

# Oregon Musician

Sharing ideas about music and the teaching of music

## Continuing Professional Education (CPE) and the Studio Music Teacher

A Note from the Editor



### About the Editor

Rhonda Ringering has released four CDs, is an active solo and collaborative performer for venues throughout the Northwest and frequently appears as an adjudicator and clinician in Oregon and Washington. Her articles have appeared in *American Music Teacher*, *Piano & Keyboard*, *Flute Talk*, *Clavier*, and *Keyboard Companion*. She received her BA from Walla Walla University and her MM from Boston University.

I started my first piano studio at age 22 armed with little more than a college degree, a brand-new membership in OMTA, and a passion for music. The limits of my musical and business training quickly motivated me attend Portland District meetings, network with other OMTA teachers, study music and business guides, and to begin coaching with a teacher who shaped me into a mature pianist. I never thought of it as CPE; it was what I needed to grow as a musician and a teacher. Today I know it was the start of a way of life that continues to challenge me musically, creatively and personally. I know that without CPE, I would have left music years ago.

In this issue of *Oregon Musician*, the contributors write of their own personal experiences with CPE, as well as offering great suggestions on where and how to find opportunities to learn more. Dr. Deborah Cleaver writes of the direct connection between practicing and teaching, and Cindy Peterson-Peart tells of her own journey of attending meetings and conferences and getting nationally certified—starting at age 50! New OMTA members Chris Engbretson and Alicia Barrett write of the importance of networking and studying once leaving a university music program and entering the professional world. Dr. Jill Timmons tackles the challenge of balancing teaching and life with the joy of CPE. This issue's feature interview, Dr. Peter Mack, tells of his own commitment to growing as a musician, and shares candid thoughts (from a clinician's prospective) on what we doing well (and not so well) as teachers.

There is no "right" way to get CPE, and the only way to fail is to not do it at all. Attend a lecture. Pull out that piece of music you have been longing to learn and work at it every day. Read a book about music. If it "lights you up" creatively, do it. It is the greatest gift you can give yourself as a musician and a teacher.

# Continuing Professional Education (CPE) and the Studio Music Teacher

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# Scaling Mt. Olympus: A Lifetime in Music

by Deborah Ingram Cleaver



## About the Author

Deborah Ingram Cleaver holds a Bachelor of Music degree from Meredith College and a Master of Music degree from Boston University. She studied with legendary pianist and pedagogue Leonard Shure, and was his teaching assistant at New England Conservatory. She taught and performed for ten years in West Berlin, Germany and now teaches at Lewis and Clark College and Reed College. Ingram is a frequent performer, lecturer, and adjudicator in the Northwest.

A life in music is a gift. I tell every prospective student that one of the greatest aspects of studying music is that our potential is limitless. No matter how talented or skilled, no matter how much we know, our capacity for improvement is infinite. There will always be some ahead of us and some behind us, but we're all on the same mountain. We are making our way up Mt. Olympus to commune with the immortals, and we are profoundly fortunate to follow a pursuit that offers so much challenge and satisfaction; so much opportunity to expand our abilities and knowledge; so much beauty, nobility, and meaning.

As teaching professionals and performers, we have both the rewards of that pursuit and the responsibility to continually expand the horizon for our students and ourselves. This means being students for life. Most professions have requirements for continuing education, some of them quite extensive. Music teachers have relatively few requirements, and almost no system in place to verify either the quality or the quantity of hours we spend increasing our knowledge, our performance skills, or our teaching abilities. It is by and large left up to us. Each of us then needs to be our own board of education, and establish guidelines to keep us climbing. Self-education is our primary badge of professionalism.

Many of us teach long hours and struggle to find the time to allow sufficient balance in our lives to hone our own skills and continue our professional development. But we do need to find that balance because the sheer pleasure of learning is something that we all deserve to give ourselves.

When I was a graduate student, the interdependence of teaching and playing was instilled in me by my wonderful teacher, Leonard Shure. His belief that performers have the responsibility to perpetuate their knowledge and give to the next generation, and that teachers need to play in order to be able to teach well have become the basis for my life as a musician and educator. Some will spend more

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time teaching while others will perform more. Some will teach in home studios, some in colleges. Some will perform in Carnegie Hall, some for their pets. But whatever the proportion of teaching and playing, and whatever the venue, we learn by doing both.

