

## Some of the most Frequently Asked Questions that come my way

How long have you been teaching?

I have been teaching for over 15 years and I love it!

(I gave my first piano lessons when I was in junior high school.)

What ages to you teach?

All ages and stages!

When is the best age to begin piano/keyboard lessons?

Generally, the best age to begin is between 5-7, but the sooner the better. The research on the positive effects on childhood development through exposure to music is quite extensive now.

The best age to begin exposure through instruction in general is usually around ages 2-3 up to 5-6. Two of the more established programs are Kindermusik and Music Together.

Why do I hear that the piano/keyboard is the best instrument to start with?

All good college music programs require a certain level of piano/keyboard proficiency. This is because the notes on a keyboard are laid out linearly, one after the other, and it is much easier to see, hear, and feel the relationships between the notes. This makes ear training and learning music theory much, much easier. Understanding what we hear, music theory, and how well we hear it (ear training) is absolutely essential.

## How much are your lessons?

Lessons are booked and paid for on a monthly basis. My rates are competitive for the area. My base rate is for the standard 30 minute lesson; however, that rate is less expensive per minute for longer lessons. (Please call or email me for details.)

## How long are your lessons?

The lessons can be 30, 45, and 60 minutes. You have the same time slot reserved for you each week. The most cost effective slot is 45 minutes. I promote 45 minute lessons because they are not rushed like the 30 minute time slots.

I have students that take lessons once a week and twice a week— for 30, 45 or 60 minutes.

I approach teaching also like coaching and training, so the more time you have with me, the better.

## Where do you offer the lessons?

I teach in my home studio in Farragut, but I also travel to student's homes as well. The cost is greater, however, if I come to your home.

## What days and times do you offer lessons?

Basically, I teach Monday, Tuesdays, Wednesday, and Thursdays from 2:00pm until 9:00pm, and on Saturdays from 9:00am to 5:00pm.

## What makes you unique as a music instructor?

Like all good instructors, I am naturally gifted as a teacher. This requires patience and active listening skills. My warm interpersonal and non-judgmental approach puts students at ease, even during a difficult lesson. But as far as being *unique*...

I creatively engage with my students during their lessons. What I mean by that is that I am always looking for new ways to connect with each individual student, so that they “get it.” If they don’t understand what they are learning, then it is partially a reflection on me as an instructor.

“Getting it” means that a student can demonstrate to me musically on the keyboard what they have learned, particularly through rhythm and emotion, but also to be able to verbalize it.

I use a fair amount of humor and tact!

As a contemporary instructor I used digital devices - keyboards, computers, the iPod, iPhone, iPad... The manner in which contemporary instructors can incorporate these devices is growing exponentially right now, especially with the iPad. So, I am constantly growing and adapting. It’s rather exciting.

With a digital studio, students can record and playback what they are learning at different tempos. With a digital piano or keyboard, students can do the same when they are practicing at home. *This is a fantastic learning tool.*

I have a strong background as a student and performer in a number of styles: rock, classical, orchestral, choral, jazz bands and ensembles, praise and worship - both live and in the studio.

I went to a great music school on a scholarship! I have been blessed to have been surrounded by fantastic musicians since I was young, but I was really stretched and grew at Northwestern. There were many, many great opportunities with exceptional professors and amazing fellow students, not just music majors.

What makes your approach to teaching different?

Probably a combination of several factors:

I relate with my students as people first, students second. Each individual has different interests and needs. As an instructor *I take that seriously.*

Second, I teach students how to play well and to understand - intellectually and musically, what they are playing, so that they can apply it to any popular style and enjoy playing the rest of their life! Playing is fun, but it can also be quite therapeutic.

Third, I balance the fundamentals of a comprehensive method with each student's interests in a manner so that they are learning not only what they *want to learn*, but also *what they really need to learn* in order to play well, regardless of the popular style or genre.

Fourth, my curriculum is fairly unique. I have used a number of resources to develop what I believe is a fine program. I am constantly improving on it and actually hope to publish it someday!

Last, I emphasize excellent practice techniques. The saying, "Practice make perfect" is simply not true. *How we practice is crucial*. If we practice poorly, then we will play poorly. If we practice poorly, we are also wasting time and will often have to unlearn and relearn poor habits. This can be quite frustrating, but can be avoided.

