
MUSE NEWS®

A NATIONAL NEWSLETTER FOR GROUP PIANO TEACHERS!

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VISIT FOUR STUDIOS THAT HAVE INCREASED THEIR INCOME AND STUDENT ENTHUSIASM WITH GROUP PIANO!

“My Whole Studio is Energized! The Teenagers Love It!”

By Sandra Connelly, DMA
Connelly School of Music
Burke, Virginia

EDITOR'S NOTE: A busy Dr. Sandra Connelly has earned a Doctor of Music and Arts degree. We appreciate her taking the time to share her group piano studio's successes with us!



Dr. Sandra Connelly (standing on right) poses with some of her many happy teenage students.

I was teaching thirty-nine private lesson students when another piano teacher and I read of a Mayron Cole Group Piano workshop being held in a nearby piano store. This was the first time that I had ever given group piano teaching a thought. When we came out of that workshop, my friend and I were all “fired up” about using group piano classes to expand our existing piano studios. Music for me has always been a career – and I naturally want to earn the maximum amount I can with my teaching talents.

I plunged right in! I bought six keyboards and taught Mayron's BLAST OFF WITH PIANO!® that summer. It was a great success! Even though

I was teaching in the basement of my home, I decided to increase my clientele by advertising. I hired my teenage students to go with me and put 20,000 fliers in doors of homes in neighborhoods that I had selected. It took us eleven days to distribute that many fliers, but I got about 200 calls from the effort. **Fliers are the best form of advertising I've found**, and I've tried newspaper ads, radio ads, magazine ads – everything. But I get a higher return on fliers than with anything else! I soon had ninety piano students and most of those students were piano class students. Of course,

I had to purchase more keyboards since I was then teaching ten to twelve students per class.

I continued teaching in my basement studio for four years as my
(continued on next page)

LOTS OF LOCATIONS!
1999
GROUP PIANO
TEACHERS
TRAINING SEMINARS!
PLAN NOW TO ATTEND!
SEE PAGE 3

“....I wish I had gone commercial five years ago!”

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studio enrollment continued to increase by leaps and bounds. I had worked out carpooling with the parents so that my students would not be a bother in my quiet neighborhood. But this past summer, I realized that my group piano studio was about as large as it could become. **I could not expand anymore without “going commercial”.** So finding a really great commercial location was my goal. I looked for easy access and well-lit parking. Within days, I had leased a storefront in a strip mall that is only three minutes from my old neighborhood.

We officially opened in September. I say “we” because I now employ twelve teachers and two accountants. I immediately put a large 3 x 12 foot sign in the store window that reads FREE PIANO LESSON TODAY. When interested customers come in for the free lesson, I teach Page 5 from Mayron’s BLAST OFF WITH PIANO® book. That piece is a rhythm tapping piece that uses only quarter notes and dotted half notes. After I explain the counting of the rhythms, I put the BLAST OFF WITH PIANO disk in my sequencer as the prospective student taps the rhythms on a C key. **The student immediately sees how much fun it is** to take music at my studio – and the parent is sold! We get six to eight new students a week from passersby seeing the sign in my store window.

I also get a lot of transfer students from word of mouth, and they must be auditioned for correct piano class placement. Most transfer students have little to no comprehension of rhythm counting and are very weak note readers. **That’s why I ask all parents to sit through the child’s audition** as I test the student at my computer. I use NOTE PLAY by Ibis for the testing. This program puts four notes at a time on the computer screen, and the auditioning student must play the notes as fast as pos-

sible since they are being timed by the computer. This keeps the student from “counting up” the lines and spaces — and, of course, there are no finger numbers. **If the student has trouble reading/playing the notes** (and most do!) I explain to the parent that the student is a poor note reader because of the piano methods he was being taught. **Most of those piano methods encourage students to read finger numbers** instead of reading staff notes. Then, I show them THE MAYRON COLE PIANO METHOD® and explain that it is the best method there is for teaching note reading and rhythm counting! But I also explain that the student must complete Mayron’s OLDER BEGINNER SERIES® before I can place the student in a piano class. **The students are usually agreeable to this review of concepts** because they really want to learn to play the piano and play it well! I’ve only had one parent who tried to make excuses as to why their child did so badly at the computer testing. Only one! But testing and remedial books are really the only way a teacher can accept transfer students and later successfully place them in piano classes.