On the one hand, nothing can clarify a musical issue more than trying to explain it to someone else. Countless passages that I have both played and taught have become clearer to me as a result of teaching them than they were when I was learning the piece myself. As a pianist, I can only speak in terms of the keyboard, but I'm sure the same holds true for other instrumentalists.

On the other hand, playing increases our instrumental IQ. It makes us more aware of the importance of fingering, of how the hands work together, how to solve difficult passages, how to manage texture and color. It marries knowledge to intuition. Elevating a piece to performance level gives us a grasp of the whole work on the cellular level that simply can't be felt without the hands on experience of practicing. It shows us how to make harmony come alive and how to make rhythm leap off the page. Of course we can't learn every piece we teach to that level, but maintaining our own playing has a broad and deep effect on our ability to communicate the art of music making.

Recently, on the plane to New York, I was asked about my reasons for going there by the person in the seat next to me. When I replied that the purpose of my trip was to have piano lessons, she was genuinely amazed that someone who teaches in a college would not know everything there is to know, and would travel all the way across the country for piano lessons. After so many years of playing and teaching, what could possibly be left to learn? Of course as musicians, we know that a hundred lifetimes wouldn't be enough to master it all, and that realization can sometimes be daunting, even overwhelming. Yet isn't that one of the things that keeps us all going? Those discoveries that inform and transform our playing, those sparks of understanding and enlightenment that send waves of comprehension through us, those hours of thought and work that result in our ability to truly express at our instruments, all work their way into our teaching. Every new idea we absorb is a source of inspiration that can be transmitted to our students. If we don't practice and play ourselves, we are robbing ourselves and our students of the potential insights we inevitably gain from our own work and accomplishment.

I've made a promise to myself to read, at the very least, one book on music each quarter. Because of an especially hectic fall, I didn't live up to my commitment over the last three months, but I'll make it up in the next. We are fortunate that many writers are passionate about some little corner of music and can illuminate their special areas of interest for us. We can't all be experts on every subject, but we can benefit from other's research and knowledge, and communicate that to our students. There are more interesting topics that can enrich our understanding of and pleasure in music than we could ever explore. Get started today! That path up Mt. Olympus is long and has many side

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paths. It leads us around endless curves with many wide-angled views of points that shift our points of view. We can look out over the panorama of a writer's thoughts to stimulate our own rumination on performance practice, style, interpretation, and genre. We can learn critically important aspects of a composer's intent and method which provoke changes in our own approach to teaching and playing. Continual learning about music keeps us fresh and vital.

It has often been said that art does not exist in a vacuum. A few years back, while writing a lecture on the relationship of music and literature, I began counting the number of poets that Brahms, Schubert and Schumann set to music. I stopped counting at fifty! Then I looked at Beethoven, Debussy, Wolf, and Mahler. All read extensively, and created unspeakably beautiful music inspired by literature. In fact, each period of music has direct links to the philosophy, literature, culture, and art forms with which it co-existed, and familiarity with those links enhances our understanding and interpretation of the works we teach and perform. Knowledge of dance steps and rhythms gives us great insight into the suites of Bach and other Baroque composers; Haydn's concept of rhetoric served not only as an academic pursuit, but as a philosophical underpinning of the very nature of music; Goethe's involvement in the Sturm und Drang literary movement directly influenced Beethoven's early and middle compositions; many of the figures in Chopin's Nocturnes are the immediate offspring of his love for Bellini's operas. Tracing the influence of cosmology in the music of Bach, the ideal of perfection of form in the classical age, the lone voice of the alienated hero in Romantic music, the devastation of war in the music of Ravel, all are fascinating and revealing subjects, and have a direct bearing on our relationship to the art to which we have dedicated ourselves.

Ours is a profession of privilege, rich rewards, and great responsibility. We are passing on our knowledge and our skill to the next generation. We want to give them our best, so it is up to us to make sure we keep climbing. Most important of all is that we never lose the profound pleasure of learning and making music that allows us to pass our passion on to our students.



# CPE: A Personal Journey

by Chris Engbretson



## About the Author

Chris Engbretson holds a Master of Music degree in choral conducting from Northern Arizona University and a Bachelor of Arts degree in music with a piano performance concentration from Linfield College. He maintains a private piano studio and also serves as visiting assistant professor of music at Linfield College where he teaches class piano, ear training and sight singing, music history, and understanding music.

