



Building Lifelong Pianists

September 2023 Newsletter



Alek Wasserman, Owner

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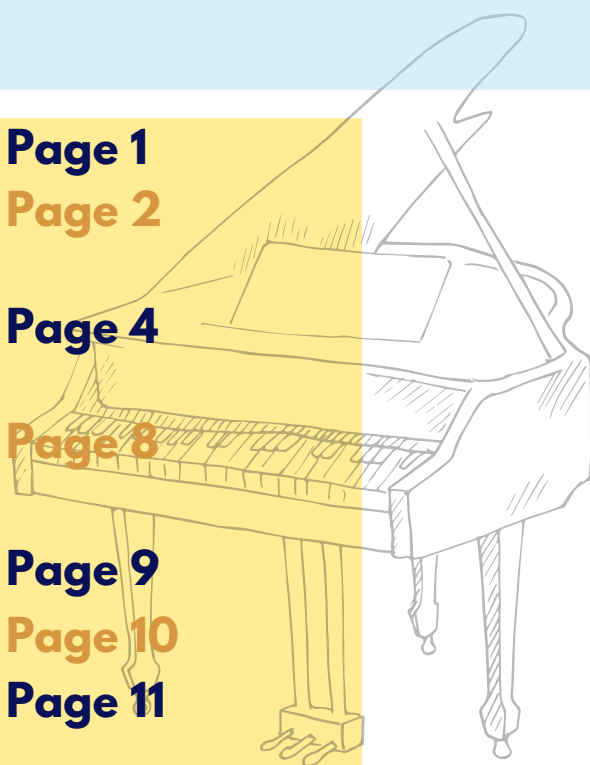
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Student of the Month: Lily P.



Q: What other activities do you do besides playing the piano?

A: I enjoy cooking, reading, and ballet. I also enjoy playing in nature.

Q: What do you like most about playing the piano?

A: I enjoy the sound of the piano.

Q: Which musicians or genres do you like to listen to?

A: I enjoy listening to Adele and Feist, especially in the car. I like their voices.

Q: Why did you decide to take piano lessons?

A: My mom encouraged me to learn piano so I could enjoy playing music.

Q: What has been your favorite experience at Triad Music Academy?

A: I like to play duets with Mr. Alek.

New Piano Instructor Natalie Barela



Natalie Barela

**MM in Collaborative Piano,
UNC School of the Arts
BM in Piano Performance,
Hardin-Simmons University**

Triad Music Academy welcomes an amazing new piano instructor to our roster, Natalie Barela!

Natalie brings a wide range of experiences to TMA, having performed and taught in a variety of different settings.

Some of Natalie's recent teaching experiences include lessons at SetApart Music in High Point, and Frush Music Studio in Abilene, Texas.

Natalie was also featured this summer on several Music Carolina SummerFest concerts, including concerts at Piedmont Music Center.

Natalie is currently pursuing her Professional Artist Certificate in Collaborative Piano at the UNC School of the Arts.

"I believe it's important to have both an appreciation and a curiosity for music. Both go hand in hand with furthering a love for this craft, a love that will last them a lifetime! As a teacher, it is my goal to have each student listen not only with their ears but with their hearts."

New Piano Instructor

Han Vu

Han Vu

BA in Music, California State University, San Bernardino
AA in Music, Chaffey College

Triad Music Academy welcomes another excellent piano instructor, Han Vu!

Han impressed in her interview with her in-depth knowledge of piano technique systems.

She is currently finishing her Master of Music in Piano Performance & Pedagogy with an emphasis in Injury-Preventative Technique at Salem College. This program is extremely unique and Han brings a valuable, specialized skillset with her to TMA.

Han's prior teaching experiences include The Music Key School (Rancho Cucamonga, CA) and Westminster Arts Academy (Westminster, CA).

"Piano playing is pleasurable, intense and anything we want it to be. While discipline and dedication are non-negotiable attributes to developing a particular skill, piano playing becomes a unity with our very being and essence overtime.

"Practice is like eating food and drinking your favorite beverage; something that you need and something that you like. Intermix the experience you want with the piano in practice and add an element of curiosity to create new sounds. Depending on what we are doing it for, learning and playing the piano can be an enriching and boundless addition to our lives."

Finding Balance: The Music Tree (Intervallic Piano Method)



By Alek Wasserman,
Triad Music Academy
Instructor/Founder

"Finding Balance" is a new monthly series in the TMA Newsletter based on a simple premise: no one piano learning method is perfect. Every method book has its pros and cons, and every student needs individual adjustments for their own needs. In this opinion series, we will explore what different piano books have to offer, as well as their flaws.

