

Adult Education Movements in the U.S.: Past and Current Paradigms that Shape Adult Piano  
Study in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Casey Loudin

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Professor Chee-Hwa Tan

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## Introduction

The lyceum and chautauqua movements reveal how adults in the United States have been interested in continuing their education since 1826. These two general educational movements provided continuing education for adults in all walks of life. Developing an awareness of past and present paradigms in adult education can provide a road map for piano teachers to better relate to adult students who continuously desire the following benefits: accessibility to education, fulfilling musical experiences and improved mental and psychological health. Students in this market include adults who are pursuing education in their spare time, who have had previous music study, retired adults engaging in self-improvement, or adults who are simply searching for musical fulfillment. There are varying approaches to adult music classes, but in order to relate former educational movements to today's music climate, I will focus on the group music class aspect rather than private lessons. While adults who enroll in group music lessons may not be traditional, adolescent students, they are an important part of today's educational demographics.

In 1826, the first lyceum was held in Massachusetts and was designed for adults to learn from those in and around their community through lectures and discussions.<sup>1</sup> Lyceums flourished until the American Civil War and then blended into the chautauqua movement in the 1870s, which was a movement intended for adults to continue education in their homes and communities.<sup>2</sup> The philosophical approach of the chautauqua and lyceum movements are reflected in 21<sup>st</sup> century adult piano study. Today, adult piano students can enroll in music classes through online formats and group music lessons such as Recreational Music Making

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<sup>1</sup> Cecil B Hayes, "The American Lyceum: Its History and Contribution to Education," *Office of Education*, bulletin, no. 12, (1932) <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED542227>.

<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this paper, lyceum and chautauqua are referred to as improper nouns unless directly related to the Chautauqua Institution.

classes. This paper examines the lyceum and chautauqua movements and draws conclusions concerning the motivations behind adults of the past furthering their education and today's adults who are pursuing group music instruction. This will be completed by giving a brief history of the chautauqua and lyceum movements along with background information concerning group music instruction and current research in this field. The information provided for group piano instruction is intended to equip music teachers with insight of current tools available to aid students in their piano studies. By studying these trends, keyboard teachers will gain clearer insight into the needs and desires of adult learners and engage with the often-unreached market of adult students.

## **Historical Context**

### **Lyceum Formation and Transformation**

American adults became more purposeful with their general studies and developed an educational movement in 1826 known as the “American lyceum.”<sup>3</sup> The term “lyceum” was originally the name of the building near the temple of Apollo Lyceus, where Aristotle taught.<sup>4</sup> The “American lyceum” identifies the historical movement as a whole and included county, state and national educational lyceums.<sup>5</sup> Each lyceum was meant to bring education to its community through lectures and debates. An example of this type of lecture was delivered in one of Abraham Lincoln’s first public speeches as he discussed the dangers of slavery.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Hayes, “The American Lyceum.”

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (W. W. Norton and Company, 2019). [0-393-06618-5](#)

Paige Lush, professor of music history and American music, explains that communities valued the education provided by lyceums, but participation in such programs dropped steadily in 1857 due to the onset of the Civil War.<sup>7</sup> However, post-Civil War, lyceums grew in popularity again with an appreciation for traveling lecturers.<sup>8</sup> As these education events gained significance in the 1860s, the arts were introduced through dramatic readings and one-man shows.<sup>9</sup> These arts activities were often used as a tool for popularity and entertainment in the movement. Despite the attendee's appreciation for arts entertainment, many scholars thought of it as an abandonment to the original idea of the lyceum: a place for studies in science, literacy and conversation.<sup>10</sup> Despite this, the arts became a staple of the program.

### **Chautauqua Movement and General Education Inspiration**

The chautauqua movement started with religious studies but expanded into many subjects through the leadership of Lewis Miller. While Miller had a great passion for education in the academic field, his greatest passion was the Sunday school movement.<sup>11</sup> This movement began because the Protestant denominations took responsibility for educating children working in mills who weren't receiving general education in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12</sup> When Lewis Miller met John Vincent, they decided to expand on Sunday school programs through a shared enthusiasm for adult education.<sup>13</sup> They started an educational gathering that was purposefully planned for the summer months so public school and Sunday school teachers could be a part of the educational