I feel quite fortunate to have had a rich variety of experiences in my musical life. In terms of my personal story, I pursued my undergraduate studies at Linfield College, where I had the great opportunity to study piano with Dr. Jill Timmons. During my four years in McMinnville I was also heavily involved with the choral program and served as an intern conductor with Dr. Larry Marsh. Upon graduation, I moved to Flagstaff, Arizona, where I began a MM in Choral Conducting with Dr. Edith Copley. At Northern Arizona University I was able to continue working as a collaborative pianist and also hone my conducting skills.

After graduating from NAU, I corresponded with Dr. Timmons about future plans and ways to continue developing as both a musician and as an educator. When an adjunct teaching position became available at my alma mater, I immediately applied. I'm now in my fourth year on faculty at Linfield College, and it has been a tremendous experience.

As a young musician with a good education and relatively little real-world experience outside the "bubble" of academia, I was admittedly a bit nervous about entering the professional world. Fortunately I'm surrounded by talented, generous and experienced mentors who helped me establish myself in the Northwest. Consequently, the advice I most often give to my friends and colleagues is to ask a lot of questions. Make contact with other professionals in our field. Take him or her out for coffee. Brainstorm. We are a community of professionals and all of us have unique strengths and weaknesses that can bolster one another. I have learned some of my most important lessons from the stories and experiences of my mentors. Of course, as all teachers can attest, I've also grown tremendously from my experience in the classroom.

## CPE: A Personal Journey

In terms of my specific professional development, I've been a member of the American Choral Director's Association (ACDA) and am a new member of OMTA and MTNA. My association with these groups is exceedingly beneficial both in terms of professional networking but also in terms of exposure to new ideas, methods, or simply hearing the stories of successes and failures from my colleagues. As private teachers, venturing outside the walls of our personal studios is absolutely critical; we need to meet other professionals, discuss our teaching methods, and willingly and excitedly consider the methods and practices of others. Be open to new ideas. One of my favorite activities as a teacher is to simply sit down with colleagues at Linfield and discuss our teaching methods. I've completely revamped my course curriculum based upon a single conversation or a new text book recommendation.

I suppose the thrust of my advice and the most important component of my personal experience is to *get out there*. Meet new people. Share ideas. Participate in ensembles. Embrace the idea that your teaching method might not be the best. Be excited to grow and change with your students. Doing so has kept me enthusiastic, excited, happy and humble.





# Continuing Professional Education and the Studio Teacher

by Cindy Peterson-Peart, NCTM



## About the Author

Cindy Peterson-Peart, NCTM, holds a BA in music from Willamette University and maintains a private piano studio in Beaverton, Oregon. She is currently President-Elect and Conference Chair of OMTA. In addition, she serves on the boards of OMTA's Portland District and Oregon Federation of Music Clubs. In her spare time, what there is of it, Cindy enjoys performing with Too Grand!, an eight hand piano ensemble that auctions off private concerts in the founders home to benefit local charitable organizations. To date, Too Grand! has raised nearly half a million dollars for charities.

Early in my career when I was a young teacher, I remember having a conversation with Thelma Spencer, a wonderful long-time OMTA member. I was bemoaning the fact that, with small children at home, I barely had time to teach, let alone take advantage of the many wonderful opportunities available through OMTA and MTNA. Her response has stayed with me these many years. She smiled and said "Oh, don't worry. I didn't even start to travel to conferences until I was in my fifties." Sure enough, as my 50th birthday approached, I reflected again on Thelma's words.

Thelma was right. As my children got older and more independent, I was able to take advantage of continuing professional education opportunities. I started with my local district meetings, master classes, and presentations. I branched out to leadership in Portland District (a continuing education experience in and of itself). As Portland District President-Elect, and then as Portland District President, I was required to attend the OMTA State Conferences, which afforded me even greater professional development opportunities than those at my local district level. Even after my term as President, I continued to attend the OMTA State Conference, as well as Portland Piano International's summer institute. It was my annual gift to myself each summer to learn, grow, and renew my energy for teaching.

