



Twinkling The Ivories

December 2011

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Becoming Your Child's Biggest Fan: Practice Tips from Nicole Elliott

At our recent Fall Institute, Guest Teacher Nicole Elliott (a Saskatoon-based Suzuki educator) held a parent session addressing ways to motivate children to play piano. Ms. Elliott spoke of her personal experiences and lessons learnt raising three children as well as being a Suzuki piano teacher.

Ms. Elliott reminded parents that every year, parents and teachers have to find new ways to motivate children to practice piano. She highlighted that there is a notion of "perfection" which parents tend to try and achieve, hence putting pressure on themselves and consequently on their children. Instead, one should seek excellence not perfection.

The parents in attendance were posed the question: "Think about how you practice with your children. Are you a fan or a critic?" Raising three children (ages 20, 17 and 7) gave Ms. Elliott the opportunity to grow as a teacher, parent and mother. She reflected on her experiences with her youngest child who has benefited from her years of experience and self-admitted mistakes made with her older children. She explained how she tended to be tense and placed a lot of pressure on herself when she helped her older children with their piano practice. She noted that she has made it a priority just to be a fan of her youngest child and has worked hard to make the experience enjoyable.

What can we do to make practice more fun? It is mostly about attitude. Parents need to reserve specific times for practice where there are no other distractions. What do you say when it's time to practice? It's very important to be positive and encouraging because it affects how the children perceive practicing. It is also important to lessen expectations on what can be done in the practice time. It is more important to spend only a portion of the time but having it be enjoyable and productive than it is to get everything done with a bad attitude. It serves no purpose for parents to get annoyed with their children or for children to be frustrated with their parents.

Ms. Elliott also shared one of her favorite books: "Life's Greatest Lessons" by Hal Urban. She read several excerpts from the book including "...no secrets to meaning of success, no quick and easy way to do things....it [success] has to be earned". She explained how music study is about perseverance and not an instant gratification. It is about creating good practice habits. Creating better habits builds character which leads to success. Breaking seemingly overwhelming tasks into smaller achievable ones makes them manageable, much like practicing a piece of music. As parents, we need to show a deep loving manner and patience to support our children as they learn these lessons. One parent added, "Just to smile even when frustrated will help." Parents have to be strong and stay constant: not ride the waves of ups and downs.

Ten things to try to motivate:

1. Take your child to concerts: observing other musicians is motivating and inspiring.
2. Don't talk while practicing: don't interrupt while the child is playing.
3. Encourage friendships with kids who also play the piano: it can be great support to have a "buddy" parent.
4. Stay calm, sit down and look comfortable.
5. Plan the practice: don't surprise.
6. Play the CD: it helps to train one's ear and it motivates the child to want to play just as well.

7. Kids don't like bribes: but having a reward is different.
8. Have fun: come up with some games, etc.
9. Listen to the teacher: be consistent with what the teacher recommends.
10. Motivation is the parents' job: the kid's job is to be a kid!

Ms. Elliott recommended one way to motivate children is to have a box of cards which have different activities or actions on them which will keep the children interested:

- Ten jumping jacks
- Give mommy/daddy a hug
- Play a silly song on the piano
- Play your favorite song on the CD
- Get a treat
- Blindfold and play
- Thumb wars
- Play a specific piece an x number of times.

The cards are fun, but they also add a sense of control to the children. An alternative is to use play money. Families can choose a prize and once the child has earned an agreed upon amount through successful practicing, he/she may "purchase" the anticipated prize. The bottom line is that when kids are having fun, they respond better and are happier. As parents, we just need to instill good habits early on and make it fun.

The parent session was very informative and encouraging for any parent who struggles to find ways to motivate their children to practice piano in a consistent manner and still have fun!

Amera Parker

Registration Survey – January 2012

Upon our return to music studios in January, families will be asked to help ESPS with planning for the upcoming 2012-2013 school term.

Teachers will be asking families the question, "Are you planning to register for the 2012-2013 school term. You'll be able to answer in one of 3 ways: "Yes," "No," or "I am not yet sure."

ESPS teachers are in high demand and we are hopeful that this survey will help us to more accurately estimate how many new students we can accept for the fall term. Your help in this process is appreciated!

2011-2012 Calendar

January 22, 2012 Graduation

February 5, 12, & 26, 2012 Winter Recitals, Suzuki Charter School

March 18, 2012 Graduation

April 21, 2012 Spring Festival

June 3, 2012 Group Concert

June 10 & 17, 2012 Summer Recitals, Convocation Hall

June 24, 2012 Graduation

Congratulations to Book 7 Graduate Ondra Chan

On a Saturday evening last spring, Ondra Chan presented his Suzuki Piano Volume 7 Graduation recital at Muttart Hall. Family and friends enjoyed his presentation of Chopin's Polonaise Militaire and a couple of very fun video game themes in addition to the Book 7 repertoire.

Ondra is currently a very busy Grade 12 IB student at Ross Shepherd High School. He is a competitive badminton player at the Royal Glenora Club and is on the swim team at school. He is continuing piano lessons as well. Congratulations, Ondra, on achieving this milestone.

Welcome to Myroslav Bodnar!

Congratulations to our teacher, Melanie Bodnar, who recently gave birth to her son, Myroslav. We offer our best wishes to the Bodnar family!

"Music exists for the purpose of growing an admirable heart."

Shinichi Suzuki