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<sup>7</sup> Paige Lush, *Music in the Chautauqua Movement: From 1874 to the 1930s* (Jefferson, North Carolina: Mcfarland and Company publishers, 2013), 11.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>10</sup> Josiah Holbrook, *American Lyceum, or Society for the Improvement of Schools and Diffusion of Useful Knowledge* (Boston: Perkins and Marvin, 1829), 3 in Paige Lush *Music in the Chautauqua Movement: From 1874 to the 1930s* (Jefferson, North Carolina: Mcfarland and Company publishers, 2013), 11

<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey Simpson, *Chautauqua An American Utopia* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1999), 31.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 32.

program.<sup>14</sup> Miller was able to schedule the first Assembly in 1874 at Fair Point on Chautauqua Lake, which would later be named the Chautauqua Institution. This assembly derived from the idea of adult education with a focus on lectures, sermons, church services and pedagogical exercises for Sunday school teachers.<sup>15</sup>

The chautauqua meetings continued to expand each summer with a surge of growth after Ulysses S. Grant visited the Assembly as the president of the United States in 1875.<sup>16</sup> Just three years later, John Vincent announced the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle (CLSC). This formation was designed to be a four-year course to be completed at home and included reading books with academic themes and disciplines.<sup>17</sup> John Vincent stated that the CLSC was “for busy people who left school years ago,” which encouraged adults to expand their knowledge beyond sacred ideas and literature.<sup>18</sup> Three days after CLSC launched their curriculum, eight thousand people had registered for the first class, which was eventually called the Pioneers. The CLSC curriculum was designed for an audience similar to adults living the “American Dream” today; busy, with their formal education many years behind them. Despite the large amount of responsibilities adults of the past and present may carry, they still yearn for personal gratification through knowledge. A yearning in which today’s adults can find fulfillment via participating in group piano classes.

Along with personal fulfillment, adults who participated in academic assemblies appreciated their newfound sense of educational identity from the Chautauqua Institution.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Gould, *The Chautauqua Movement: An Episode in the Continuing American Revolution* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1961), 13.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 45

Vincent, founder of the Chautauqua Assembly, supported the idea of educational identity through graduation ceremonies, also known as “Recognition Day.”<sup>19</sup> The chautauqua movement provided a space for adults and children to learn throughout the summer and supplied materials for those who were often not able to receive educational materials at home. This gave women and men alike an educational identity and sense of accomplishment previously unattained. Without the formation of this institution and academic movement, many adults would not have acquired new skills and improved their mental state.

While many elements of society have changed since the founding of the Chautauqua Institution and early adult educational movements, one can draw parallels with the structure of these previous adult group programs and its prevalence today. After studying the historical adult education movements, one can conclude that adults have been and will continue to search for ease of accessibility to instruction, an enriching and fulfilling experience and improved mental health in pursuit of bettering oneself. Music teachers who include these components in group piano courses will fulfill students’ desires in their search for personal growth.

### **Group Piano Lesson History**

Johann Bernhard Logier was a wind instrument player, piano teacher, businessman, composer and inventor who saw a need for piano to be taught in groups in the early 1800s.<sup>20</sup> He recognized the hardship that teachers faced while trying to make a reasonable income through teaching individual, private lessons and by 1815 developed a group teaching format that could include up to thirty students at various levels.<sup>21</sup> He approached these classes by focusing more on

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>20</sup> Pai-Yu Chiu, “A Comparative Evaluation of Group and Private Piano Instruction on the Musical Achievements of Young Beginners,” (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2017), 5. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

fundamental music theory and harmony rather than technique.<sup>22</sup> This style of group teaching influences many pedagogues today.

According to Gerald Carson, social historian and writer, seven out of ten people in the United States public school system were being taught to read music in 1866.<sup>23</sup> Not only were students given a foundation for music education at school, but many families owned pianos and were taught how to play by family members. Piano education in the U.S steadily grew and by 1905 there were more pianos and organs in the homes of US citizens than there were bathtubs.<sup>24</sup> Since pianos were so easily accessible to families across the country, the importance of piano teachers began to rise. This unique job was frequently given to women as they could pass musicality down to their children and intrigue their future husband with their piano playing abilities.<sup>25</sup> The need for piano teachers rose even more when listening to music became highly accessible through the advent of the radio, phonograph and television set.<sup>26</sup>

In 1913, the first group piano class launched in public schools and was successful until the Great Depression and World War II.<sup>27</sup> After these two events, class piano dropped out of the public-school system and many colleges and universities adopted the format that Logier had previously started to emphasize basic musicianship.<sup>28</sup> While colleges have been employing group music classes for many decades, adults outside of universities have also been using group classes for general education. There are many forms of adult music classes that will be discussed in the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Gerald Carson, "The Piano in the Parlor," *American Heritage*, December 1965, Volume 17, Issue 1.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Pai-Yu Chiu, "A Comparative Evaluation of Group and Private Piano Instruction on the Musical Achievements of Young Beginners," (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2017), 5. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

following pages, but the most well-known adult group piano movement is based around Recreational Music Making (RMM) courses.