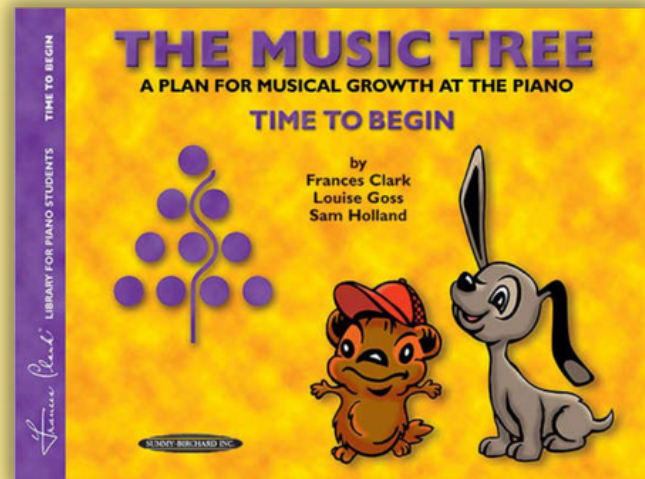
I'm going to start this article off by doing something I rarely see educators do - I will admit my own bias.

"The Music Tree: Time to Begin" was the very first piano book I learned out of when I started lessons in 2001. By coincidence, it was also the first book I learned how to teach with when I took Piano Pedagogy I at the Lawrence University Conservatory of Music in 2013.

The Music Tree series is the lifeblood of who I am as a piano teacher. I have used it more than any other piano method book, and it holds a special place in my heart.

Having engaged with this material from a teacher's perspective for the past decade, I have learned what the intervallic method does best. I have also learned where it falters.

These next few pages will be, in a sense, as much a reflection on my own teaching as they are on The Music Tree itself.



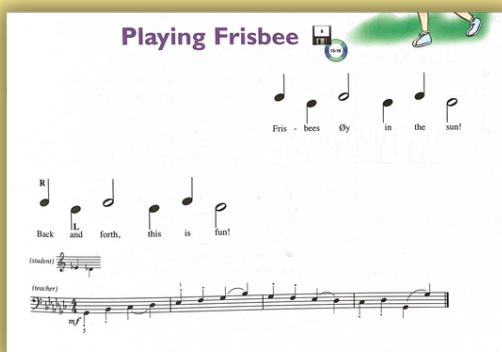
The Music Tree: Time to Begin

You may notice a big difference between this month's article and last month's [Finding Balance: Middle C Method Books](#). The Middle C method has multiple representatives, but The Music Tree is the original and purest intervallic method book.

Finding Balance: The Music Tree, cont.

There are a few other series that incorporate aspects of the intervallic approach, but The Music Tree is arguably the only truly intervallic piano method. Therefore, we will focus exclusively on The Music Tree here.

Let's start with what The Music Tree gets right. The intervallic approach, to me, really means two things: first, music reading is initially done on a proto-staff, simplified for students without prior reading experience. Secondly, students learn to read notes by how far apart they are from each other, rather than reading based on Middle C.

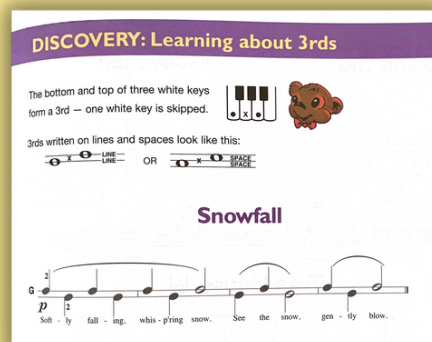


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This approach can work extremely well for younger beginners, who are often simultaneously learning the basics of reading English.

The Music Tree places a heavy emphasis on its primer book, which you can think of as a sort of "Level 0" before reading standard notation.

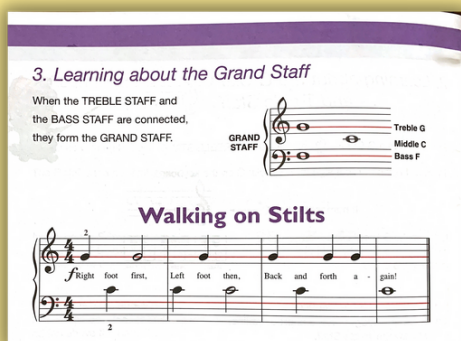
Its primer, "The Music Tree: Time to Begin," focuses on gradually building up to staff notation, and each unit focuses on reading a different interval. This sequence ends at reading 5ths, which are the furthest possible interval within a pentascale (standard hand position). Please see our [Interval Etudes](#) e-book for further reading on pentascales.



