

Notes from conversation with Dr. Thomas Otten and Dr. Jill Timmons

Introduction

7:30 Know your technology and available resources

- Keep it simple, keep external devices to a minimum
- Do a trial “Tech Session” with your student before first lesson
- Camera placement is important – need to see the student’s upper body at least
- Setting volume levels – best quality without distortion
 - Some devices have Ambient Noise Reduction or Noise Cancellation – turn those features off. They interpret piano sound as “noise” Look this up in “settings.”
- Find an app both parties can access and work well with (Skype, Zoom, FaceTime)
 - If the connection goes badly, sometimes hang up and call back, or try a different device
 - If you can’t get your computer or tablet to work, try using your smartphone
- Leave time between lessons for technical adjustments

13:30 What are some of the pitfalls

Realize that you won’t have the same experience. Manage your expectations around the medium. You can successfully teach most anything that you do in an in-person lesson

- If the student is struggling, ask what fingering they are using, and go through this
- Pedaling – you can work on this
- Tone quality – listen differently, you won’t hear the same sound quality, you can still tell when the sound is getting harsh or when the balance is off
- Sometimes the soft flatten out, ask them how they are hearing the sound

18:30 Important considerations

- Position the camera so the student can see you at the keyboard
- Try to minimize twisting your body when addressing student
- You can face the device when looking at the score and the student together
- You can hold your device in different ways to directly show you at the keyboard
- You *can* teach when you don’t have a piano available – lots of singing and gesticulating, have to “ramp up” engagement with the student.
- You can’t play along with them because they can’t hear you at the same time they are playing.
- You need to work out a system for letting them know you want them to stop, perhaps clapping to signal as the voice might not carry over.

- In person lessons are preferred, but they are simply not possible in this time.
- We can't abandon our students! We need to be there for them and move the cause forward.
- Helpful to stay grounded and connected with music.

27:30 Curriculum

- Start with sight reading
- Work on technique – works surprisingly well – our focus is more visual in this medium
- Theory – send pictures of their work
- What about performance options? – Immediate family, Zoom classes with small groups

31:30 Pros and Cons for Online Teaching

- It meets the need for what may be a long-term problem
- It's simple - you don't have to alter your well-grounded and established curriculum
- Students don't have travel or weather challenges
- It's not the same as in-person, but you CAN adapt
- Can have students from around the country
- Students who know you well can relax in the comfort of your established relationship
- Can even start new students online – it works!

35:00 Postlude

- This is an opportunity for us to bring beauty and joy and support to our students
 - Expanded reading lists
 - [The Musician's Journey: Crafting Your Career Vision And Plan](#) by Dr. Jill Timmons
 - [Franz Liszt in Three Volumes](#) by Dr. Alan Walker
 - [Fryderyk Chopin: A Life and Times](#) by Dr. Alan Walker
 - [Chopin in Paris](#) by Tad Szulc
 - [Debussy: A Painter in Sound](#) by Stephen Walsh
 - [Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy](#) by Paul Roberts
 - Non-musician authors for breadth and levity – John Steinbeck, Bill Bryson, David Sedaris, Augusten Burroughs
 - Recommended recordings
 - Getting out (when possible) for exercise
 - Stay well and safe, and keep playing!

Learn more about Dr. Otten on his website or write him with questions via email.

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