### **Recreational Music Making**

RMM classes imitate traditional group learning by providing adults the opportunity to learn piano among other likeminded students. These classes have proliferated around the country since the turn of the century. Karl Bruhn and Remo Belli coined the term “Recreational Music Making” in 2002 at the National Association of Music Merchants Global Summit in Estepona, Spain.<sup>29</sup> Both Bruhn and Belli noticed that baby boomers were nearing retirement and many of them had been wanting to play an instrument for a long time.<sup>30</sup> According to the U.S. Gallup Poll of 2008, one of the greatest regrets among baby boomers was that they quit music lessons as children.<sup>31</sup> During this time, Bruhn and Belli described RMM as a chance for people who do not consider themselves musical to discover the many psychological and emotional benefits of playing a musical instrument.<sup>32</sup>

Through this definition, many teachers have successfully created a space for adults to fulfill a lifelong dream of learning music. Since RMM classes began, many technological advances have developed that provide teachers and students with access to music lessons through avenues such as YouTube channels, apps, online books, prerecorded video lessons and interactive online courses. I will further examine and reflect upon the historical values from the chautauqua and lyceum movements rooted in adult piano education today in the following pages.

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<sup>29</sup> Brian Chung & Brenda Dillon, *Recreational Music Making Handbook for Piano Teachers* (Alfred Publishing, 2009), 5.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Music USA NAMM Global Report, “U. S. Gallup Poll,” (August 2008): 139, quoted in Brian Chung, *Recreational Music Making Handbook for Piano Teachers* (Alfred Publishing, 2009).

<sup>32</sup> Chung and Dillon, Ibid.

## Motivations for Music Study

### Accessibility to Music Instruction

After the Chautauqua Assembly became popular, many people around the country held events that catered to the concept of adult education. Circuit chautauquas were one of these events in which educational programs were presented in tents and only lasted a few days. The traveling nature of circuit chautauquas allowed lecturers to easily move from one community to the next. According to Lush, the circuit chautauqua became the most influential incarnation of the chautauqua idea due to its accessibility to participants.<sup>33</sup> Attending circuit chautauquas did not necessitate travel because education was brought directly to one's community.

Adults of today mirror circuit chautauqua participants by sharing an appreciation for accessibility. However, this accessibility looks different than in the 1900s. Dr. Rebecca Johnson, nationally respected pedagogue, discovered a way to make RMM classes convenient by partnering with a senior center who had effective advertising and enthusiastically supported her program.<sup>34</sup> In Johnson's reflections from teaching RMM classes she discusses the struggle of limited time to teach children after school hours and the advantage of holding adult group piano classes during the day.<sup>35</sup> Giving lessons throughout the day fosters the idea of "drive-thru" piano lessons for adults as they can easily access classes during their lunch break, on their way home from work or while running errands. Dr. Kathy Rabago, music school owner in Texas, shared in a phone interview that her adult classes have found the most success when scheduled in the morning. She stated that this was a good time for adults to attend classes because many of them

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<sup>33</sup> Lush, 16.

<sup>34</sup> Rebecca Johnson, "How do you incorporate RMM into your teaching?", *Keyboard Companion*, October 1, 2007.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

drop their kids off at school and come straight to piano. Her students have also expressed that they enjoy the success of lessons in the morning to kick start their day.<sup>36</sup>

Dr. Laura Williamson, a successful piano teacher located in Johnstown, PA, demonstrates how teachers can provide accessibility to piano lessons through offering convenient lesson times and a variety in style of lessons.<sup>37</sup> She offers partner lessons for friends, co-workers, siblings or any other pair who want to enjoy learning music together while having a high teacher to student ratio.<sup>38</sup> She also holds mini sessions in which private or partner lessons may take place for up to 6 hours before students commit to a set lesson time. In a phone interview she shared that these mini sessions are often bought as a gift for other people or used as a trial period for potential students.<sup>39</sup> She also shared that this was a great way to bring in new students since they were able to use this time as a trial period for piano.<sup>40</sup> All these forms of teaching are a great way to utilize the different learning styles and combinations that adults can benefit from.

