



NEW ENGLAND

PIANO TEACHERS' Assoc., Inc.

February 1, 2009

Dear Colleagues,

We usually can think of February as our last real month of winter in New England; let's sincerely hope that that is the case this year. Too much snow and lots of ice have put a damper on many things, but luckily we have our music to keep us occupied and content!

Our student recitals have not yet been affected by snow, and our monthly programs have continued to flourish, with wonderful speakers and good attendance.

In January **Virginia Eskin** led us through a program on Schumann, MacDowell, and Liszt with colorful language and dynamic playing. **Jean Alderman's** notes for the morning are included with this newsletter. Notes by **Linda Vieira** from our November Teacher's Exchange are also included.

This month we will hear from **Anne Sears**, Professor of Music at Wheaton College, who has done extensive work in research and performance on American Music, and African-American Music in particular. Please read her full biography on p. 14 in our Yearbook.

There are still more recitals to attend – Sunday, March 1 is the Senior Recital, and Sunday, March 22 is the Adult Recital.

DEADLINES for the Competitions are coming up very soon – February 23 for the Middle School Competition, held on March 22, and March 2 for the Ruth Davidson High School Competition, and Alice Hamlet Senior Competition, both held on March 29.

Our Music Donations Chair, **Ruth Ross**, is gearing up for another "sale" at the March meeting at First Parish. Bring your own donations that day (early, please) and plan to look for items others are donating. Members who have CD's of their performances that they might wish to donate are encouraged to bring them, too. All proceeds go to our Scholarship Fund.

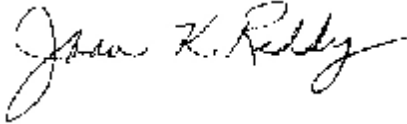
The Board, at their recent meeting, decided that we would not accept announcements for our newsletter or extra announcements on email that did not directly involve a member or members of NEPTA. If you wish to make an announcement about an event you think might be of interest to some members, please come to a meeting and tell those assembled.

The Board would also like to encourage more members to apply for student aid for lessons, piano maintenance, and music through the Miriam Pizer Award (given out in the fall) or the Grants-in-Aid program, available throughout the year. The Pizer Award is chosen by lottery; the Grants-in-Aid by application to Scholarship Chair, **Carol Chaffee**.

The NEPTA 2009 Membership Update is included with this newsletter.

I look forward to seeing you all in the gatherings ahead.

Sincerely yours,



Joan K. Reddy
President

February NEPTA Announcements

Janice Zaganjori, Chair of the Intermediate II recitals, announced that on Sunday, Feb. 1, the following eighth grade students were chosen to receive the Wanda Paik Award:

- Lucy Chai, student of **Luba Pyatkovskaya**, who performed “The Lark,” by Balakirev
- Raagini Rameshwar, student of **Janet Ainsworth**, who performed the first movement of Beethoven’s Sonata in A major, Op. 2, No. 2
- Kyuil Lee, student of **Wanda Paik**, who performed Dohnanyi’s Rhapsodien in F# minor, Op. 11, No. 2
- Felix Chen, student of **Faina Kofman**, who performed the first movement of Beethoven’s Sonata in F major, Op. 10, No. 2

Tanya Shrago will offer a violin/piano recital, Music to Warm Your Heart, with **Olga Kachanova**, violin, on Thursday, Feb. 19 at 7pm at the Manchester Community Music School, 2291 Elm Street, Manchester, NH.

The Sounds of Stow Chorus and Orchestra, under the direction of **Barbara Jones**, will celebrate the 200th anniversary of Mendelssohn’s birth, performing his “Magnificat,” composed when he was 13, the beautiful “Verleih’ uns Frieden,” and “Lauda Sion,” the last choral /orchestra work he composed. In addition, **Ming-Chi Tsai** will perform the violin concerto in E minor. The program will conclude with Beethoven’s “Choral Fantasy,” **Ernest Goldman**, piano. Sunday, March 22, 3pm, Hale Middle School, Stow Center (just off Rte. 117). Tickets available at the door. Visit www.soundsofstow.com or call Barbara at 987-562-2620 for more information.

Inga Magid announces that Keys for Kids music school in Lexington will hold its second annual evaluation for piano students. All interested piano teachers are invited to participate. They are also looking for qualified judges for evaluation.

The evaluation consists of 11 progressive levels, including technique, sight reading, transposition, ear training, and repertoire. Evaluations are to be held twice a year, late spring and fall. Please contact Inga at Inga@keys-for-kids.com with questions.