Then, after many years of teaching and raising my family, my 50th birthday approached. I thought about Thelma and her words of advice and decided that I would take the plunge, travelling to New York City for my first MTNA National Conference in 2012. What a wonderful experience! Not only was it incredibly educational, it was great fun. The opportunity to learn from and interact with other teachers from throughout the nation was invaluable. And it was a great excuse to vacation in the Big Apple! March of 2013 found me (and my husband and grown children) enjoying the sunshine and fun of Disneyland while learning about such diverse topics as the Taubman Approach and how it relates to small hands, brain development and learning



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styles of young children and pre-teens, what the Alexander Technique really entails, and teaching jazz in a traditionally classical studio. I also watched amazing master classes from such gifted clinicians as Ingrid Clarfield and Peter Mack as well as a delightful evening concert by the dynamic piano duo Anderson and Roe. One of the highlights of the conference was an informal question and answer session that included Ingrid Clarfield, Randall Faber and Scott McBride Smith. That session alone, the opportunity to hear from these great pedagogues was worth the registration fee. Although we won't have the warmth of the California sun, my husband and I are looking forward to attending the MTNA Conference in Chicago this March. Just like the OMTA State Conference, the MTNA National Conference has become a valuable part of my teaching year and I look forward to many more years of coupling excellent learning opportunities with fun vacation destinations. What a great way to see the country!

But continuing professional education can be expensive. A trip to New York City or Chicago from Oregon is a costly endeavor. However there are so many wonderful opportunities right here at home, many low cost or free. If nothing else, take advantage of what your local district has to offer. District meetings, master classes, presentations and festivals are great learning opportunities. This year I volunteered at the State Level MTNA Competition. That was a marvelous experience; I learned so much just observing some of the best students in the state. And it was free! If your district isn't very active, consider travelling to another district a few times a year to take advantage of what they have to offer. In Portland District, our events are open to the public and posted on our website. A teacher from Central, Eastern, or Southern Oregon would be welcome to sit in on anything we have to offer and we might even be able to find a teacher to welcome you into their home overnight. OMTA exists to help and support all of our members and, although we are made up of many diverse district organizations, we're all a part of the same whole and are here to help each other learn and grow.

As a part of my 50th birthday observance, I also decided to take advantage of another continuing professional education opportunity, National Certification. At the time I started the process I had been teaching for nearly 30 years. Who knew I could learn so much from assessing my own teaching philosophy, policies, and procedures! I only wish I had done it sooner. As my term as OMTA President approaches, I know that I want use my time in office to encourage members throughout the state to embark on this wonderful process. It can be intimidating, for sure, but there are many of us who are willing to help guide you through. It's such a superb, valuable self-evaluation and validation experience. Whether you're just starting out in your teaching career, or a seasoned veteran, or anywhere in between, you'll be glad you did it.

Finally, I'd like to make a plug for the best continuing professional education experience that OMTA offers. If you've never been to our State Conference, or if it's been many years since you've attended, make this the year you join us. August 8-10 in Newport will be a wonderful weekend. Our guest artist will be Alejandro Cremaschi, an associate

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professor of pedagogy at the University of Colorado Boulder and the current President of the Colorado State Music Teachers Association. Dr. Cremaschi specializes in Latin American music and will have some fascinating presentations to share as well as a wonderful concert on Saturday evening. In addition, we've invited two fabulous presenters from the MTNA National Conference in Anaheim. Kendall Feeney, a faculty member of both Eastern Washington University and the Golandsky Institute, will share her expertise in the Taubman Approach and how it relates to overcoming the challenges of small hands. Dorothy Yan from San Antonio, Texas will give her presentation on "brain games" to get young students engaged and involved in lessons from the minute they walk in the door. We will also have a lecture/demonstration from the wonderful piano quartet, Thunder Egg Consort. They will share their love of chamber music and how teachers can incorporate it into their own studios. Add in master classes from early intermediate to advanced level students and a fun private outing at the Oregon Aquarium and you have an amazing continuing professional education experience for less than what you'd pay for an August weekend at the beach alone.

I encourage you all to begin now, no matter where you are in your career, to make continuing professional education a priority. Don't let the expense deter you. Be creative! Add in a professional development fee to your studio tuition. Or designate a small portion of each student's tuition to go toward your continuing education savings fund. Start small, start local, just start. Because the end result is priceless.



# “I Know I’ll Always Learn Something”: An Interview with Dr. Peter Mack

by Rhonda Ringering, NCTM

Photo by Michelle Smith-Lewis



## About Peter Mack

Irish pianist Peter Mack is in great demand as a performer, clinician, convention artist, adjudicator, and teacher. Celebrated for his moving performances, and his easy rapport with audiences, he has performed throughout the United States and Europe, as well as in Australia, India, and the former Soviet Union. He is the winner of the New Orleans, Young Keyboard Artists, and Pacific International Piano Competitions. His prize in the Sherman-Clay competition included a Steinway grand piano. Naturally, he is a Steinway artist!