Dr. Williamson also caters to adults through a class similar to recreational music making which she calls Piano for Pleasure. This class is easily accessible to adults of all ages due to the amenities the building has such as free parking, being handicapped accessible, and providing restrooms on the main floor with the piano classes. She shared that most of her adult students who take her Piano for Pleasure class are retired adults and can participate in group lessons during the day.<sup>41</sup> This provides her with a great way to utilize her time as a teacher while many young students are at school.

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<sup>36</sup> Kathy Rabago, interview by Casey Loudin, March 5, 2020.

<sup>37</sup> Laura Williamson, "What is Piano for Pleasure", LBW Piano, accessed January 27 2020.  
<http://lbwpiano.com/index.php/what-is-piano-for-pleasure/>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Laura Williamson, interview by Casey Loudin, March 3, 2020.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

Accessibility continues to influence adult classes through modern technology available to teachers and students. Such technology includes prerecorded digital courses and live streaming online piano classes. These various classes may be referred to as digital lyceums because they are a technological parallel to lyceums of the past. They also resemble circuit chautauquas in the way that they bring education directly to people's homes and communities. Progressive teachers such as Dr. Kathy Rabago and Bradley Sowash have created these digital lyceums via their online curriculum and live streams. On Dr. Rabago's website, she offers prepared online courses that anyone can purchase and have lifetime access to.<sup>42</sup> These courses, carefully sequenced for optimum success, include instructional videos, an online music community of teachers and students and an abundance of resources. Online courses include topics such as playing with chords, preparing for a praise and worship band, producing music and a general beginner's course. In a phone interview conducted with Dr. Rabago, she encouraged teachers of adult group classes to try her online courses because they are sequenced for beginners but are an engaging activity for all ages.<sup>43</sup>

Bradley Sowash, progressive online jazz teacher, has created a virtual presence by providing live group piano classes.<sup>44</sup> In these classes, adults receive real-time, online group instruction in the comfort of their home. Once the class is complete students can replay all videos up to a year. Participation in his class also provides students the support of a Facebook community to receive feedback from Sowash and other students. These live, online courses are a great opportunity for participants and Sowash because students have easy accessibility to group

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<sup>42</sup> Kathy Rabago, "Velocity Lessons Online Music Instruction," Velocity Music Academy, accessed January 27, 2020. <https://www.velocitylessons.com/>

<sup>43</sup> Kathy Rabago, interview by Casey Loudin, March 5, 2020.

<sup>44</sup> Bradley Sowash, "Online Classes," Bradley Sowash Music, accessed January 27, 2020. <https://bradleysowash.com/group-lessons>

piano lessons while Sowash can teach multiple students at one time from his private studio. In an interview with Sowash, he shared his technique of how he avoids apprehension to posting videos online for other classmates to watch. He stated that he asks his students to provide observational feedback to one another rather than critiques.<sup>45</sup> This could include comments such as, “the left hand has a steady bass”, “the melody was clear throughout the piece”, “the mood was happy until the middle section” and so forth. This form of observational feedback encourages classmates to not only provide a sense of community through friendly feedback but also develops students’ ears as music consumers who listen and analyze music like experienced musicians.

Apps and websites readily available for digital learning include Flowkey, Skoove and Simply Piano. Flowkey, recommended by Yamaha, gives a step by step tutorial for multiple songs, presents a demonstration of how your hands should look while performing the piece and automatically scrolls the music forward as you play.<sup>46</sup> Skoove is an online resource providing a comprehensive approach with tips for playing classical, pop, improv and technique. Skoove also has online teachers ready to answer questions as students pursue lessons.<sup>47</sup> Simply Piano, by JoyTunes, provides students with step by step instructions for each song in their program and gives students an opportunity to play songs while simultaneously listening to each note and giving feedback on if the correct note is played.<sup>48</sup> Each of these apps comes with a variety of songs to learn and give students of all ages the opportunity to enjoy the process of learning the piano straight from their mobile device. Sowash combines his online teaching with a software

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<sup>45</sup> Bradley Sowash, interview by Casey Loudin, March 5, 2020.

