



Building Lifelong Pianists

August 2023 Newsletter



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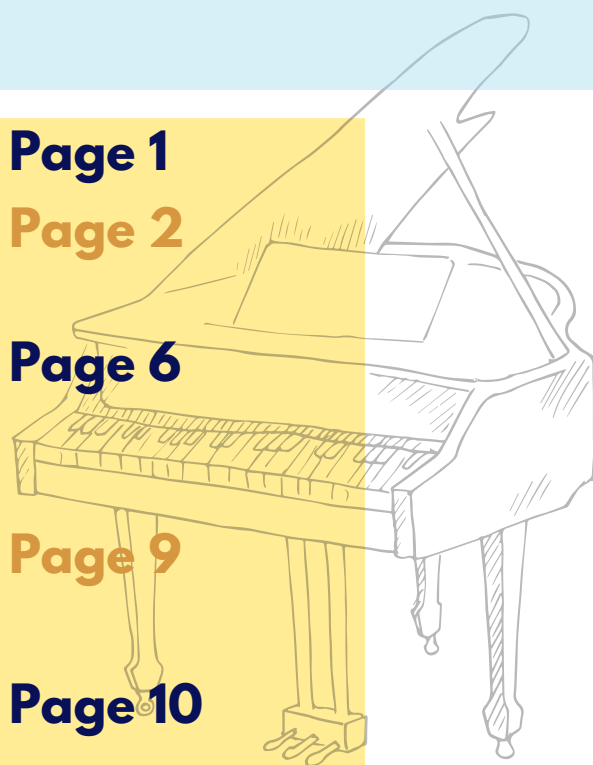
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Student of the Month: Ally W.



Q: How has taking piano lessons impacted your family?

A: I love seeing the confidence our children have gained from learning the piano and performing at recitals. As a bonus, I am thrilled to have a fun family activity we can do together as well as cultivating a skill we can use for a lifetime.

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

A: I love the challenge of learning new pieces and find playing to be peaceful and relaxing. Mostly, I have found playing the piano is an enjoyable family activity I can share with my children.

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

A: Hmm...almost everything! There are very few genres I don't appreciate. Depending on my mood, I listen to anything from classical to French café to hip hop. A few of my favorite current era musicians...Adele, Sam Smith, Passenger, Lewis Capaldi, Lady Gaga.

Q: Why did you decide to take piano lessons?

A: I had taken lessons as a child but hadn't touched a piano in decades. I began helping my children practice their pieces and realized how much fun I was having. My son suggested I should start taking lessons with Alek too, so I decided to go for it.

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

A: My kids and I look forward to each lesson with Alek. We gain so much knowledge in a fun and encouraging atmosphere, which helps motivate us to improve.

Finding Balance: Middle C Method Books



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.

It is important to note here that Middle C method books comprise a wide swath of different books by various authors. Some piano method books fall into another category, but still take some cues from the general Middle C idea. The term "Middle C" should be taken as an umbrella term in this article unless otherwise stated.

Middle C method books are perhaps the most commonly-used group of piano books in American piano education. Defined by starting a student with their right thumb on Middle C, some of the most famous examples of Middle C books include the "Faber Piano Adventures" series and the "Alfred's Basic Piano Course" series.

Students in these books typically start reading music on the grand staff very early on, and tend to stay in one hand position for a longer time than in other method books. Since the thumb is rooted on Middle C, students usually learn to read going outward from that note.



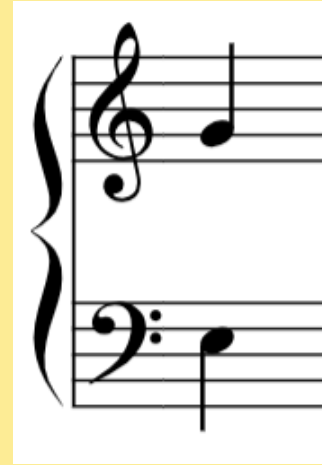
A typical Middle C hand position. The right thumb is on Middle C, the left thumb is on the B next to it, and each consecutive finger covers the next white key.