Connelly School of Music is doing so well that I wish I had gone commercial five years ago! I have now hired some of my teenage students as teaching interns, and if they show good teaching abilities, they are promoted (with a pay raise!) to teaching assistants. These interns and assistants help the teachers with some of our large group piano classes. My whole studio is energized! The teenagers love it! I have no idea how many students we presently teach! **We quit counting after 250 students.** But there would be no way that my studio could be this successful without THE MAYRON COLE PIANO METHOD® and especially Mayron Cole herself! The students *love* the music! And since most of my students are transfers, they can really appreciate the difference between this great method and the other methods!

**NEW FROM THE MAYRON
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One of Sandra Connelly’s spacious teaching rooms holds a grand piano, numerous electronic pianos, and a computer lab.

1999

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June 4 - 5

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La Quinta Inn
Raleigh/Durham Airport

June 18 - 19

Orlando, FL
Holiday Inn NickiBird Resort
Disney World Main Gate

July 16 - 17

Houston, TX
Sheraton North Houston Hotel
Bush Intercontinental Airport

August 6 - 7

Cleveland, OH
Sheraton Airport Hotel
Cleveland Hopkins International
Airport

August 20 - 21

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“We Could Easily Teach 250 Students! We Need a Bigger Studio Space and More Teachers!”

MUSE NEWS® interviews
BRENDA and JOHN WHITLOW,
owners of **Rowlett Piano Studio**
in Rowlett, Texas.

MN: Brenda, for several years you owned a very successful group piano studio in El Paso, Texas. When John became a band director in Rowlett, you moved and started over. How did you build your second huge studio?

BRENDA: John and I are lucky enough to be in a great city at the right time! Rowlett has a population of around 40,000 people and is growing at a dramatic rate. Presently we are the only commercial piano studio in town! But when we first arrived in Rowlett I taught group piano classes in my home, and John worked in the public school as a band director. Of course, I had to advertise because no one knew me here. But I was careful not to list my home address on any advertisements – I only listed my home phone number.

JOHN: I put fliers in the doors of all the neighborhood homes for Brenda. We also advertised in a neighborhood newsletter and in a popular coupon magazine. Our coupon gave \$10 off the registration fee. That coupon book was a great way for Brenda to get her name out into the community!

BRENDA: My goal was to have twenty students that first year of teaching – but I got fifty! Twelve months later, I had ninety students. It’s hard to believe, but word-of-mouth and the coupon book were bringing in more students than I could handle. I was getting up to thirty calls a week, and I couldn’t teach any more students! My group

piano studio was by then covering most of the living area of our home!

JOHN: In October of the second year, Brenda and I saw a commercial site on Main Street that was for lease. It was 1000 square feet – enough room for two piano labs!

BRENDA: John and I had thought it would take at least five years to make a commercial studio financially feasible, but there we were — thinking of “going commercial” after only thirteen months of group piano teaching in Rowlett! I knew if we were going to take on the financial responsibility of a commercial studio, I would need another teacher to teach full-time with me. That’s when John decided to quit his job as band director and become a group piano teacher.

JOHN: We really put a lot of thought into that decision! We were used to my steady paycheck coming in – and this commercial group piano studio would really be a gamble! But Brenda and I had wanted to run a piano studio together since we were in college. It was always a dream of ours! So, I took a deep breath – and resigned from my position as band director! It was scary!

