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Q - When is the best time to start piano instruction?

A - At Meryl's Music and Arts Centers, we believe children are most successful playing an instrument when they complete a strong aural and movement readiness program, are able to sing in tune and keep a steady beat, and possess a desire to meet the challenges of playing an instrument.

Families need to have taken at least one session of our Music Together® classes before enrolling in the Piano Transitions class. Students are generally ready for the Piano Transitions class in kindergarten, however some preschoolers are able to successfully participate in the Piano Transitions class.

Students may re-enroll a second year in Piano Transitions Class or move on to Piano Lessons, also using the Music Moves curriculum.

Q - How much practice will be necessary?

A – Students enrolled in Piano Transitions classes are not expected to practice, but encouraged to share their pieces at home and listen to the CDs. Expectations for each child will vary.

Q - Can my child start piano lessons before we have a piano at home? What about digital or electronic keyboards?

A - Students do not need a keyboard for the Piano Transitions class, although it does make classes more enjoyable for them and they usually make better progress.

A good acoustical piano is preferable, however, if you plan to purchase a digital keyboard, please consider a full size keyboard and request that the action simulate an acoustical piano. The Yamaha and Roland digital keyboards have the best reputations.

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An introduction to our
newest program:



Piano Transition Classes
For 4-6 year olds



PIANO TRANSITIONS : Music Moves for Piano by Marilyn Lowe

Three ten-week semesters of 45-60 minute classes include singing, chanting, moving, responding to musical patterns, creating at the keyboard, and playing short pieces. Activities are developmentally appropriate for Preschoolers and Kindergartners. Classes help students organize the sounds of music using syllables, imitate musical patterns accurately, sing in tune, move with the beat, and develop beginning piano technique and keyboard skills using rote instruction. Piano book with CD is included. Registration is for one year.

Q - How is your piano instruction different than other piano instruction?

A - We use a stimulating, revolutionary approach to piano instruction that is based on extensive research about how children best learn music. Students are given an opportunity to acquire the language of music in a way that encourages independent music making and musical thinking.

With emphasis on music as both an aural (listening) art and an oral (performing) art, our program develops the entire musician while students sing, chant, and move to music they will learn to play.

A solfege (syllable) system helps students organize the sounds they know and is key to a successful transition to reading notation. When students are ready to read, they are able to bring meaning to what they see on the page.

Incorporated into this instruction is a wise and systematic presentation of purely pianistic skills (keyboard knowledge, technique and body awareness) using an attractive and musically rich repertoire of folk and original compositions.

Creativity and improvisation are part of each lesson from the very beginning.

And finally, students in our program are given an opportunity to take advantage of the benefits of a peer group setting.

Q - What books do you use in class?

A - We use a new series called Music Moves for Piano (published by GIA in Chicago), which was written specifically to apply the systematic and profound music learning theory of Edwin Gordon.

Students who have used this series show high retention, secure performance skills, solid reading and writing skills, music creativity, and development of audiation skills (the ability to think musically with understanding). Many are able to easily create arrangements of songs, transpose and harmonize songs, improvise, compose original music, or play music for parties.

Q - Explain the group lesson format.

A - Students benefit tremendously from group instruction. They not only enjoy being with one another, but also learn more from watching and listening to one another.

In Piano Transitions Classes, we use one piano and limit the group size to 2-4 students so that the instructor is able to observe all individual playing.

Q - What do you do at the lessons?

A - Lesson activities are organized around four specific areas of musical development: 1) audiation skills (ability to think musically with understanding) using singing, chanting, moving, and pattern instruction; 2) keyboard geography and technique; 3) keyboard exploration, creativity, and improvisation; 4) book/listening assignments.

Students will engage in movement and sing songs that will later be performed. They will also chant and sing tonal and rhythmic patterns, and learn to

play piano pieces, initially without using notation.

Q - How do you teach children to audiate?

A - The easiest and best way is to begin with positive music listening and exploratory experiences with infants, toddlers, and preschool children to encourage the development of a rich musical vocabulary. Participation in our Music Together® classes provides an excellent opportunity for those experiences. Listening to just commercial children CDs or music videos will provide experiences with a limited number of sounds, an action similar to feeding your children only their two favorite foods, or teaching them only some of the letters of the alphabet.

After age 4-5, the MUSIC MOVES program continues to use a developmentally appropriate, but more formal, sequential approach (with more expectations for correctness) and emphasizes the continued development of a music vocabulary. When students are comfortable with tonal and rhythm patterns, we introduce syllables to help them organize the patterns. Soon they are able to play or create a piece that begins on "DO" as "G."

Q - When and how do the children learn to read notation?

A - Just as in language development, children learn to read when they are ready. Some children pick it up quickly without much teacher assistance. Others need more time and assistance.

In our approach to music literacy, the use of pattern instruction and associating syllables with the patterns is key to the transition to reading notation. Students much more easily associate symbols on the page with patterns they have sung, moved to, and understand in their heads. Moreover, the ability to give meaning to notes, phrases and styles is preferable to just reading note names and finding the right keys.

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