## How much to I need to practice?

First, the more a student practices *well*, the quicker their learning pace. Learning more, more quickly yields more encouragement and enjoyment. Practicing well for 10 minutes is much more productive than practicing poorly for 20. Practicing well for 10 minutes twice a day is often more productive than once for 20.

Generally, anything less than 15-20 minutes a day (in one or two sittings) 5 or 6 days a week will not yield enough progress for minimal growth and enjoyment.

That being said, the best way to approach practicing is not by measuring in minutes, but rather by the different tasks assigned. For example, suppose a teacher assigns four different areas to work on— a scale, 2 songs, and a page from a theory book. For each practice session, work on the scale until there is some good improvement, and then do the same for each song, and then work some in the theory book. This will probably take at least 20 to 30 minutes, but perhaps longer if the student wants to practice more in order to progress more quickly. Each of those 4 tasks could also be divided into two of four practice sessions a day.

The student's age and level of playing are also a factor. For example, a 5 year old may not have the attention span to practice more than 10 or 15 minutes a day. Generally, a student who is playing at an intermediate level will probably need to practice at least 30 to 40 minutes a day, but a more serious student, especially at an advanced level can easily put in an hour or two once or twice a day, and four to eight hours when moving towards a professional level.

It is also best to practice as soon after a lesson as possible on the same day, even if only for 10 or 15 minutes to review the material while it is still fresh. Warming up before a lesson is also a good idea.

## When did you start playing the piano?

I started private lessons when I was 6, but by the time I was 12 I began moving into popular music, playing by ear and reading sheet music and chord charts. Unfortunately, I couldn't find a teacher who taught contemporary approaches and styles. It made learning popular music more difficult and time consuming.

## What is the difference between teaching and playing classical and contemporary styles?

The differences are in these main areas. Both styles certainly incorporate them. It is mainly a matter of emphasis.

Classical music stresses reading music while contemporary music stresses playing by ear, but reading is still important. However, popular music also uses two other forms of notation not found in classical music. They are very important to learn— lead sheets and chord charts.

Classical music stresses learning certain literature while contemporary music stresses theory. There, of course, plenty songs to learn with either and the more the better.

Classical music stresses technique while contemporary music stresses emotion and rhythm. Any good player will be taught solid technique. *How one touches and move across the keys is essential.* Unfortunately, this is sometimes not stressed enough by contemporary instructors.

Classical music obviously stresses acoustic music contemporary to the 1600-1800s (Baroque, Classical, and Romantic), while today's contemporary music stresses electric styles since the 1960s on— basically what most of us listen to for enjoyment and will hear on most music stations. However, many advanced contemporary players have had some good exposure to both classical and jazz.

Classical music stresses playing on an acoustic piano, while contemporary music stresses digital pianos and keyboards, which can sound and play like an acoustic piano, but can produce numerous piano and synthesized sounds as well. As long as a keyboard has full-size keys that are weighted and touch sensitive, the difference is not substantial until the acoustic piano is a standard 6 to 9 foot grand (Kawai, Yamaha, Baldwin, Mason & Hamlin, and if affordable a Boesendorfer or a Steinway. Avoid spinets.) Standard brands for digital pianos are Kawai, Roland and Yamaha.

A wonderful advantage to digital keyboard instruments is not only the vast range of sounds they produce, but also the ability to simulate many other instruments rather well—bass, drums, guitars, strings and horns. The human voice is nearly impossible to reproduce digitally.

## What do I need to take lessons?

You will need a digital piano or keyboard with 71-88 keys that are full-size, weighted, and touch sensitive and that has a damper (sustain) pedal. Some keyboards do not have keys that are the same size as a piano and are much lighter. This can work for a younger student with smaller hands (generally ages 5-7), but moving to a keyboard with full-size weighted keys as soon as possible is very important.

Touch sensitivity means that the faster (“harder”) the key is pressed the louder the sound. It is absolutely critical for developing expressiveness. Headphone jacks are nice too. (Please contact me for details before making a purchase.)

## Do I need any extras supplies?

You will probably want an MP3 player (iPod, iPhone...) with speakers so that you can record and listen to what you are practicing. I can provide you with most of the files.

You will also need a metronome, either an app or an electric model.

I will provide all the lesson materials as we go, except for any particular song you want to learn. I can help you locate songs you are interested in learning.