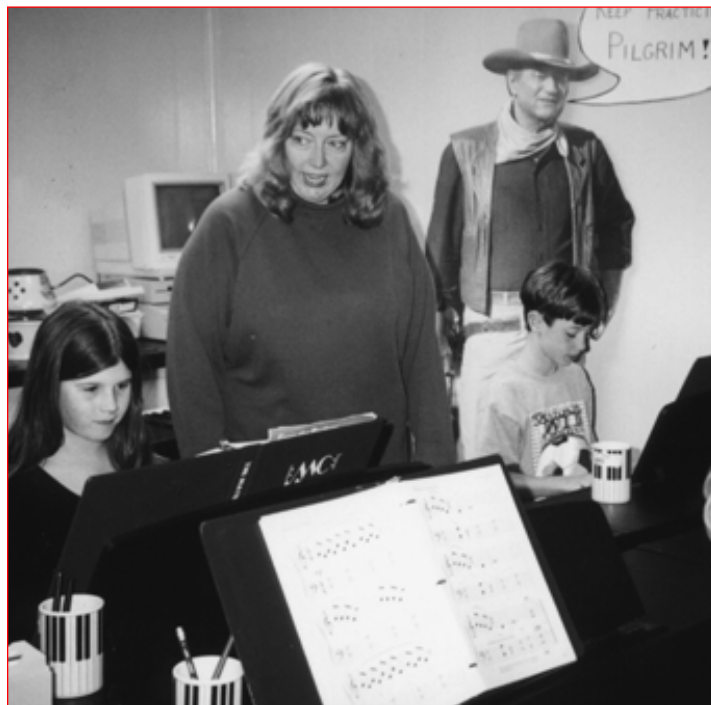
BRENDA: It was very scary! We both took big steps of faith! But in a short time, John was making more as a group piano teacher in our studio than he was making as a public school band director.

JOHN: And I owned my own business! It was — and is! — great! This is the first time that I have ever owned my own business!

MN: Your studio has grown very fast! Have you tried any other successful ways of advertising?

BRENDA: Yes! We have a large sign in the front of our commercial location that gets lots of calls. And we joined the Chamber of Commerce. I got the Chamber of Commerce marketing idea from an article in MUSE NEWS® several years ago — and from Bill Cole’s “Business and Advertising” talk at his and Mayron’s group piano teacher training seminars. A brochure explaining our group piano studio goes in a “newcomers’ packet” that the Chamber sends to over one thousand new families every quarter. Every commercial piano studio should join the Chamber of Commerce! It’s a great investment!

(Contd. On Page 5)



BRENDA WHITLOW (and a life-size poster of John Wayne) encourage students in one of the many **ROWLETT PIANO STUDIO** keyboard classes.

“Brenda and I had wanted to run a piano studio together since we were in college! It was always a dream of ours!”

JOHN: Then, we contacted a school music teacher that we know well and asked if we could come to her school and do a piano program for her students. She was really helpful. Each school grade was brought to the gym during their music class, and Brenda and I did a group piano presentation. We taught the kids how to tap quarter notes and two-eighth notes by using “Tap! Tappey!” from Mayron Cole’s BLAST OFF WITH PIANO!® program. We put the rhythms on a big poster board so that all the students could see. The entire gym full of kids learned how to tap those rhythms while we played the accompaniment to “Tap! Tappey!” on our keyboards. Then, from the audience, we had some of the “best” students come to the keyboards and tap the rhythms as everyone else clapped the rhythms with them. Of course, the accompaniment made it sound great! In addition, Brenda and I played several duos of popular music, and then some of our piano class students (who attend that school) played our electronic keyboards in ensemble for the crowd. At the conclusion of the program, Brenda and I explained our summer piano program. The kids were sold! It was a smash success! About sixty students signed up for the BLAST OFF WITH PIANO!® summer session. BLAST OFF WITH PIANO!® is a great program because it can be taught in a week!

MN: *How did you divide the students?*

BRENDA: My teaching schedule was already filled, so John got all the beginner students who called. Our enrollment climbed quickly to around 190 students! John is really good with the younger students. We had some six year old students who took BLAST OFF WITH PIANO!® who said they would enroll for fall piano classes only if Mr. John was their piano class teacher! He’s also teaching

Mayron’s EZ KEYS® program to five year olds.

JOHN: It’s wonderful! I’m having a good time!

MN: *Is it easy working with a spouse?*

BRENDA: Most of the time! I try not to be too bossy! Of course, we are in separate areas busily working so we don’t actually see each other that much. We have two young children, so we alternate working late evenings – I work late two nights a week and then John works late several nights. So far, we are working five days a week.

