



Building Lifelong Pianists

March 2024 Newsletter



Alek Wasserman, Owner

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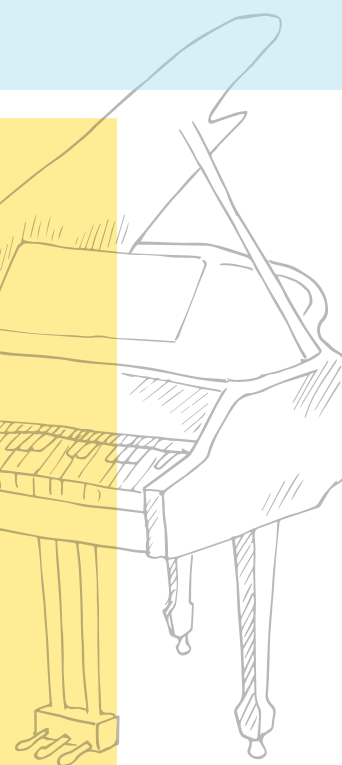
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Student of the Month: Kirsten Gray



Q: What professional music positions do you hold, and what is your academic background in music?

A: I currently teach Music Appreciation at Forsyth Tech. I have also performed with the Winston-Salem Symphony, Fayetteville Symphony, Piedmont Opera, and Greensboro Opera on bassoon.

I have studied bassoon performance at the University of Michigan, UNCSA and UNCG.

Q: What has been your favorite experience so far as a TMA student?

A: My favorite experience so far is when my teacher, Austin, started a lesson with me sight reading Bach's prelude to "Well-Tempered Clavier." As a bassoonist, I've been envious of the repertoire JS Bach composed for other instruments, and while sightreading, I was so happy to finally be playing the music of one of my favorite composers!

Student of the Month: Kirsten Gray, cont.

Q: What is something that has been unexpected about your piano lesson experience?

A: Something that has been unexpected is this feeling of being a beginner, where I feel that the new music I'm learning is impossible and beyond my playing ability. However, after a few days of very slow practice, where I focus measure by measure, eventually what once seemed impossible, I can play with ease.

Q: What has been different about your piano lesson experience with TMA compared with your group piano class in college?

A: The motivation is very different. My group piano class during my undergrad was a requirement for my degree with tests, a project where I had to accompany another student, and a final exam. I really enjoyed the class but learning music for a grade was an extrinsic motivation. Today, I am taking piano lessons just for fun, and because I really enjoy learning the piano!

“Kirsten has a doctorate in Bassoon, which certainly helps, but she has been going above and beyond at every lesson and has been pushing herself quite a bit.”

-Austin Caldie, TMA Instructor



From the Other Side: What I've Learned as a Piano Dad



By Alek Wasserman,
Triad Music Academy
Instructor/Founder

This past November, something happened that changed my entire perspective on life: I got married! In the process, I became a husband to my wife Angel, and I became a dad to her 8-year-old daughter, LiLie. With the changes this brought to my personal life, I've learned a lot about piano lessons, as well.

About 88% of TMA's student body is made up of children from 69 households (at time of writing), so piano parents clearly play a large role in the community we've built.

Piano parents pay for lessons, provide transportation, attend recitals, monitor practice, and provide moral support when their students need it, among other things.

While our instructors make a point of transparency and thoroughness in their teaching, it is ultimately up to child students and their parents to translate their weekly lessons into regular practice habits.

I'd like to discuss what that looks like, now that I've seen the "other side."



LiLie and me after her first piano recital at [Piedmont Music Center](#).

LiLie began taking piano lessons with TMA Instructor PG Hazard in September of 2023, and she's had a wonderful experience!

LiLie loves exploring new pieces on the piano, sharing her talent with her grandparents over video calls, and receiving instruction in PG's calm, supportive, and creative style. She has progressed to about a third of the way through [Piano Safari: Level 2](#) in just a few months.

In the process of guiding LiLie's piano journey as a parent, I've learned three really important lessons.