The Longy School Preparatory Division announces auditions for its Summer Afternoon Piano Program on Sunday, March 15 and, if space is still available, on Sunday, March 29. The program will run weekdays except July 4 from 12:30 to 5pm from Wednesday, July 1 through Friday, July 17. Designed for students ages 10 to 18, the program’s daily schedule will include daily piano duet coaching, rehearsal periods, and chorus as well as a variety of enrichment activities. Students will perform in Pickman Hall on the last day. Faculty will include **Deborah Beers**, **Shaylor Lindsay**, **Eleanor Perrone**, and **Alice Wilkinson**. Tuition for the program is \$695, plus \$30 registration fee. Call Denise Carter at 617-876-0956 X1650 or email her at Denise.carter@longy.edu to sign up for an audition. You can also contact NEPTA member **Deborah Beers**, coordinator of the program, at 781-861-6884 or at Deborah.beers@longy.edu to ask questions.

Virginia Eskin's presentation: "MacDowell and his mentors, Schumann, and Liszt"

January 26, 2009

Notes by Jean Alderman

Virginia Eskin's topic, "MacDowell and his mentors, Schumann, and Liszt" was demonstrated in pairs, e.g., "Traumerai" by Schumann and then by MacDowell; "Elf," by Schumann, then MacDowell's "Elfin Dance;" etc. The linkages of subjects, motives, moods and keys were presented in ebullient performances by Ms. Eskin -- with dazzling technical facility and memory.

Parenthetically, she made a comparison between the singer who has the breath support to carry out the long line, who controls the sound until her body stops it, and the poor pianist, who desperately wants the long line but whose control is lost the moment the sound begins..."except for our weapon, the pedal." And she wields hers with great control and imagination. She believes in, and uses, the sostenuto to stunning effect.

MacDowell (1861-1908) studied for a short time with Liszt before he died in 1886. Ms. Eskin spoke warmly of Liszt, his bravura and sexiness in his young days, then his deep spirituality and enormous generosity later in life. She credits him with bridging us into atonality and Schoenberg, and suggests reading Allen Walker, Liszt's definitive biographer.

As romantic, poetic, nature-loving composers, all three, Schumann, Liszt and MacDowell, used themes of Idylls, Forests, Legends, Elves and Flowers for inspiration.

After intermission, the subject changed to women composers, of whom Ms. Eskin has long been a champion. She played some wonderful Fanny Mendelssohn from her "Songs without Words," confessing that she prefers Fanny to Felix, and making us laugh with, "And Kurt Masur, a man of tremendous power, giving us all Mendelssohn programs! We don't NEED more Mendelssohn." It was a passionate outburst from a woman who believes the new, the current, the unknown should be heard. She lives her belief.

Ms. Eskin singled out the Czech composer Vitezslava Kapralova (1915-1940), playing two of her "Dubnova Preludia" - beautiful music. (See www.kapralova.org.) Then she charged into several interesting rags by women, with an electrifying left hand and hyperbolic projection. She says, "You have to be hyperbolic and you HAVE to communicate."

Her wide-ranging pianistic skills and life experience, her powers of recollection and eloquence and her energy, all projected with a friendly, funny, personal style, gave us an exhilarating morning, hard to capture on the page.

NEPTA Teacher's Exchange

November 17, 2008

Gleanings from Readings: Highlighted and Underscored

Presented by Shelley Reeves, Barbara Jones, Shann Wood and Nancy Shad

Notes by Linda G. Vieira

Shelley Reeves discussed This is Your Brain On Music: The Science of a Human Obsession by Daniel Levitin. Mr. Levitin is a "rocker" and engineer who went into science. As an example of how he combines these interests, he wired up the Boston Pops to see how the audience responded to the orchestra. His book begins with a general introduction to music that has broad appeal with examples from pop, jazz and classical music.

He states that we all have a musical brain with auditory functioning beginning at 20 weeks. Pitch, timbre, rhythm are processed all at once. The frontal lobes anticipate and make predictions on what **will come next in music**. Non-musicians may not have the terms to describe this but it still happens to them. A musician's brain develops more in the area that involves naming. A violation of what we expect is what makes music interesting. A good composer knows when to meet our expectations and when to surprise us. Twentieth century music does not set up expectations; its intention is to eliminate the tonal center and/or rhythm. Since there is no violation of expectations, there is no emotional attachment.