JOHN: And we have completely outgrown the commercial space we are leasing! We could easily teach 250 students! We need a bigger studio space and more teachers! Brenda and I have found another commercial piece of property just down the street on which we might build a studio. Of course, that would mean getting a small business loan so we are working through all the financial details before we make up our minds to move.

MN: *Do you have any other thoughts you’d like to share with piano teachers?*

BRENDA: We use THE MAYRON COLE PIANO METHOD^a with all of our piano classes! I’ve been teaching Mayron’s piano method for a long time now, and I think my favorite level is LEVEL I. I still love the way information is presented in an easy-to-understand, logical format. I also encourage teachers to go to Mayron and Bill Cole’s group piano teacher training seminars and get training! John and I will be coming back for more training this summer!

JOHN: I like the practical “how to” aspects that Mayron and Bill’s seminars share! You really get the “nuts and bolts” for running a large, successful commercial studio. And I also have to say a few words about Mayron’s piano method! I really like it because every composition not only teaches a good sounding piece of music, it teaches concepts that can be applied to other pieces! And since I am a trained percussionist, I really like the Rhythm Taps^a that Mayron has sprinkled throughout the method! It’s the best!



JOHN WHITLOW puts his band director skills to good use as a group piano teacher. Ensemble playing is a great way to learn to count rhythms accurately!

“Parents Told Us If Piano Lessons Had Been Like This When They Were Kids, They Would Have Stayed With It!”

MUSE NEWS^a interviews
DENA MAXWELL and
LARCI CONNER of
Ankeny, Iowa

MN: You two teachers are great friends and also group piano teachers in Ankeny. How did you expand your existing piano studios into group piano studios?

DENA: I've been a “piano partner” teacher for years using another piano method, but I was teaching too many days and too many hours each week. I knew there had to be a better way. I was ready for a change! Last spring I called Mayron Cole for a product catalog and sample packet.

LARCI: I'd been a private lesson teacher for years in another town and had built a studio of sixty students. When I moved to Ankeny two years ago, I had to start over. I already had thirteen private lesson students when Dena showed me the sample music packet Mayron had sent her.

DENA: Larci and I decided to jointly conduct a BLAST OFF WITH PIANO![®] camp last summer using Mayron's 5-lesson booklet! It was a smashing success!

LARCI: Yes! I needed lots of students and Dena only needed a few. When the BLAST OFF camp was over, I had 52 students and Dena's schedule was filled, too.

MN: How did you “divide” the students for your two studios?

LARCI: We filled Dena's schedule first. She took all the siblings. But she didn't have very many openings.

I took all the rest. And, believe it or not, we are still getting phone calls about the summer camps. Parents call and tell me their child took from us last summer and now the youngster is interested in starting piano classes at one of our studios.

MN: How did you advertise for the summer piano camps?

DENA: We put fliers in the newspaper. Plus, we advertised in the free Iowa PARENTS magazine.

LARCI: I even handed out fliers to the parents who were at the swimming pool. We put fliers everywhere.

DENA: At the end of the summer, we decided to go to Atlanta for one of Mayron's group piano teachers training seminars.

MN: What made you decide to attend the seminar?

DENA: We visited and called other teachers in this area who use THE MAYRON COLE PIANO METHOD[®]. All of them advised us to go get training!

LARCI: I was ready to become a group piano teacher! I'd always known that group teaching was a more effective way to teach piano. I had five little girls taking private lessons using another piano method, and each one of them was on the same page at the same time! That's not very efficient teaching – in fact it's boring teaching! I'd even contemplated writing my own group piano method. Thank goodness I didn't have to!

MN: When you returned to Ankeny, how did you “convince” reluctant parents that group piano lessons were best for their child?

LARCI: We didn't convince all of them. I lost some of those original thirteen private lesson students. But I told my piano parents that it was group piano lessons or nothing! Most of them then accepted the group piano concept.