<sup>46</sup> ” How to Play with the Songs You Love,” Flowkey, accessed on February 1, 2020, <https://www.flowkey.com/en>

<sup>47</sup> ”Play Your Way,” Skoove, accessed on February 1, 2020, <https://www.skoove.com/en>

<sup>48</sup> ”Anyone can play, make your musical dreams come true,” JoyTunes, accessed on February 1, 2020, <https://www.joytunes.com/>.

called Classroom Maestro, which he recommends for in person or online classes.<sup>49</sup> He suggests this software because it instantly illustrates musical ideas such as chords, scales, intervals and other concepts from your MIDI keyboard onto a digital grand staff for others to see.<sup>50</sup> This level of accessibility was most likely only dreamt of during early educational movements.

### **Fulfilling Experience**

Brenda Wristen, professor at the University of Nebraska, completed a study examining adults' motivations for participating in group piano classes. Her study included a survey of 26 adult students providing information for joining the Community Piano Experience (her version of group piano class). Based on the questionnaire, 14 of 26 participants worked outside of the home full-time, but still desired personal fulfillment through a musical experience.<sup>51</sup> Dr. Johnson expands on this idea by sharing that her RMM students (comprised of many boomers), have a deep need for personal fulfillment and partnership in the learning process since many of them didn't have this identity in their career.<sup>52</sup> These students resemble the hard workers of the early 1900s who pursued education and a sense of fulfillment through knowledge. RMM, and other adult group music classes, are a wonderful vehicle for fulfilling such needs because adults can enjoy a musical experience by learning new skills and making music in a low pressure community.

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<sup>49</sup> "Classroom Maestro," TimeWarp Technologies, accessed March 15, 2020, <https://timewarptech.com/shop/music-software-apps/software/classroom-maestro/>.

<sup>50</sup> Bradley Sowash, interview with Casey Loudin, March 5, 2020.

<sup>51</sup> Brenda Wristen, "Demographics and Motivation of Adult Group Piano Students." (Faculty Publications: School of Music), 2005. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/musicfaepub/2>

<sup>52</sup> Rebecca Johnson, "How do you incorporate RMM into your teaching?", *Keyboard Companion*, October 1, 2007.

Making music in a joyful, supportive environment provides adults with a sense of identity as well as partnership in the learning process.<sup>53</sup> Like past adult education movements, group piano classes bring people with similar interests and a common purpose together. Since many adult group classes are full of “boomers,” participants in the same demographic can experience music they have heard their whole life in a new form. This could include learning simple rhythms, melodies or accompaniment patterns from music in the late 1900s. Revisiting songs from childhood enhances adults’ musical experience by playing songs that have impacted their lives for many years. The idea of adults finding identity and enjoyment in music is not a new trend as the chautauqua movement crowds grew when music entertainment became part of their program.<sup>54</sup>

Pamela Pike, professor at Louisiana State University founded the “Third-Age Piano Program” in 2002, which was meant for senior citizens to study piano in a group setting.<sup>55</sup> She discovered that many retired adults joined the group class due to the socialization and personal gratification rather than tangible goals.<sup>56</sup> These adults resembled the students who participated in the “Recognition Day” of the chuatauqua movement since they both found personal gratification in their success as a student. Conforming to the desires of adult students looking to pursue music for personal satisfaction provides a set of challenges that teachers must consider. These challenges include finding pieces appropriate for adults with little practice time, physical

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<sup>53</sup> J Boswell, “Human potential and lifelong learning,” *Music Educator’s Journal* 79(4), (1992): 38-40, quoted in Brenda Wristen, “Demographics and Motivation of Adult Group Piano Students” (Faculty Publications: School of Music. 2005).

<sup>54</sup> Lush, *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Pamela Pike, “Using Technology to Engage Third-Age (Retired) Leisure Learners: A Case Study of a Third-Age MIDI Piano Ensemble.” *International Journal of Music Education* 29, no. 2 (May 2011), 116–23.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0255761410396965>

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

declines due to aging and expanding on the social benefits of playing with others.<sup>57</sup> Pike increased the social structure of her group classes by using all electric keyboards and creating a MIDI ensemble. This group playing experience provides students a sense of community while learning and performing ensemble music with others.<sup>58</sup> Ensemble playing is a great way to simplify the difficulty level of music presented while providing students an opportunity to sound professional and jam with others. Learning in a group setting provides adults the joy of making music among others while still progressing in their personal music journey.