Peter Mack is well known for his extensive repertoire, having performed twenty-six concertos with orchestras. A choral scholar at Trinity College Dublin, and a fellow of Trinity College London, he has a doctorate in piano performance from the University of Washington. His principal teachers were Frank Heneghan, and Bela Siki.

In 2013, Dr. Mack received the extraordinary honor of being asked to deliver both the Advanced Piano Masterclass at the Music Teachers National Association (MTNA)

*(Continued next page)*

Over the years I have had the honor of attending many of Dr. Peter Mack’s master classes and have come away from each of them inspired by his unique blend of high musical standards, humor, and warmth. As I watched him draw sensitive playing out of young pianists in an advanced piano master class at MTNA’s 2013 convention in Anaheim, I knew I wanted to know more about how he continues to grow as an artist and teacher and why he shares so much of his time and talent with his colleagues. Mack graciously agreed to this long-distance interview with thoughtful insights and his trademark candidness.

### ***Why is it important to give back?***

Part of what is lovely about our profession is that we have all benefited from the generosity of those who came before us. It’s nice to feel part of a chain, passing our knowledge on to colleagues, and to the next generation. But I have a far more selfish reason; I find that I get at least as much as I give! I learn so much from the people that I meet.

### ***How do you keep up with your own CPE?***

I go to conferences; I’m especially excited to be going to the MTNA conference in Chicago in March

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annual convention in California, and the Masterclass for MTNA Winners at the biennial National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy (NCKP) in Illinois. His students are frequent winners of local, national, and international competitions. He is the proud teacher of fifteen MTNA national finalists, and two MTNA national first place winners. Dr. Mack is Professor of Piano Performance at Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle.

“Mack is one of those lucky ones, born with a completely balanced set of talents. He has perfect piano hands, his technique is all but infallible, he has boundless temperament, style and taste, and above all, he communicates directly . . . In all capacities he is indefatigable . . .”

—*Los Angeles Times*

2014, partly because I helped to plan it! I attend lectures. I watch videos on YouTube. I go to concerts. At competitions, I make sure not only to watch my own students play, but also those of others. I have several close friends who are piano nerds, just as I am. When we get together we gossip of course, but we also share our discoveries, and attempt to solve each other’s problems. I read magazines and books. I haunt secondhand bookstores, looking for scores and recordings. It’s a full life!

I really enjoy teaching master classes. It’s important to remember that the people being taught in the master class are actually those sitting in the audience. The performers on stage are often so nervous that they aren’t really able to take in any of the information in a meaningful way. But the audience members are more relaxed, and more receptive. So I direct most of my attention to them.

I also firmly believe that master classes have to be entertaining. I teach at Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle. For a while we had the great Wagnerian soprano Jane Eaglen on our faculty. I will always remember being at one of her master classes in which she said “We are all in the entertainment business!” If she is in the entertainment business, then I certainly am. So I try to make my classes fun, and fairly fast-paced.

I love going to master classes because I am always on the lookout

# “I Know I’ll Always Learn Something”: An Interview with Dr. Peter Mack

for new concepts, new ideas, or new ways to say the things I’m already trying to convey. It’s also interesting to watch someone giving a master class to see how they deal with the allotted time, and what they prioritize. I know I’ll always learn something. Even if the master class doesn’t go so well, it teaches us what not to do!

## ***Who has taught you the most about being an excellent instructor?***

I was fortunate to study with many excellent instructors. My time with Bela Siki at the University of Cincinnati, and then at the University of Washington particularly stands out. However, I would have to say that the person who made me decide that I wanted to become a pianist is the teacher I had from the age of 14 until the age of 22. His name is Frank Heneghan, and he was my teacher at the College of Music in Dublin, Ireland. He inspires me because he’s a great teacher, working particularly with beautiful sound, great balance, and tremendous personality. But more than that, he is extraordinarily generous with his time, and every lesson is utterly intense. He never coasts, he always cares, and he never gives up until you’ve got it right. Although he is now retired, and in his 80s, he spends most of his time traveling the world teaching and lecturing wherever he goes. He has twice the energy and enthusiasm of people half his age.

## ***What are your most rewarding moments as a master teacher or clinician?***

I get the greatest satisfaction when a student does something good that it would never occur to me to do. Many students do what their teacher says. But if, in the course of the lesson or master class, a student comes up with something original on their own, then that’s the greatest feeling of all.

