

A Different Kind of Music Making

The summer of 2007 was unique in that MTNA and the National Piano Foundation (NPF) co-sponsored four regional RMM Teacher Training Seminars for piano teachers. RMM is code for Recreational Music Making, which originated with NAMM, the International Music Products Association. NAMM supported the funding of the seminars through a grant awarded in 2007.

The seminars were held in four cities: Madison, Wisconsin; Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; Seattle, Washington; and Raleigh, North Carolina. A total of 115 teachers from 21 states and Canada attended the seminars and 14 retailers and district sales managers attended a portion of the seminars.

The clinicians were experienced RMM teachers who have successful programs in their communities. Brenda Dillon, NPF's project director, teaches at a senior center in Plano, Texas. Autumn Keller, a Musikgarten national teacher trainer, teaches an RMM program in Billings, Montana. Debra Perez, a store co-owner and

teacher trainer at two stores in south Texas, coordinates a comprehensive music education department, which currently has 25 RMM piano classes per week, with 8–12 students per class.

The goal of the seminars was to stress that RMM teaching is different, as teachers are student-centered rather than teacher-centered. Teachers already know everything they need to know about teaching students how to play the piano. However, RMM teaching can require an attitude conversion on the part of the teacher. The objective is to create a stress-free environment for learning so that students continue to enroll once they realize this is a safe environment. Although performance is not the goal, ultimately most of the students want to perform in relaxed settings like piano parties or celebrations. Another goal was to teach group teaching concepts and demonstrate how effective the group is for RMM students.

The seminar evaluations included these comments:

- “Because of the supportive atmosphere and by leaving our egos and attitude at the door, I found this seminar to be my favorite of all I’ve attended.”
- “This was the best seminar I have ever attended and I have been attending seminars for 30 years. At no time did I get tired and tune out.”
- “I appreciate the validation that playing the piano purely for pleasure is acceptable, even desirable, and the validation that any level of playing is acceptable and enriching. I also liked the idea that the student’s interest

and goals lead the way, not the teacher’s preconceived must-dos.”

In addition to the teachers’ responses, there were several exciting outcomes of the seminars. MTNA invited the three clinicians to present six RMM sessions at the Denver conference. (March 30–31) They will be followed by three group teaching sessions on March 31–April 1). Details of these sessions can be found on MTNA’s website (www.mtna.org) and NPF’s website (www.pianonet.com).

At their fall meeting, the Piano Manufacturers Association International (PMAI) voted to fund Quin Mathews Films to film and produce DVDs of the six RMM sessions. This company is noted for its national and international arts-related documentaries. Another grant proposal has been submitted to NAMM to assist in the funding of these DVDs and to assist MTNA in placement of a series of short clips from each of the DVDs on its website. The clips will be viewable along with information for purchasing a copy of the full DVD. Clips will also be posted on YouTube.

Producing DVDs of the sessions and placing clips of them on MTNA’s website exponentially expands the number of teachers who will have exposure to RMM teaching. They will serve as on-demand teacher training or distance learning. Attending an on-site seminar has its benefits, but DVDs can be used at local MTA meetings and by individual teachers without the expense of traveling.

The DVDs will be available for ordering the summer of 2008. ■

Brenda Dillon, project director for the National Piano Foundation, currently teaches RMM classes at a senior center near Dallas. She is an RMM teacher trainer, has written numerous articles about RMM teaching and has developed materials for beginning classes.

