

About Mr. McElroy

I have a degree in Music Education, and my 'real' job is the instrumental music teacher at San Juan Hills High School. I teach all of the bands and orchestras at the high school level. However, for the first decade of my career, I also taught general music classes (K-3) while also teaching at Aliso Niguel High School. In fact, I taught a weekly music class for all rooms at Laguna Niguel Montessori until I moved to San Juan Hills High School (the distance made that arrangement impossible). I am an experienced music educator for all grades K-12

Several years ago, a family was discussing piano lessons with my wife, Ms. Jennifer (room 8 at Laguna Niguel Montessori). Some studios won't start kids at this age, and families like the convenience of not having to travel for lessons. I was asked to teach 1 student 'on the side.' Well, that turned out to be quite successful. As families saw me teaching 1 student, they asked if they could join. After a few years, I had a nice handful of students. I feel that I communicate well to these 'pre-studio' students, and start them off with a lot of enthusiasm for music as well as the knowledge and skill to pursue their talents. My 'studio' was only meant to serve students at Laguna Niguel Montessori as I had time between my responsibilities at the high school.

I mainly see what I do as a service to students at LNMC, but as COVID struck, several students - even some who graduated from Montessori - have asked to do virtual lessons. I've found them to be quite successful. I now have a strong group of students at various levels of development. Still, because of my high school schedule, I only offer lessons in-person for Laguna Niguel Montessori students at LNMC and Zoom lessons for students outside of LNMC.

There are many piano teachers out there. All of my own kids took lessons through teachers who are part of the Music Teachers Association of California ([MTAC](#)), and they teach a program called Certificate of Merit (CM). Though not all teachers do this, I really like this program. They also hold recitals and are more prepared to teach students at a higher level. They vary on when they start students, 2nd to 3rd grade is the most common time to start. That's where I fit a nice niche for pre-school/Kindergarten students, and I always teach with the goal for the students to be prepared to work with one of these specialists. Because I am primarily a high school band and orchestra conductor, I do not hold recitals or participate in the CM program. I have always intended my 'studio' to be made up of Montessori students in the primer or level 1 books. That's about 2 years of study. Some students have taken lessons twice per week and moved into level 2 books. That's fine too. However, once students get past level 1 or 2, they are better served with the private teachers I mentioned above where they can perform in recitals and be part of the CM program - if they want to study more seriously. I can teach past book 2, but I share this information with you here so you know that I am set up best for younger beginners, and the MTAC teachers are better designed for older/more experienced children looking for more intensified study.

Payments

My fee is \$35 per half hour. If you are paying through Venmo, you can pay as you go. My Venmo ID is @deanmcelroy, and if it asks to verify the last 4 numbers of my phone number, it is 5490. Please pay on the lesson day. If you have not paid before the lesson, I will send a reminder after the lesson. The next lesson will not occur until the previous lesson is paid for. Some families pay one month ahead (for example, if there are 4 Tuesdays in November, the family will pay \$140 up front). If this is easier for you, that's fine too, just put the dates in the description line. I will always credit forward any lessons as long as I receive notice ahead of time (even if that means a text that the child is home sick the day of the lesson). If families prefer to pay by check, that's fine, but they must be done one month in advanced (see example above). Checks are due by the first lesson of the month, and should include all potential lessons for that month (again, I'm happy to credit forward missed lessons with advanced notice).

Materials

The books we use are the series, Piano Adventures, by Nancy Faber. New students will use the primer level. You need 3 books - lesson, performance, and technique. The series then moves to level 1, 2A, and 2B. These levels require a 4th book - theory. These books can be found on Amazon for about \$7 each. Each series is designed to take about a year of lessons.

By level 1 (or older students age 6 or 7 in primer), students should have access to a metronome. These can be downloaded on a phone or tablet. Any will work, but I recommend Pro Metronome.

Pianos

It's tough to recommend a piano since they all come with different bells and whistles. You can start with ANYTHING, but the following features are the most important (By the way, if you have an acoustic piano, you have all of these):

1. 66 FULL SIZE keys. This is a MUST. Students need to get used to using full size keys from day 1. Most keyboards have full size keys. Anything smaller is usually considered a toy. 88 keys is a full keyboard. They're great, but not required at a beginning level.
2. Pressure sensitive. This means that students can play loud and soft based on how hard they press on the keys. Though not required to start, it is an important feature for them to learn musicality - not just technique. This is offered on most reasonably priced models.
3. Sustain Pedal Input - these are in most models regardless of price. It is a quarter inch jack in the back of the keyboard that usually says 'sustain' or 'pedal.' This is used around book 1 (the 2nd book), but not seen regularly until the level 2 books.
4. Weighted Keys - This is not necessary at the beginner level and really brings the price up. With weighted keys, the keyboard will feel more like an acoustic piano. Often, when a student moves from a keyboard to an acoustic piano, they have a difficult time

because the keys are 'heavier,' This helps with that. They are usually called 'Digital Pianos' at this point - not keyboards or synthesizers. Again, this is usually a huge price jump and not necessary at the beginner levels.

Practice tips

At the earliest levels, I do not encourage practice charts and carrots/sticks to motivate students to practice. At the early stages of the Primer book, it will be difficult for students to practice without me. About halfway through the book, they should be independent enough to practice on their own. Encourage them by asking, 'show me what you learned,' or 'can you teach me what you learned.' Make it a fun time to spend together with them. Placing a timer on the piano and telling them to practice alone does not foster enthusiasm for music (even though this will become a reality at the more advanced levels when they're older).

When students begin book 1, they should dedicate at least 30 minutes per day for the most success - but 2-3 hours per week, broken up into at least 3 days is sufficient. Any less will slow their progress. In the level 2A and 2B books, 45 minutes for 5 days per week should be the minimum goal for steady progress.

Students generally feel most rewarded from practice time when they can play pieces for you, so ask to hear what they are playing and continue to offer encouragement. Try to avoid correcting them (I'll do that). We want to keep the environment as positive as we can to encourage them to love music, which will then develop intrinsic motivation - the only REAL motivation that lasts.

Thank you so much for trusting you child's music education with me. You can always reach me at any of the contacts below.

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