My advice to young teachers regarding their own CPE would be: to get out, go to things, and try to learn from as many different people as they possibly can. Also, learn as much repertoire as you possibly can at an early age. It’s much harder for me now that I am in my 50s, to retain the pieces I learned recently. However, the pieces I learned in my teens and 20s I can play still at the drop of a hat.

Teachers living in rural areas with little access to most CPE opportunities are more fortunate now than they used to be, because of the Internet. There are so many wonderful performances of the true greats on YouTube, so many masters classes and recordings, so many scores on IMSLP [free public domain sheet music site, [www.imslp.org](http://www.imslp.org)], that geographical isolation is no longer quite the limiting factor it once was. And, they should go to the Chicago conference!

## ***What are we doing well in our teaching?***

I think that the teaching of technique has improved immeasurably since the time I was a child. Pieces that I played in graduate school are now routinely showing up in the youngest age category of the MTNA competition finals. When did “Gaspard de la Nuit” become something suitable for teenagers? We understand a lot more about the mechanics of playing the piano than we did decades ago.

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## ***What is our greatest teaching weakness?***

I think one of the most important things that we do as teachers is to make sure that our students have a really good grasp of style, and that they understand the need for variety in performances of music from different time periods. As I go around the state, and the country listening to young pianists, a lot of what I hear sounds the same no matter what the time period.

I find the least satisfying performances being given of classical repertoire. For me, it’s by far the most difficult to teach well. I’m more likely to hear ten thunderous Liszts than I am to hear even one delightful Haydn sonata. One can hide a great deal in the raptures of Rachmaninoff, but a Mozart minuet exposes everything.

## ***How do you balance compassion and the need for precision in your master classes?***

I think it’s tremendously important to be kind to the students who have volunteered to play in the master class. They are in a tremendously vulnerable position. But no matter what happens on stage, they always deserve our respect. When I was very young, I had a very mean teacher. Sometimes, especially when I am tired, I find that I can slip unconsciously into the teaching patterns that she used to use. I really try to guard against it. Our main goal should be that students want to play more after they have left us. They won’t all make their lives in music, but we hope that they will all love music. Being abusive to them—either in lessons or in master classes—won’t achieve that end. Fortunately, I think that the days of the really unpleasant teachers are drawing to a close.

I’m certainly not going to pillory a student in a master class for technical imperfections. Besides, my own playing is far from being pristinely clean, so who am I to criticize them?

## ***What advice would you give to all who are working to be the best teachers we can be?***

It’s most important that we enjoy what we do. Lessons must be somewhat enjoyable. If we are not having a good time, then the student probably isn’t either, and that’s not going to make them want to practice, or to keep going when it gets tough. It’s important to be demanding, and to have high standards; students really respond to sensible challenges. But it’s also important to remember that the most valuable gift we can give our students is the love of the art, and the desire to create music long after we are gone.

And everyone should go to the Chicago conference in March 2014!



# New Voices

by Alicia Barrett



## About the Author

Pianist, piano instructor, music director and church musician, Alicia Barrett has been an active musician in Forest Grove for nearly ten years. As an instructor, she has experience working with students of all ages and levels. She holds a Bachelor's degree from the University of Oregon. For more information, visit [www.aliciabarrettpiano.com](http://www.aliciabarrettpiano.com).

One of the only things that makes a musician better is a commitment to working on our abilities and continual creative growth. This applies to everyone from the most beginning musicians to professional pianists. Running a studio with 35 students is a lot of work, but in order to be successful I know I need to continue take care of myself and my playing. Shortly after graduating from the University of Oregon the opportunity to buy a successful studio presented itself and I jumped on it. Within the span of a few months I needed to learn how to balance teaching with my own growth as a pianist. I realized that in order to be the best teacher for my students I needed to continue to learn beyond what my college degree had taught me.

First and foremost the most important thing to a musician, I discovered, is the time spent in the practice room. It is not just time though; it is quality time practicing that makes a musician better. With a busy schedule that most piano teachers have it can be difficult to find time to practice on a regular basis. For me, it is almost impossible to find the two hours a day that I prefer to practice in an uninterrupted block. In order to even have a chance at getting my full practice time, I take advantage of every free minute I get between lessons. The benefit to this style is twofold: not only am I able to fit practicing into my day, but when my students walk up to my studio they often see and hear me practicing. This serves as a good role model for them, which motivates them to practice.