Introduction of note reading by 3rds in "The Music Tree: Time to Begin."

Finding Balance: The Music Tree, cont.

This gradual reading process builds up until students find themselves reading the Grand Staff at the end of the primer. Both the primer and the second book, "The Music Tree: Part 1," heavily emphasize the "landmark notes" of Bass F, Middle C, and Treble G. Students then learn to read intervallically based off those three notes on the keyboard.



Introduction of the grand staff in "The Music Tree: Time to Begin."

The premise is that students learn a system of note reading based on pentascales in familiar positions, without being confined to a single hand position. The series goes at a pace that I find to be very appropriate for most students who start lessons at age 7 or below.

Other piano educators sometimes assert that they find the pacing to be too slow, but I disagree. With my time spent as a public school teacher, I feel that The Music Tree's pacing is very much in line with what American schoolchildren are used to in other subjects. I have never personally had a student or parent express doubt about The Music Tree's pacing.

The points I've made so far all line up well with my own teaching priorities, and I've had success keeping students in piano lessons for years with this series, making plenty of progress.

Now let's talk about where The Music Tree misses the mark.

First of all, this book is too "babyish" to be used with students above 2nd Grade. In my opinion, it's too bad that there are no solid options for older students to learn the intervallic method.

I also find that it takes a lot of extra care to make sure students develop

Finding Balance: The Music Tree, cont.

proper keyboard technique using this method. Some of the pieces in The Music Tree are written in a way which can incentivize bad habits if not supplemented by the teacher. Let me be clear - that is a potentially massive issue for a young pianist. That said, with proper adjustments made by the teacher, technique shouldn't become a problem.

Another issue is that many of the pieces in the primer have very simple student parts. The supplement here is of course for the teacher to play the duet part with the student to fill in the musical gaps, but this may leave the music sounding a bit dull when the student is practicing at home.

In keeping with the theme of our "Finding Balance" series, the takeaway here is clear: no method book is perfect. Every method book requires teacher and student adjustments to fill in its gaps. In the case of The Music Tree, I take the following three steps to make this book work best:

1. I only assign this book to students ages 7 and below.
2. I instruct technique separately from the book's priorities to supplement proper piano hand shapes.
3. I always play duets with students.

That's how I find balance as a piano teacher while teaching from The Music Tree!

The "Finding Balance" series only reflects my own opinions. TMA Instructors are encouraged to express their own piano teaching beliefs and use method books of their own choosing so they are free to teach as their best selves. We create uniformity across TMA studios by offering the same recital and masterclass opportunities to all students, as well as Unlimited Lesson Support. Most importantly, all TMA students have exclusive access to the same library of online piano learning supplements. At the time of writing, we have over 25 items written from a method book-neutral perspective.

Back to School & Referral Specials

New Students:

Sign up by September 15th, 2023
and have your registration fee
waived - \$25 off!



Current Students:

Refer a new student by
September 15th, 2023 and
receive \$25 off the next month's
tuition!

Back to School Essentials



Essex



Boston



Boston

Special TMA Pricing to get your student ready to continue their music education



Summer Recital Recap

On August 26th, twenty-three Triad Music Academy students performed in a splendid recital. Many students were first-time performers, while others are more seasoned. Congrats to our lifelong piano learners on a splendid culmination of their hard work!



Immediately following the child student recital, two of our adult students impressed with their own recital. Congrats to these dedicated piano learners on an intrepid performance!



Upcoming Events!

Ieva Jokubaviciute Masterclass

UPDATED: Saturday, Sep 30th @ 4:30 PM
[Piedmont Music Center](#)



Ieva Jokubaviciute
Associate Professor of the Practice,
Duke University

Select Triad Music Academy students have been chosen to perform. Email alek@triadmusicacademy.com if you would like to watch!

Myron Brown Masterclass

Saturday, Nov 4th @ 4:00 PM
[Piedmont Music Center](#)

Myron Brown
Associate Professor of Music,
Winston-Salem State University



Select Triad Music Academy students will be chosen to perform. Email alek@triadmusicacademy.com if you would like to watch!

Upcoming Events!

Triad Music Academy Child Student Fall Recital

Saturday, Dec 9th @ 4:00 PM

[Piedmont Music Center](#)

Recitals open to all Triad Music Academy child students. Email alek@triadmusicacademy.com with any questions!

Triad Music Academy Adult Student Fall Recital

Saturday, Dec 9th @ 5:30 PM

[Piedmont Music Center](#)

Recitals open to all Triad Music Academy adult students. Email alek@triadmusicacademy.com with any questions!