Finding Balance: Middle C Method Books, cont.

So let's start with what Middle C books do well. Because they use the same hand shape consistently, it is very easy for students to find the limited notes that are contained within the Middle C default hand position.

A positive consequence of this setup is that Middle C books can often incorporate arrangements of familiar tunes much more quickly than other methods. I find this especially useful in motivating adult students and older child beginners (middle or high schoolers). On that note, I don't think you can overstate the importance of using culturally relevant music in teaching the piano; students always stand to benefit from playing music they know and love, provided the music is within their skill range.

For me, however, that's about where the positives of Middle C method books end. The pitfall of the Middle C idea lies in its simplification of piano playing, which is paradoxically also its main draw.



The complete range of the default Middle C hand position (E3-G4).

There are a lot of problems that come with always assuming the same hand position on the piano; the main issue I've seen is students who struggle to conceptualize how to play fingerings outside of their default hand shape.

I have never personally used a Middle C method book with a younger child beginner. However, I did see this problem arise regularly when I taught public school.

Finding Balance: Middle C Method Books, cont.

When I was an elementary school music teacher, I used melodicas as an alternative to the recorder. A melodica, for those who don't know, is a keyboard wind instrument. It's basically a mini-piano that you blow into.

I had several students who had taken Middle C-based piano lessons for years and could not coordinate simple hand positions on the melodica. They were unable to do so because their vision of playing a keyboard instrument was limited to a single hand position that does not use black keys. If a teacher chooses to use one of these method books, they must guide students with extra materials to avoid this problem.

Another issue I've seen with transfer students who have come into Triad Music Academy with Middle C method books is that their hand shape is extremely flat. This is a result of using the thumb prematurely, since these books tend to start with Middle C played with the right thumb.

By contrast, other method books will avoid using the thumb altogether with young hands. For example, "The Music Tree," which is an intervallic method book series, does not use the thumb until almost halfway into its second book.

Overuse of the thumb in the beginning of a young student's piano journey can completely throw off their hand shape, leading to tension, low wrists, and a variety of other technique issues.

So do I use Middle C method books at all? Yes, actually! But only in very specific situations.

The strengths of the Middle C method, like I said before, really shine when applied to adult students and older child beginners. Other method book styles can have a tendency to use more childish-sounding music in the beginning phases. A Middle C book's ability to incorporate folk tunes and pop hits early on is very motivational to older learners.

Finding Balance: Middle C Method Books, cont.

Another big difference for these older learners is that their hands are more physically developed. This means that we can much more easily mitigate the overreliance on the thumb from a technique standpoint.

The other time I will use a Middle C method book is situational; some younger child learners transfer into the studio already established in their Middle C method. Depending on a few factors specific to the student, it may be better to keep them with the book they already know rather than to force them into a book I prefer. As a teacher, you have to consider a student's prior piano history. Failure to do so can be a jarring experience for a young student.

As I mentioned in my [Intro to Piano Method Book Types](#), I use the "Faber Piano Adventures" series since they have great books written specifically for older child and adult beginners. But even then, I supplement by teaching 5-Finger Patterns and exposing students to black keys and other hand shapes well before they

would organically reach those concepts in the Faber books.

Regardless of which method book you use, my recommendation is this: make sure your teacher's priorities line up best with your own piano goals. A skilled piano educator will recognize the limitations of any method book and adjust their teaching to foster student success.

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.

Triad Music Academy Endorses Piedmont Music Center Pianos



By Alek Wasserman,
Triad Music Academy
Instructor/Founder

Bottom line up front: Triad Music Academy is proud to endorse [Piedmont Music Center](#) pianos!

Over the next few pages, I'll explain how Triad Music Academy (TMA) and Piedmont Music Center (PMC) came to our valued partnership, and the history of one of North Carolina's finest piano dealerships.

The scene was May of 2018. I was graduating from the UNC School of the Arts and hitting the "real world" for the first time. I was about to lose my access to the university's piano practice rooms, but I couldn't go without a piano. I hadn't yet been hired for my first full-time teaching job, so I was in real need; I had to find a piano for a reasonable price.