DENA: My piano parents had mixed emotions. I had people accusing me of lowering my quality. But I stressed that group piano lessons are a higher quality than most private piano lessons since students must learn to read their notes and must learn to count rhythms correctly if they are going to play with other musicians. Now, a year later, my group piano teaching is accepted. And I now have so much more confidence about teaching in groups!

LARCI: That's right! When parents call either of our studios, they now know that they are calling for group piano lessons. That's all that we sell!

MN: What were the students' reactions about going into group piano classes?

LARCI: Mine were excited. They get to be with their friends and play theory games; plus they get to play music on my new electronic pianos. I have a fourth grade boy who had quit piano when I was teaching him another piano method. He couldn't cope with putting his hands in different keyboard positions. That drove him nuts! When I started teaching group piano with the MAYRON COLE PIANO METHOD, he came back! He's in a class with three other boys, and they are the best class I teach. They even have their own piano class T-shirts!

DENA: There were a few disgruntled students, but they soon left. Now there's a very real high level of energy in my studio. The students who started from the beginning last fall with THE MAYRON COLE PIANO METHOD are, of course, doing the best! Transfers from other piano methods have a difficult time reading notes and counting rhythms! Period!

MN: What are some of your victories?

LARCI: Dena and I did a joint Christmas recital at a large church. We had about one hundred students from our two studios participating, and they all played in ensemble.

"I was ready to become a group piano teacher!"

There were no solos! And they did beautifully! In fact, they were fantastic! It was a real goose-bumpy thing.

DENA: Even my five year old EZ KEYS^a students participated. They were so cute. They waved to the audience from the stage. Everyone loved them!

LARCI: At the end of the recital, fourteen students played Mayron's SILENT NIGHT ensemble while the rest of the students stood on the stage and sang. It was so moving people cried. That really "sold" what Dena and I are doing here in Ankeny! Parents told us if piano lessons had been like this when they were kids, they would have stayed with it!

MN: *What are some of your future musical plans?*

LARCI: We want to get more adult students into group piano classes. And this summer, we'll be working with the Ankeny Friends of the Arts at our community center. There will be several thousand children involved.

DENA: We'll do Mayron's JACK AND THE BEANSTALK^a operetta plus some more BLAST OFF WITH PIANO! camps. Plus, we may do the first EZ KEYS^a book for five-year olds. It's a great opportunity for Larci and me!

MN: *Is there anything else you'd like to tell piano teachers around the country?*

LARCI: My fifth grade 1-B students sight read a jazz piece yesterday! Sight read it! I've never had a first year student be able to sight read a hands together piece before! I am a MAYRON COLE PIANO METHOD groupie!

DENA: I'd like to add that my students were responsible for the switch to THE MAYRON COLE PIANO METHOD. They were frus-

trated and unhappy with their lessons. When Mayron sent me the complimentary sample packet, I played pieces for each student. All but eight students begged for Mayron's books, so I switched those students who really wanted a change in piano methods! It was hard for them at first, but as soon as they could click as a group, their interest in piano went way up. They

now ask for more songs, more mystery messages, more supplemental books. I didn't understand how enjoyable Mayron's music is for children. It looks deceptively simple. But it is those thorough steps that lead to success! After seeing THE MAYRON COLE PIANO METHOD in action, I understand why my students like it! Thanks, Mayron, for creating it!



Above: LARCI CONNER (center/back row), owner of PIANO LESSONS WITH LARCI, smiles with some of her many happy group piano students.

Below: DENA MAXWELL, owner of MAXWELL HOUSE PIANO STUDIO, works theory pages with a class of students.



PICTURE YOURSELF AS A SUCCESSFUL GROUP PIANO TEACHER! TEACH THE MAYRON COLE PIANO METHOD®!

**CALL 800/527-6873 FOR A FREE
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*Connelly School of Music
Burke, Virginia
Dr. Sandra Connelly, Owner
(See Page 1)*



*Maxwell House
Studio of Music
Dena Maxwell, Owner
and Piano Lessons with Larci
Larci Conner, Owner
Ankeny, Iowa
(See Page 6)*



*Rowlett Piano Studio
Rowlett, Texas
John and Brenda Whitlow, Owners
(See Page 4)*

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(See Page 3 for a List of Cities!)***

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