One of the ways I keep myself motivated to practice is by making a performance goal for myself at the end of each year. This last year I organized and played for a concert benefiting the local community theatre. I picked challeng-



ing pieces that I knew would take a lot of practice and would make me a better player. In preparation for this recital I sought input from other pianists in the Portland area. I benefited from these lessons so much that I decided to make lessons with other pianists a semi-regular thing. In addition to the benefit concert, I am regularly involved with my local community theatre more directly as both a pianist and music director. This helps me in a different way than performing by myself, as it gives me the opportunity to work with musicians from different backgrounds and skill levels. With such busy rehearsal schedules I find myself playing constantly. For this last production I was playing, for the show alone, five days a week for three hours a night.

In addition to all of this work at a personal level, joining OMTA has helped me immensely. The resources now available to me are invaluable. Surrounding myself with other motivated teachers has encouraged me both as a musician and teacher. I now strive to be the best performer I can—both for myself and my students.



# Ask Artsmentor

by Dr. Jill Timmons



## About the Author

Jill Timmons, professor emerita at Linfield College, performs internationally as a solo and ensemble artist and has recorded on the Laurel, Centaur, and Capstone labels. She is the author of: *The Musician's Journey: Crafting Your Vision and Plan* (Oxford University Press, March 2013). You can find her in her Lake Oswego studio teaching, practicing, or writing her next book!

Dear Artsmentor,

I certainly understand the need for continuing professional education and in fact, there are a number of things I would like to pursue. But with a large teaching studio to maintain, my work on committees for OMTA, and family responsibilities, I find it next to impossible to tend to my own professional development. Any advice for one who is overscheduled?

*Pressed for Time*  
in Portland

Dear *Pressed*,

It's a great question and as you know, you are not alone in feeling squeezed for time. It's a common lament I hear from my clients. The nature of work within a private teaching studio is primarily one-on-one, highly personal, and requires additional time beyond the scheduled lesson. Most private teachers have home studios and so if there are other people in the house, the bleed through between work and family is ever-present. I may be thoroughly engrossed in practicing for my next concert but that won't stop my son from asking: "Has anyone seen my blue sweatshirt?" The first step in finding time for your own professional development may be in creating clear boundaries between work and the rest of your life.

I'd like to suggest that you approach your continuing professional education from a new angle—one of self-reward! For me, CPE can't be one more thing to do or yet another "add-on." Rather, it is a reward for my

work, my commitment to the profession, and provides me with something that is essential for my well-being. Tangentially, it also keeps my “tool kit” up to date. CPE can be something as simple as working with a colleague who knows more about a subject than you do. It can also mean reconnecting with your own piano study; not the ubiquitous weekly piano lesson but something far more creative. Maybe you set your sites on studying a certain work or even a program. You ramp up on coaching in the summer when there is typically more time available. Then as the academic year unfolds, you sculpt your practice time around that summer work you did to launch your project. You check in once a month with your coach. The key here is to keep it simple and not something that pushes you beyond the point of no return in over scheduling. Most of us can find time for self care. We regularly attend to our appearance, our health, and even the occasional escapist novel. CPE can be a welcome inclusion to those sustaining activities.

Another approach to CPE can be found in the professional immersion or retreat. I thoroughly enjoy attending these kinds of events and have done so for decades. Sometimes I am a performer, sometimes an auditor. Either way, I always come away enriched. We encounter superb music professionals in these distilled events and we have a rare opportunity to make new networking connections and lasting friendships. Where else can we talk shop endlessly, sometimes for days at a time? It’s heaven. I like the term the French use for this type of continuing education: stage. It’s a training course. This broad term truly encompasses what we are likely to find. You might consider the OMTA State Convention, for example.

So as you consider your options for the coming year, I would strongly encourage you to reflect upon what it is you would like to learn. Will this curiosity lead you to exploring new repertoire in your practicing and perhaps finding a mentor or coach? Perhaps this will include a focused pedagogy project over the course of the year. Will you find a special immersion course that offers you enrichment and renewal? Or will you put together a combination of these approaches? Whatever direction you choose, look to satisfying your curiosity. Treat yourself to learning something new. This can richly enhance what you bring to your students and your own connection with music. You may also discover along the way a renewed passion for what you do.



# Coda

*We don't stop playing because we grow old;  
we grow old because we stop playing.*

~ George Bernard Shaw ~