From the Other Side: What I've Learned as a Piano Dad, cont.

First, our teaching staff is amazing!

Like I mentioned before, PG has done a wonderful job of building LiLie's love for the piano at the beginning of her journey. And while PG and I were classmates at the UNC School of the Arts, we had different teachers and therefore different perspectives. LiLie has learned useful ideas from PG that I would not have necessarily thought of. Additionally, LiLie had a great lesson in PG's absence when TMA Instructor Han Vu stepped in.

This sets my mind at ease as a parent tremendously. Knowing that I can be somewhat hands off with my own child's piano education because of our dedicated instructors, is a load off my shoulders.

Second, the relationship is different.

This may seem obvious, but understanding all the nuances of the different relationships with children is much easier when you can see both sides.

I have worked with children since 2012, but I just became a parent at the end of 2023.

One of the clearest differences is how a child is motivated by their teachers, versus how they're motivated by their parents. Sometimes, when a parent tells a child to try a certain practice method, it can be seen as a chore. But when the teacher suggests the same idea, it's a no-brainer! I've developed some extra empathy for parents in this regard.

On the flip side of the coin, students need to practice outside of their lessons. Even the best teacher can only account for one or two days' worth of piano out of a whole week. So it becomes clear that both parents and teachers share responsibility in making sure that students practice.

Parents have to find the time to facilitate practice (or at least make sure that it happens if they aren't actively involved), but teachers have to create the motivation so students practice of their own volition.

Young students don't need to practice for huge amounts of time, but they do need consistency. This brings me to my next point.

From the Other Side: What I've Learned as a Piano Dad, cont.

Third, creating a stable practice routine at home is critical. This is sort of a new one for me. I grew up in a household where playing an instrument was mandatory until high school graduation. While my parents aren't professional musicians, my mom went far enough with music to fully understand my introductory piano lessons and practice with me until I was at least an intermediate-level pianist.

By contrast, my wife is not a musician. It's hard for someone who never took lessons as a kid to feel like they can take an active role in helping their child practice. While LiLie and I practice together on the weekends, it's very difficult for us to do so during the week, since I'm usually teaching lessons when she would be practicing after school.

In the three months between the start of LiLie's lessons and Winter Break, she progressed through about half of Piano Safari: Level 1. That's a pretty good clip for an 8-year-old student, even though she wasn't practicing consistently on weekdays.

In the two weeks we were on Winter Break, LiLie and I had daily lessons for 20-30 minutes and progressed to the very last piece in the book. Obviously, not every child has this advantage, but it goes to show just how much consistent practice can change your piano outcomes.

I get it. If you're not a musician, it can be hard to ensure your student gets quality practice outside of their lesson. So here's what we offer at TMA to bridge the gap:

Parents are encouraged to watch lessons. If your student is a minor, you are always allowed to be present for their lessons. You can be actively involved if you'd like, or you can just observe. But being present for lessons, especially for Third Graders and below, can be really helpful.

While we are not a Suzuki Method piano studio, we are influenced by their idea of parental involvement. You can read more about it in this article from the [Suzuki Association of the Americas](#).

From the Other Side: What I've Learned as a Piano Dad, cont.

Use our TMA-Exclusive Online Piano Learning Resources. All TMA students and parents have unlimited downloads of our materials in their **My Music Staff** accounts. At present, we have 13 concept-specific piano lesson packets, 5 student-level original piano compositions, and 11 piano learning articles available for unlimited download. I guarantee there is something to be learned for all TMA parents by accessing these materials, and we'll be adding more.

Use our Unlimited Lesson Support. Many piano teachers put “office hours” or a limit on how much students and parents are allowed to contact them in between lessons. This is not the case for TMA! All of our students and parents can contact me directly with their lesson questions however much they need, period.

Here are a few examples of how parents have gotten value from their Unlimited Lesson Support:

Parents have texted pictures of sheet music, asking for correct fingerings on tricky pieces.

Parents have emailed pictures of their students' posture in their home set up, only for us to realize their student was sitting too low or too high. This has led to technique improvements for several families.