The reality of playing the piano is that correct technique cannot be fully expressed on an electronic instrument because the physical mechanism is different. I had to find an upright that I could fit in the West Salem apartment I was living in at the time.

Not knowing where to look, I tried out the pianos at another gallery first. The only reasonably-priced instruments they had were either very low-end, or digital. I spent over an hour there trying to pick one out, but I couldn't find a piano that really spoke to me.

After I left, I decided to try the other piano gallery I knew of. I walked into Piedmont Music Center, talked to owner Chris Fulk, and we looked at uprights in my price range. Within 15 minutes, I had found my Baldwin! For only \$3,000 on a payment plan, I had an instrument that I believed in.



My Baldwin upright piano,
purchased at PMC in May of 2018

Triad Music Academy Endorses Piedmont Music Center Pianos, cont.

The piano I purchased from PMC has lasted me five years without any mechanical issues, and it stays in tune extremely well. It has carried me through virtual teaching during the COVID-19 Pandemic, writing numerous pieces of music, and daily practice. It was the instrument I practiced on when I auditioned for the 440th Army Band.

In the years in between 2018 and 2022 (when TMA was founded), Mr. Fulk had expressed interest in partnering with me for programming. When I opened TMA, I knew exactly who to go to for help.



**Chris Fulk, Owner of Piedmont
Music Center**

Initially, TMA was supposed to offer in-home piano lessons exclusively, since I didn't have a physical location worked out. When Mr. Fulk offered to house TMA, he dramatically altered our trajectory for the better.

Without PMC, we simply would not be able to offer three recitals and masterclasses a year. And we wouldn't be able to ensure that every student plays on an acoustic instrument during their lesson.

PMC is integral in implementing our lifelong pianist concept, full stop.

So how did PMC become one of the most prolific piano galleries in the history of the State of North Carolina? I interviewed Mr. Fulk to find out.

Born and raised in Winston-Salem, Mr. Fulk started piano lessons at the age of 7. He graduated from UNC-Chapel Hill with a degree in business, and a music minor. While at UNC, Mr. Fulk studied organ. He went on to play in many local churches.

Triad Music Academy Endorses Piedmont Music Center Pianos, cont.

Mr. Fulk founded PMC in 1972, in his own words, "to promote the importance of piano education through providing the best possible pianos at an affordable price." Since then, he has sold thousands of pianos. Many homes throughout North Carolina are complete with PMC pianos, but they've also accomplished countless institutional sales. Some of the local universities housing PMC pianos include:

- UNC School of the Arts
- Wake Forest University
- Salem College
- High Point University
- Davidson College
- UNC-Chapel Hill

My personal favorite PMC fact is that Blues legends B.B. King and Muddy Waters both had PMC pianos onstage when performing in Winston-Salem!

My own take on PMC's success is that there are two crucial ingredients.

First, Mr. Fulk is the most knowledgeable person I've ever met on the inner workings of the piano.

The second important ingredient is that Mr. Fulk is a person who really cares about matching people with the right piano for them. When you buy a PMC piano, you know it's been properly mechanically vetted to make sure it works. Mr. Fulk's altruistic nature is why PMC pianos are priced affordably despite all the care that goes into them.

It is for these reasons that Triad Music Academy is proud to endorse Piedmont Music Center as the pianos of choice in Winston-Salem!

If you have any questions about pianos, Mr. Fulk can be reached at welchfulk1@aol.com or (336) 724-9612.



The Falcone concert grand piano at Piedmont Music Center

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!

Upcoming Events!

Triad Music Academy Child Student Summer Recital

Saturday, Aug 26th @ 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 Summer Recital

Saturday, Aug 26th @ 5:30 PM

[Piedmont Music Center](#)

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

Ieva Jokubaviciute Masterclass

UPDATED: Saturday, Sep 30th @ 4:30 PM

[Piedmont Music Center](#)

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