### **Improved Mental and Psychological Health**

A study conducted for the peer reviewed journal titled, “Frontiers of Psychology,” concluded that piano study can “promote cognitive reserve (CR) and improve subjective well-being.”<sup>59</sup> This conclusion was drawn from a study that included two groups of adults: one who participated in four months of piano classes while the other group engaged in various leisurely activities. After four months of lessons and various relaxed activities, the groups were tested on their cognitive domains (motor ability, attention, and executive function) and quality of life (QOL).<sup>60</sup> The results of the two tests concluded that adults who participated in piano lessons increased their motor ability, attention span and executive function.<sup>61</sup> Psychological distress also decreased for students who participated in piano lessons, but the control group who engaged in various leisurely activities had the exact opposite pattern with fatigue slowly increasing.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Sofia Seinfeld, “Effects of music learning and piano practice on cognitive function, mood and quality of life in older students,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 4, no. 810, (November 2013), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00810>

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

Research continues to show how music lessons can increase mental health of participants through the work of Barry Bittman, President of the Yamaha Music and Wellness Institute. He discovered that group music lessons without a performance emphasis is the key focus for increasing students' mood, reducing burnout and countering the effects of stress at the genomic level.<sup>63</sup> While the overall value of group music lessons for adults is very high, such classes also have a secondary impact on teachers. Debra Perez, writer of *Musical Moments* (an adult group piano method), states that the laughter and stress-free environment of her RMM classes has improved not only her students' quality of life but hers as well.<sup>64</sup> Dr. Johnson expands on this idea by sharing that letting go of the stress which often comes from worrying about children progressing properly has been incredibly freeing in her time of teaching adults. She shares that her adult students are not always steadily progressing, but they are happy to be at piano each week and have a contagious enthusiasm towards learning.<sup>65</sup>

Creating a stress-free environment is of utmost importance for adults to receive the many positive effects of a group class. Teachers can mindfully prepare for this environment through creating warmup exercises, playing calming background music before the class begins and affirming the bravery of adults in being a student again no matter their age. Debra Perez creates this environment by addressing tension in students' bodies with breathing exercises, setting a comfortable pace for her students, removing her expectations while embracing theirs and preparing lessons that are concept and experience based.<sup>66</sup> Dr. Rabago encourages a stress-free environment for herself and her students by making it clear that her expectations do not include

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<sup>63</sup> Barry Bittman et al., "Recreational music-making modulates the human stress response; a preliminary individualized gene expression strategy," *Medical Science Monitor* 11, no. 3 (2005), 31-40, quoted in Brian Chung, *Recreational Music Making Handbook for Piano Teachers* (Alfred Publishing, 2009), 4.

<sup>64</sup> Michelle Conda, "Where can you find training in adult teaching?," *Piano Magazine*, June 1, 2008.

<sup>65</sup> Rebecca Johnson, "How do you incorporate RMM into your teaching?," *Keyboard Companion*, October 1, 2007.

<sup>66</sup> Michelle Conda, "Where can you find training in adult teaching?," *Piano Magazine*, June 1, 2008.

them practicing.<sup>67</sup> However, she shared that they normally choose to practice between lessons anyway.<sup>68</sup> This devotion to learning reflects the adults who previously chose to attend educational presentations in the lyceum and chautauqua movements. Both generations of adults strive to engage in education without feeling pressure from outside sources.

These tips in creating a stress-free class are crucial because many teachers may be tempted to pour all their knowledge into adult students since they are cognitively further advanced than traditional younger students. However, it is important that all students (no matter their age) enjoy the process of learning piano rather than feeling overwhelmed each time they attend class. For improved quality of life, students must experience the joy and development of successfully playing and creating music even if they are mentally ahead of their physical abilities. Adults who feel uplifted and accomplished every time they leave group piano class are the ones who are truly improving their quality of life. This relaxed approach is quite different from the expectations that are often held by many traditional private piano instructors who strive for perfection and achievement in reaching performance goals.