A parent sent in a video of their student's playing, demonstrating that the student had misread an F# as F^b, allowing us to fix a wrong note outside of the lesson in the process.

To access your Unlimited Lesson Support, simply text me directly at (336) 497-1136 or email me at alek@triadmusicacademy.com.

Lastly, communication is key. I encourage all TMA parents to use the resources at their disposal, and to ask your child's teacher any questions that you may have. Just remember that some of us know where you're coming from on a personal level, and we make it our business to help you build your lifelong pianist.

-Alek Wasserman,
TMA Founder & Lead Instructor

New Piano Instructor: Laura Agner



Laura Agner

**BA in Organ Performance,
Salem College
Injury-Preventative Keyboard
Technique Certificate,
Salem College
High School Diploma in Organ,
UNC School of the Arts**

Triad Music Academy welcomes our newest piano instructor, Laura Agner!

Laura adds to our growing roster of piano educators with unique skillsets, bringing knowledge of both the piano and the organ to TMA. Specializing as a church musician with extensive keyboard technique knowledge, Laura has served extensively as an organist in the Piedmont Triad and surrounding areas. Her experience includes five years as the organist at Mt. Zion United Church of Christ in China Grove, North Carolina.

What struck me about Laura during the interview process was her impressive knowledge of keyboard technique mechanics, and her framework for developing those skillsets in young students.

Outside of music, Laura also has a background working in daycares, so she's a perfect fit for starting our youngest beginner pianists.

New Piano Instructor Laura Agner, cont.

Another unique quality that Laura brings to the table is her educational background. While she focused academically on the organ, Laura learned to play the piano first.

I also think Laura can play a key role in promoting lifelong piano playing in Winston-Salem; as we build our community of lifelong pianists, it's important that we reach all of the corners of the Winston-Salem piano world. While we already have instructors who are graduates of both Salem College and the UNC School of the Arts, Laura becomes the first TMA instructor to have attended both schools.

These kinds of connections can be invaluable in bridging the gap between the various piano-playing institutions in our wider community, strengthening TMA's mission of promoting lifelong piano learning in Winston-Salem.

Here's what Laura had to say about her approach to teaching the piano:

"Teaching is sharing my passion of the piano with my students. The piano was my first love, and secretly my favorite, even specializing in the organ. I treasure the sensation of making music with the keys underneath my finger beds. Let's show others what we can do on the piano, and love what we do every step of the way."

Finally, all new TMA instructors must pass State, Federal, and National Sex Offender Registry background checks in order to be welcomed onto the team. It is my priority to ensure your student's safety and wellbeing as they pursue their lifelong piano playing journey with TMA.

If you are interested in piano lessons with Laura, please reach out to me via (336) 497-1136 or alek@triadmusicacademy.com and we'll be more than happy to get you on her schedule!

-Alek Wasserman
Founder & Lead Instructor



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Referrals & Openings

Current students: now until March 15th, receive ~~\$25.00~~ off your next month's lessons when you refer a new student! Just tell them to text (336) 497-1136 and include your name in their initial text.

Openings:

Teacher	Location	Day	Time
Laura Agner	Main Studio	Saturday	11:00 AM - 5:00 PM
Austin Caldie	Main Studio	Sunday	1:45-3:45 PM
Shannon Lindegren	Main Studio	Wednesday	6:30-7:00 PM
Alek Wasserman	Main Studio	Tuesday	6:45-8:00 PM

**Fully Booked Instructors:
Natalie Barela, PG Hazard & Han Vu**

Upcoming Events!

Annie Jeng Masterclass

Saturday, April 13th @ 4:00 PM

[Piedmont Music Center](#)

Annie Jeng
Assistant Professor of Piano &
Piano Pedagogy, UNC Greensboro



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

TMA Spring Recital

Saturday, June 1st @ 4:00 PM

[Piedmont Music Center](#)

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

***Recital may be updated to different times for different teachers' studios, TBD. Any changes will be communicated in advance by email.