In Chapter 5, Mr. Levitin writes about how we categorize music using a multiple trace model. Animals cannot recognize songs if they are transposed. The human brain has "gist memory" in that we can understand music if it is transposed. He doesn't think that perfect pitch that rare. Perhaps many people have this latent ability but have to learn to name pitches. We could help our students do this.

One cannot tell if music is deviating from the norm if you don't know what the norm is. Perhaps we move our students along so quickly that they miss what is the norm and don't get the surprise in music e.g. why Beethoven is funny at times.

The connection from the auditory center to our emotions is strong. Sound creates a startle response and we react without thought of survival. At a MIT conference, researchers felt that music is an evolutionary accident: it came along with language and serves no evolutionary purpose. Although there is a strong connection from our motor centers to music, humans have recently divorced movement from music. Spectators at music events are a fairly recent occurrence. In chimpanzees, males sing to attract females. Music is like a peacock's tale; singers and dancers attract the best mates because they have better stamina and can provide food and shelter. About 50,000 years ago, music became generalized throughout the population. Singing is what makes us human. Although pleasure seeking activities tend to disappear, music has remained.

The connection between the two lobes of the brain is overdeveloped in musicians because we use both sides of our brain frequently. Good music readers tend to use the left brain and memorizers tend to use the right brain. Training can help students use both sides more evenly.

Music is most memorable when there is a strong emotional connection or attachment. The taste that we develop is tagged in our brain during adolescence. It is important to assign listening to students during their teen years.

Barbara Jones talked about Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain by Oliver Sacks, who is an accomplished amateur musician. She defined Musicophilia as an abnormal appetite or liking of music. This book is antidotal and contains many "adventure stories" about what is odd, unusual or unexplained in people's relationship to music.

There is a story about a man struck by lightning who developed an overwhelming urge to listen to and play piano music. There are also examples of people who have nonstop musical hallucinations and children with Williams Syndrome who are highly gifted musicians but have child like intellects.

There is a wide range of musicality from perfect pitch to musical savant to someone who is amusica. What is considered normal is arbitrary and we are all a variation of that. Barbara stated that she thinks of her students as being somewhere on a continuum and feels one must be inventive to reach students.

This book does not come to any conclusions but illustrates that music is the most profound link we have. She said this is the kind of book you can read in parts and also highly recommended other books by Oliver Sacks.

Shann Wood had read Mindset: the New Psychology of Success by Carol S. Dweck, PH.D and discussed an article entitled "Brainology: Transforming Students' Motivation to Learn also by Ms. Dweck.

Our brains are constantly changing through learning and experience. A student may see their intelligence as something that's fixed (fixed mindset) or as having a potential that can grow through learning (growth mindset). With a fixed mindset, a person thinks that being smart is valued so it becomes important to maintain that image for themselves and with others. Because they think their intelligence is fixed, they choose tasks which they can succeed at and are afraid of challenges and devastated by setbacks.

In contrast, a student with a growth mindset likes challenges and is resilient in the face of setbacks because they think they can become smarter. In the 1990's, parents and educators believed building a child's self esteem was most important. However, praising a child's intelligence or talent encourages a fixed mindset and can actually undermine motivation. Reinforcing the process of learning, challenging a student and praising him/her for their hard work and effort encourages a growth mindset which leads to greater potential and development.

Nancy Schaad spoke about her recent Master's thesis research at Lesley University regarding the effect of music on the brain. An internship at Sarasota Opera showed her that the intellectual study of a new musical art form can lead to a deeper physical and emotional response to the music. This led to the creation of her course "Music and the Brain, Body and Emotions."

She learned that researchers have only been mapping the brain for a little over ten years and they have proven that there is not one center in the brain for processing music - but many.

The brain has two basic functions:

- anticipating patterns in daily life and
- processing change" in these patterns.

Music can consist of simple patterns or ,at its most complex, can be full of change. Gottfried Schlaug, a neuroscientist from Harvard University has completed a study showing that the corpus callosum (the area of the brain connecting the left and right hemisphere) is larger in musicians who have studied keyboard from an early age. He believes this larger area "may improve motor control by speeding up communication between the hemispheres" (Discover 2).

Studies have also shown that in non-musicians, melody is processed in the right brain and harmony in the left. However, professional musicians favor the "left hemisphere for perceiving melodies and found cerebral dominance for melody 'migrates' from right brain to left as the individual acquires musical training" (Jourdain 84).

She provided a list of books about the brain and music and has started an educational business called "Music and Lifelong Learning: teaching students how to bring music actively into their lives."

She can be reached at www.nschaad@comcast.net.