## **Practical Applications for Piano Educators**

### **Recommendations for Curriculum and Class Activities**

Adult students frequently have a strong desire to be at piano lessons, and teachers can strengthen their love for piano by catering repertoire choices to each students' unique interests and life experiences. Group piano teacher, Jane Karowski, discusses the importance of students enjoying the music they study in her group class.<sup>69</sup> When choosing music for adults, teachers

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<sup>67</sup> Kathy Rabago, interview with Casey Loudin, March 5, 2020.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Jane Karowski, "Is it accurate to assume that all adult students study piano only for personal enrichment? If adult students want to improvise, what are some activities that will get them started?," *Clavier Companion*, July 1, 1991.

should ask themselves how music can enhance their students' various life activities and hobbies.<sup>70</sup> Karowski continues this idea by observing that adults who are grandparents may enjoy learning nursery rhymes to facilitate family enrichment via piano study.<sup>71</sup> Teachers can also take advantage of the traveling and cultural exposure adults have experienced. For instance, learning clave rhythmic patterns would be a great unit to study after a student has traveled to Cuba or other Latin influenced cultures. Group and private music teachers who choose repertoire students will appreciate and relate to will foster a desire for learning, no matter their students' age.

Improvisation can be a difficult concept to embrace at any age or level but especially for adults who are self-conscious.<sup>72</sup> Janeen Larsen shares activities she uses to encourage adult students to improvise in her article based on creative improvisation tips.<sup>73</sup> The activities she suggests include: using the piano to paint a picture or scene, replicating the sounds of animals, imitating different emotions, creating ostinato patterns for the left hand to repeat while the right hand improvises and using the blues scale and 12 bar blues as a call and response duet.<sup>74</sup> Larsen emphasizes the importance of moving through improvisation activities quickly, so students never have the opportunity to be self-conscious and doubt themselves.<sup>75</sup> If adults are constantly challenged through various improvisatory activities, they will have ample opportunity to adapt to the bravery required for improvising. Sowash encourages improvisation in his classes by providing his students with sheet music that only includes target notes.<sup>76</sup> These scores not only

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Janeen Larsen, "If Adult Students Want to Improvise, What Are Some Activities That Will Get Them Started?" *Clavier Companion*, July 1, 1991.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Bradley Sowash, interview by Casey Loudin, March 5, 2020.

avoid copyright infringements but encourage students to improv between target notes, focus on the large structure of the piece and learn a solid method for memorizing music.<sup>77</sup>

In a study titled “The Music for Life Project,” students and teachers were encouraged to identify the challenges they each had to overcome in a class piano setting.<sup>78</sup> When considering approaches to andragogy, teachers reported that there was a great need to revisit and repeat repertoire, adopt a slower pace, speak clearly, keep content relatively simple and incorporate games in the learning process.<sup>79</sup> When giving students an opportunity to revisit and repeat pieces they already know, they are able to enjoy the success of playing through many pieces while reflecting on their progress. Using a slower pace in group teaching helps adults physically experience each learning step despite their faster cognitive abilities. Dr. Williamson suggests playing through pieces with a backing track to make the activity a fulfilling experience.<sup>80</sup> When repeating music with adult students this is a great way for them to feel accomplished as they successfully play with a professional band from a prerecorded track.

While interviewing Dr. Williamson, she shared that she has found success in extending her adult class to seventy-five minutes to provide an introductory activity called “table time.”<sup>81</sup> This is a time where students can get to know one another, ask questions about the previous lesson’s assignments and review concepts on a white board with everyone like a round table discussion. She has found that this “table time” works well for building a sense of community and support since students wear headphones throughout most of the class. Her group class is set

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Susan Hallam and Andrea Creech, “Promoting Well-Being in Older Citizens Through Musical Engagement,” in *Contemporary Research in Music Learning Across the Lifespan*, ed. Jennifer A. Bugos. (New York: London: Routledge, 2016), 242.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 245.

<sup>80</sup> Laura Williamson, interview with Casey Loudin, March 3, 2020.

<sup>81</sup> Laura Williamson, interview by author, Casey Loudin, March 3, 2020.

up with a lab controller that Dr. Williamson oversees and controls what each student hears. Despite everyone playing through headphones, her students have expressed that they enjoy the fact that they don't have to play for each other, and others can't hear them playing unless they volunteer to do so.<sup>82</sup> One piece of advice Dr. Williamson gave in our phone interview is important for teachers of all ages to recognize. She stated, "It's ok for people to try out piano. They may not come back, but you have to be ok with that. Don't take people leaving as a failure."<sup>83</sup> Adult students may not be the traditional young learner who take lessons throughout their entire 12 years of schooling, but all students can be inspired from piano lessons in a short period of time.

