivia in the ranks of adulthood.

Olivia is planning to attend either Samford University or Belmont. While her exact career path is undecided, she is considering going into Entertainment Law, with a dream of ably representing emergent musicians.

Briarwood Christian School awarded Olivia their Leadership, Legacy, and Academic Scholarship. She is a talented tennis player, an active drama participant, and a member of the National Honor Society. Her class voted her *Class Favorite* and *Most Optimistic*. (I heartily concur with their findings.)

We rummaged around and found some early photos of Olivia at the piano. I vividly remember the day the recital photo was taken. Both of my knees were badly dislocated and splinted, therefore I was limping around in tennis shoes with the aid of a cane. Even though I was in extreme pain, you can see how proud I am of her performance. She is going to leave a cavernous void in my week and in my heart! I'll let go only after extracting a promise from her to always, always stay in touch.



Summer Quarter 2014

The Summer Quarter will consist of six weeks of lessons plus the bonus week for make-up lessons. *If absolutely necessary*, during the Summer Quarter only, students may have the option of arranging their six lessons individually with me rather than having a regular weekly lesson time. This flexibility will allow students to get in all of their lessons around their travel and summer camp schedule. Lessons will still need to be scheduled with me during my normal working hours and within the dates specified for the Summer Quarter.

Please understand that, without payment, it isn't possible for me to reserve spaces in the studio. The studio maintains a waiting list of interested students. Some students remain on the list for a long time before they are able to begin study. Lesson times will be offered to these students immediately when they become available. Some families actually prefer to begin in the summer. Students who have terminated their lessons are always welcome to return, but please know in advance that availability could not be guaranteed after an absence.

Written notification is required one month in advance of ending lessons. Students who fail to give the one month notice will be billed for the month or will forfeit their deposit. No refund will be given for tuition paid in advance. The final page of this newsletter is a letter of intent. Please print it and return the completed form to me by May 16.



RECITAL ETIQUETTE

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.

RECITAL ETIQUETTE

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!

I Have an App for That!

Tenuto



If I haven't already recommended the app Tenuto to you, I'm doing so now. Tenuto was created by the free and comprehensive online music theory resource, musictheory.net. I love how

the site allows me to customize theory drills for my students. This flexibility makes it work equally well for beginners and advanced students. The app costs \$3.99. If your device works on wifi only, you may consider purchasing it, rather than using the online version, so that you can use it anywhere you go. *What if students spent the drive to school each morning drilling their notes?* Oh, what a marvelous world that would be. Fluency in note reading makes learning new music *so much easier* and, therefore, more enjoyable. *How about using it on the way to piano each week?* If you bring your device to your lesson, I'll set up the drills for you.

Music Journal



The Music Journal app is perfect for more advanced students studying lengthy pieces that evolve slowly over time. It is a sophisticated statistics-based app designed to help you organize your practice routine and track your progress. The built-in metronome saves your last practice speed for you. At a glance you can see an analysis of your practice routine with a breakdown of your practice averages overall and per assigned piece. This is a wonderful way to build accountability into your practice sessions. Want to really impress me? Flash me a screenshot of your weekly practice summary during your next lesson.



LETTER OF INTENT

Due: May 16, 2014

I will be continuing my piano lessons and will see you in the Summer Quarter.

I would like to terminate my lessons and have no plans to return in the future.

I would like to terminate my lessons. Please add me to the waiting list for a future opening in the studio.

I can't attend any lessons during the Summer Quarter, but I plan to pay the lesson fee before June 23rd, 2014, to reserve my space in the studio.

Student Name(s): _____

Parent Signature: _____

Return this form to Heather Byars by May 16, 2014