

GMTA TEACHER OF THE YEAR 2003



JEANNINE MORRISON, *NCTM*

BIOGRAPHY

The recipient of the 2003 GMTA Teacher of the Year Award is Jeannine Morrison. A native Atlantan, Jeannine has nurtured the love of music in countless students over her 50-year teaching career and established a reputation as a loving, caring teacher with high standards, impeccable musicianship, and the ability to motivate her students to do their very best. One of her students writes, "I am constantly amazed at how much she gives of herself and inspires that in her students." Another writes, "I owe much of my success to her and everything she's taught me – not just music, but confidence, poise and grace." And a fellow GMTA member states, "I have learned so much from her in life lessons as well as piano lessons."

Jeannine is a founding member of the South Metro Atlanta MTA and currently serves as Co-President for the Decatur MTA and program chair for the Atlanta Music Club. She is also Professor Emeritus of Music at Clayton College and State University, where she began teaching in 1972, and a Past President of the Atlanta Music Club.

She received her Bachelor of Music from Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, a Master of Arts from Columbia University in New York, and the Licentiate Diploma from the Royal Academy of Music in London. She continued with additional study under Dr. Edwin Hughes of New York during the last 13 years of his life.

Jeannine holds MTNA Master Teacher Certification and has assisted at least 10 other private teachers in their own preparation for state certification. Her students have been the recipients of many awards in GMTA and other solo and concerto competitions. Many of them have established successful careers as performing and teaching musicians in private, academic and professional arenas. They have also earned scholarships to a number of highly respected institutions, including the Peabody Conservatory, Curtis Institute, Indiana University, Florida State University and Furman University, as well as a number of schools here in Georgia.

The recipient of numerous honors recognizing her talent and abilities, Jeannine became in 1988 the first Georgia pianist to be named to the Baldwin Piano Company Artist's roster. She also served for 3 years as a judge for the Fulbright Scholarship awards in New York and continues to adjudicate for several other organizations that she belongs to, including the National Guild of Piano Teachers, the Leschetizsky Association, and the Liszt Society.

She has given debut recitals in New York's Town Hall and the National Gallery of Arts in Washington, D.C., earning enthusiastic press reviews in both cities. Critics hailed her debut with the Atlanta Symphony as well, calling it a sensation. She is well known for her collaborative endeavors with long-time duo-piano partner Joanne Rogers. Since 1976, they have performed over 350 concerts together and led a number of master classes and workshops throughout the US.

Jeannine's teaching and service to the music profession and community has touched the lives of many in a significant and enduring way. Congratulations to an exceptional teacher, Jeannine Morrison, GMTA's 2003 Teacher of the Year!

JEANNINE MORRISON TEACHING TIPS

MAKING THE DIFFICULT "SPOTS" EASIER

Each piano student is different! That is one aspect of teaching piano that makes our work interesting and varied. One must study a student's physical capacity, especially his/her "playing mechanism." Obviously, after a few lessons we try to understand the mental and emotional capabilities of each student, also. An experienced teacher will work with each person according to his/her capacities and will be reasonable in their expectations and goals for each student.

Keeping the above concepts in mind, try to approach each problem passage in the music with the most logical solution. Have the student study the score and determine what is required of his/her hands and fingers in order to execute the passage. Planned fingering is essential to the success of playing correctly. Establish the fingering and stick to it. Faulty and careless fingering creates most problems.

Work with a very small amount of the music, note-to-note, chord-to-chord, hands separately when necessary, and drill, drill, drill. Most students will not stop after two or three notes or chords, or even after one measure. To help the student remember to practice the difficult spots while practicing independently, I use a post-it note and cover the place to stop. I usually write on the note – go back and repeat this segment ten times, or fifteen times, or whatever it takes to conquer the passage. As my first music teacher used to say, "Take a small bite of steak and chew it really well before trying to swallow." I always remind students of the complexity of one note in the score – that is, it represents a pitch, a specific finger, a rhythm (or duration), a dynamic level, an articulation, and the note's importance in any given phrase.

When studying hymns on the piano always sing the melody, and if possible the alto, the tenor or the bass part. This enhances ear training and phrasing. It is time to make a new phrase when you run out of breath.

Planned pedaling is also crucial and so often neglected. I once heard a famous pedagogue say “pedal with your ears.” This will work for the experienced students, but giving very specific instructions and drills in using the pedals is crucial.

Hopefully, these few suggestions will open a new avenue in your teaching habits, and make piano lessons more enjoyable for the student and teacher alike.

Happy teaching!

Jeannine Romer Morrison

Professor Emerita of Music
Clayton College and State University
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