Like younger students, adults want to have fun in piano lessons and teachers can promote an exciting learning atmosphere by planning activities that emulate fun games. Some activities I have found to be successful when co-teaching RMM classes at the University of Denver include: note naming quizzes, walking on a large staff made of tape on the floor to identify intervals and line and space notes, using rhythm cards as a basis for students to improv with and creating an ensemble by using various keyboard settings. These relatively simple activities are exactly what adults appreciate.<sup>84</sup> During the chautauqua movement, music and arts activities were discouraged by the leaders but adored by the audience. Music teachers today can move straight to fun music activities with their adult students since such events have proven to be successful with adults from many generations. While interviewing current adult group class teachers, many of them stated that they gave their students certificates at the end of the course. Sowash shared that many of his students are classically trained piano teachers looking for guidance in jazz classes and the

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Hallam and Creech, 245.

certificate was a way of accomplishing professional development.<sup>85</sup> Dr. Williamson shared that her retired students appreciate the certificate because they can show it to their grandkids, and it gives them a sense of accomplishment in an activity they've always wanted to try.<sup>86</sup>

### **Teacher Training Opportunities**

Teachers can specialize in recreational music making by participating in the RMM Teaching Specialist program that the Music Teachers National Association offers. This program requires an understanding of teaching approaches for adult students through video submission and a written teaching philosophy. Education in RMM is also available at local and national piano conferences including the RMM track at the Music Teachers National Association conference and the National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy. The National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM) supports RMM classes through providing interviews with RMM instructors on their website as well as an extensive list of beneficial resources for teaching adult group classes.<sup>87</sup>

When beginning adult classes Dr. Williamson suggests reading and rereading available materials for such courses.<sup>88</sup> A few materials that the NAMM suggests include: the Musical Moments series by Perez, The Piano Guy: Play Piano in a Flash website and books, Recreational Music Making Handbook for Teachers by Brian Chung and Brandon Dillon, Adult Piano Adventures by the Fabers and Yamaha's music education programs. Perez also provides a teacher's manual and videos to guide instructors in using her adult group class curriculum. Teachers can work their way into adult group classes by following the model that the New

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<sup>85</sup> Bradley Sowash, interview with Casey Loudin, March 5, 2020.

<sup>86</sup> Laura Williamson, interview with Casey Loudin, March 5, 2020.

<sup>87</sup> "RMM Recreational Music Making," NAMM, accessed November 17, 2019, <https://www.namm.org/category/term/rmm-recreational-music-making>

<sup>88</sup> Larua Williamson, interview with Casey Loudin, March 15, 2020.

School of Music Study utilizes. At this school, private lessons are offered to adult students along with six group repertoire classes per year.<sup>89</sup> This is a great way to incorporate group piano classes into a teacher's studio as it can be viewed as an opportunity for students to play their pieces for one another if they are wanting a performance experience without the high pressure of a large audience.

## **Conclusion**

After studying historical adult education movements and observing the motivations that guide adults toward music study today one can conclude that adults are pursuing group music classes with an appreciation for accessibility, a fulfilling experience and a desire for improving mental and psychological health. While researching and writing this paper, I received an email from a potential adult student who was inquiring about piano instruction and truly demonstrated the spirit of my research. In her email she stated,

I have come to a point where I'm not getting a lot of satisfaction or joy from my day job, and so am looking for another avenue. I'm not terribly interested in performing or becoming any level of "expert" on the keyboard – just enough to find enjoyment, a creative outlet, and the ability to play some music to the best of my ability!... I am looking more for a "fun and joyful" approach rather than a strict, goal-driven one.<sup>90</sup>

This potential student resembles many of the adults who are returning to piano today and are hoping to fill a void part of their life through piano instruction. In the early 1900's this sense of fulfillment was made convenient through the CLSC, and their curriculum that was delivered to people's homes. Today's convenience level has risen as teachers have incredible access to technology and online resources conducive to group music instruction. Current adult students

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<sup>89</sup> "Adult Piano Study," The New School for Music Study, accessed November 10, 2019, <https://www.nsmspiano.org/adult-piano-study>

<sup>90</sup> Email message to author, March 2, 2020.

mirror adults of the past who attended circuit chautauquas and lyceums through a common search for educational fulfillment and identity. Like the adults who pursued knowledge in previous educational movements, today's piano instruction can provide adults with a sense of personal fulfillment and knowledge while creating music.

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