

2019 GMTA TEACHER OF THE YEAR Huu Mai



Have you ever wanted to visit another teacher's studio and be a fly on the wall? Learn their secrets, watch them in action with their students? While reading the letters of recommendations from students, parents and colleagues of this year's Teacher of the Year, I wanted to be that fly on the wall. Here are some phrases used to describe him:

Enthusiastic, always positive, teaches us life skills as well as piano lessons, compassionate, role model/mentor, always thinking about how to do things better, energetic (Do you want to know his secret for this at 3:00 in the afternoon before a long evening of teaching?), highly skilled in music, yet maintains a remarkable level of humility

These are words from a student: "He genuinely cared for his students and their personal journeys with piano. Competitions were not the first priority, but rather, he chose to see his students and their needs as well as strengths first and foremost. He reminded me that my playing was a story and a means of communication"

A parent commented: "He takes on students far older than the traditional private music student and teaches adult students with the same care and enthusiasm that he shows toward younger students."

I would like to share some excerpts from his teaching hints:

A Beautiful Dream

As a child, I experienced many moments of excruciating suffering. The world as I knew it was sparse of compassion and kindness. Loneliness became my constant companion. When I heard orchestral music for the first time, I was shocked by how joyful it was. "How could music be so joyful in such a world?"

In high school I became an idealistic dreamer who believed all things were founded in love. Music was my salvation. It saved me, for I could express the deepest of pain, soul-shattering outcries of despair, as well as the fire of hope and dreams of what a perfect love might feel like. I loved performing. They became opportunities for me to be free, if just for a few minutes at a time.....I believe to the core of my being that music is one of the most powerful forms of living magic.

We yearn for freedom. Freedom from fears. Freedom to express. Freedom to be our best selves. Freedom to dream, to believe, to love. ... Imagine if we could help another discover this freedom.So when you sit with your precious students, remember the magic of music.For if through music you can help one student find a bit of beauty and of freedom, have you not succeeded in making our world more beautiful?

Our 2019 TOTY is Huu Mai. He began his musical journey at the age of seven with piano lessons in Salt Lake City, Utah. In 1993 he moved to Georgia where he began his violin studies. He composed his first musical works at age 13 and dreamed of being a composer and conductor. As a passionate advocate of the musical arts, he has dedicated much of his life's work toward the proliferation and achievement of music education. A

passionate believer in passing on the gift of music, his students have been recognized nationally and internationally.

He is a frequent guest lecturer having presented for numerous associations including chapters of the MTNA and the College Music Society National Conference. Mr. Mai's presentations include *Circular Technique*, *The Art of Practice Bach and Math*, *Developing Artistry: Keys to Unlocking Musicality* and *Breathing and Rhythm: The Missing Link to Expression*. In addition to speaking engagements, he is an active adjudicator with the Georgia Music Teachers Association and throughout the southeast.

A believer in the importance of service to the community, Mr. Mai served as president of the Cobb County Music Teachers Association from 2012-2016. In 2009, Mr. Mai co-founded the "Rising Star Concerto Competition" along with Eriko Ishikawa and Robert Trocina.

In 2001, he was a recipient of the Steinway John Innes Grant and received 1st prize in the GMEA Collegiate Piano Competition. He holds a B.M. from Kennesaw State University in Piano Performance, where he studied with David Watkins. He is certified with the Yamaha Music Education System for which he taught from 2004-2008.

He has performed with orchestras as a concerto artist and as a collaborative artist with saxophonist, Thomas Giles and violinist, Sinisa Ciric. He has served as music director of several churches in Atlanta. In 2014, Mr. Mai conducted the Atlanta premier of "Shanti: A Journey of Peace" by Kanniks Kannikeswaran featuring a diverse ensemble including a Hindustani chorus, a western chorus, full orchestra, Hindustani instrumentalists, and traditional Indian dancers. An avid composer, a number of his compositions have been featured in concerts including his song cycle, "Three Songs of Eternity," choral works, "Image" and "You Are Not Forsaken," among many others. His music spans many genres from concert music, Broadway, and contemporary commercial music.

Currently Artist-in-Residence in Piano at the Kennesaw State University School of Music, Mr. Mai's intention is to inspire aspiring musicians to develop into the versatile, proficient, and imaginative artists our ever-evolving world demands.

He is delightfully married to his soul-mate, Marielle. He loves cooking haute cuisine, playing tennis, exploring the outdoors with his wife, and living life!

As we honor and congratulate our 2019 TOTY -Huu Mai - let us follow his advice: "Make yourself the best version of you that you can imagine. Expect the highest from yourself as you should your students. Aim for excellence in all aspects of your lessons. And most importantly, remember to dream a most beautiful dream."

**Georgia Music Teachers Association
Teacher of the Year, 2019 – Huu Mai
Teaching Tips**

What is music to you? Music was my salvation. As a child, I experienced many moments of excruciating suffering. The world as I knew it was sparse of compassion and kindness. Loneliness became my constant companion. When I heard orchestral music for the first time, I was shocked by how joyful it was. “How could music be so joyful in such a world?” I thought. As I grew older and a bit wiser, I realized by my early teenage years that I was not alone in wanting to live in a better world. The deep yearning I felt within myself was also within the great composers. I knew I was not alone. How could others write of such beauty unless they, too, yearned for it? Perhaps, they had even experienced such beauty in their lives.

By the time I entered high school, I was a fully-fledged dreamer. I became an idealistic dreamer who believed all things were founded in love. Music was my salvation. It saved me, for I could express the deepest of pain, soul-shattering outcries of despair, as well as the fire of hope and dreams of what a perfect love might feel like. I loved performing. They became opportunities for me to be free, if just for a few minutes at a time. I would listen to Samuel Barber’s *Adagio for Strings* every morning before school to *feel* and to summon the courage to *really live*.

You see, I believe to the core of my being that music is one of the most powerful forms of living magic. The core of music is sound and silence. And sound is resonance. All things resonate. Even our emotions, our very beings, our intentions. The purest forms of love are resonance. Resonance does not want to be stifled. It does not fear. It knows only *freedom*. The freedom to *be*. And when we listen to the wisdom and love in the *Intermezzo in A Major, op. 118, no. 2* by Johannes Brahms, if we surrender ourselves and allow our spirits to sympathetically resonate with the emotions of the music, we cannot help but be transformed by it. We become a bit wiser, more thoughtful. Kinder. Is this not magical?

We yearn for freedom. Freedom from fears. Freedom to express. Freedom to be our best selves. Freedom to dream, to believe, to love. This is my dream. And it is beautiful to me. Imagine if we could help another discover this freedom. This is my dream. So when you sit with your precious students, remember the magic of music. Remember this beautiful dream. For if through music you can help one student find a bit of beauty and of freedom, have you not succeeded in making our world more beautiful?

Aspire, in all aspects of your teaching to be compassionate, to be caring, to be kind, to believe in your students, to aim for the highest beauty that you can imagine, to see the beauty in your students, to help them grow as people and as artists, to give them the greatest opportunities to succeed, to listen and *hear* them, to help them rise up when they are down, to go the extra mile when no one else will, and to be grateful for every precious moment you have with them. Teaching is as much about being transformed by our students as it is about sharing our knowledge and wisdom with them.

One last thing. Make yourself the best version of you that you can imagine. You deserve it, and your students will benefit for it. Expect the highest from yourself as you should your students. Aim for excellence in all aspects of your lessons. And most importantly, remember to dream a most beautiful dream.