

Piano Teaching—Traditional Or Recreational? What’s The Difference?

By Brian Chung and Brenda Dillon

When we piano teachers first hear about teaching “Recreational Music Making” (or RMM) classes, our initial response is to ask, “**What is RMM teaching... and how is it different from my traditional approach?**” The word “traditional” may not apply to you; but, for this discussion, it refers to the following teaching philosophy:

TRADITIONAL TEACHING

- Emphasis on performance
- Structured curriculum
- Individual (private) or group lessons
- The teacher prescribes the lesson direction/style
- The teacher appraises the level of success

This is a good methodology that continues to serve the needs of many aspiring and accomplished musicians today. However, it fails to meet the needs of millions of potential music makers who find the traditional learn-

ing style too solitary or who cannot live up to its standards of achievement.

As a worthy alternative, RMM teaching holds the promise of reaching literally tens of millions of *new* music makers who can powerfully transform the music teaching profession and elevate the importance and impact of music making in our culture. RMM teaching can be described by the following attributes:

RMM TEACHING

- Performance not required
- More flexible curriculum
- Taught in group lessons
- The student *and* teacher participate in lesson style/direction
- The student appraises the level of success

RMM teaching is, above all, designed to be fun and social. It makes music making accessible for anyone—and puts as its first priority the needs and desires of the student.

Designed primarily for adult learners, RMM teaching addresses one of the deepest regrets expressed by adults—the *fact that they gave up music lessons as a child*. Adult learners aren’t striving to become the next “Horowitz.” They simply want to attain a reasonable level of skill that allows them to play many of their favorite songs. And they want to learn to play in a fun, social environment.

Other comparisons:

- **Traditional teaching can be stressful** for both teacher and student with its emphasis on performance. **RMM teaching is stress-free**, since high-level performance is not required. Students enjoy the playing experience in groups, but solo playing is always voluntary.
- **Traditional teaching** is usually taught during limited “after school” hours if the teacher is focused on school-age students. **RMM teaching** has students (particularly retired adults) who can attend classes dur-

ing the day and won’t conflict with the schedules of school-age students.

Questions About RMM Teaching:

Since RMM classes are stress-free, do the students learn how to read music and play a wide variety of repertoire?

They do learn how to read music and to play many kinds of repertoire. The teacher introduces them to music appropriate to their skill level, and each class votes on the book or books the class will use for each eight-week session. Previous choices have included classical themes, Broadway and movie hits, popular, jazz, holiday, patriotic and so forth.

Do RMM students learn technique?

Their technique continues to improve as they watch the technique of their classmates and share technical tips with each other.

Since performance is not a requirement, do RMM students ever perform?

The irony is that the majority of them *do* want to perform for their class and eventually at more public settings such as an RMM “Player’s Club” or a “Stress-Free Celebration Concert.” They just want to be assured that they don’t have to perform unless it’s *their* choice. Removing the stress with a “no-performance” option is clearly a powerful motivator for their enrollment.

Do RMM students have as many competing choices for their time as school-age students?

If traditional teachers are predominantly focusing on school-age students, they are increasingly aware of the competition for their students’ time with countless other activities. It’s not that RMM students don’t also have many other choices of activities, but they seem to have narrowed them in a more discerning way. A majority of them have long had a dream of learning to play the piano, and now

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they have the time and the resources to realize that dream.

Demographics indicate that RMM teachers will have an abundance of potential piano students if they choose to embrace this method of teaching. Adults are ready to focus on their dream if they can find a piano teacher who will partner with them in a non-stressful setting. Although dreams don't have an expiration date, *now* is our time to reach out to adults and help transform the future of music making by becoming an active RMM teacher. For more information about RMM teaching, visit the National Piano Foundation website www.pianonet.com.

