

Piano and Music Theory Studies

with Miss Manda Suchara



Locations

- In Students' Homes (students must have an acoustic or Digital full-size/full-key-weight piano (see *Types of Pianos* below) in an area that can be left undisturbed by the rest of the household for the lesson time)
- Through City Music School (Crestwood)
- Online via Skype (payment through Paypal); for students ages 18 and older only

Cost

Varies based location and desired content; typically it ranges between \$25-\$35 per half hour, plus the cost of books and other materials

Expectations of the Student

- The student genuinely wants to learn to play the instrument and/or develop other musical skills
- The student has regular access (at least 5 times a week) to a piano (see *Types of Pianos* below)
- The student is supported by those who will encourage his/her pursuit (e.g. the student will not be reprimanded for making noise when practicing, for playing the same thing over and over until s/he gets it just right, the student will not be berated by others for practicing, the student is not being forced against his/her will to study, etc.)
- The student will practice lesson material on his/her own, guided by the instructor's directions. Practice time varies based on a student's age and learning style. Customarily, beginner-level students are expected to practice at least 10 minutes a day, for at least 5 days a week (lesson does not count as a practice). Advanced students may be practicing 60-90 minutes a day, 6 or 7 days a week to master the lesson material. Students are never prevented from exceeding the material that was assigned, but the expectation is that the student will do at least the minimum amount required so progress can continue
- The student will be honest with the instructor about practicing habits & frequency, and the student will openly express his/her thoughts about their interest in the material, its degree of difficulty, etc.
- The student, (supported by his/her guardian/household if applicable), will commit to weekly lessons, make attending them a priority, and will give the instructor as much notice as possible if a lesson needs to be rescheduled

What the Student Can Expect

Manda will provide weekly or bi-weekly lessons in piano study or music theory.
Lessons will last 30-60 minutes, as pre-arranged.

Making a Connection: Piano will only become a lifelong passion or enjoyable hobby if it's integrated with the rest of one's life. For this, it's common for an instructor to spend a little time at each lesson getting to know what is going on in a student's life, understanding the student's interests, goals, and behaviors, asking/answering questions, and looking for opportunities to cross-refer learning or synthesize with other interests.

Length of Lesson: While student and teacher will agree on the length of a lesson, it's imperative that a teachable moment or breakthrough not be truncated by a timer. Manda will do her best to begin and end lessons precisely on time, but will also be as flexible as possible to allow for families' busy lives and to be respectful of any significant teachable moments as they occur in lessons.

Student-focused Teaching & Patience: We all learn at different paces through different means. Manda is extremely patient and is very skilled at differentiating a student's learning. She will work to find a strategy that works for the student. This is an especially important point for siblings who are in lessons at the same time. They will undoubtedly progress at different speeds. This is not a competition. Manda is more focused on helping students thoroughly learn a concept, rather than having them parrot back exercises or songs just to check them off in the book. Students will be practicing SLOWLY, STEADILY, and they will be given the chance to play a concept/song over and over again until they feel accomplished.

Gauging a Student's Readiness: Musical ability is combination of one's personal interest/drive/passion, mechanical aptitude and coordination (gross and fine motor skills), and the hardwiring of one's cognitive abilities. Anyone can learn to read music and play an instrument if they truly want to; however, much like learning a foreign language or sport, some people more naturally adapt to skills needed for the material. Youtube is full of videos showing toddlers, barely able to walk, performing works on piano, drums, violins, and other instruments. Often, these are prodigies, which means they have an exceptional aptitude for understanding music and pronominally advanced mechanical skills. True prodigies are rare and are not the norm by which students' capabilities should be measured, regardless of age.

Students who succeed in music are often the ones who have enough maturity to work one-on-one with a teacher through a 30 minute lesson, enough cognition to retain the majority of the lesson material (and/or take good notes), enough interest/self-discipline to practice the material at home, and regular encouragement from others. Piano, in particular, takes physical as well as mental athleticism. Manda will continually assess students' interest and maturity. For younger students, she will keep guardians up-to-date on how lessons are progressing and will make recommendations if a student's behavior suggests that it might not be the right time for piano or theory study. At all costs, Manda tries to avoid wasting a student's time, a family's resources, and/or giving a student a negative experience of music – forcing a student to learn when s/he is not ready can be irrevocably damaging to a student's perception of music... and to their own spirit.

Manda divides piano education into 3 parts:

- **Technique:** dexterity, posture, mechanics, speed, control, patterns, drills
- **Theory:** understanding how music works and how to interpret the secret code of music – scales, chord progression, types of notes & rests, music interpretation, musicianship
- **Repertoire:** learning to play songs, preparing pieces for performance, showmanship

The structure of the lessons is based around these 3 elements. The lessons are a chance for students to demonstrate what they've worked on during the week and a chance for them to learn a bit more about one or all three areas of study.

Types of Pianos and their Impact on Study

Acoustic – These pianos can be upright, spinet, or grand. While there are electronic/digital versions, acoustic pianos usually do not need a power supply. They do need to be tuned regularly. Acoustic pianos offer students the best investment in their education. The weighted feel of the keys is essential to developing the student's touch and technique. Full mastery of the instrument will require access to an acoustic piano at some point in the student's study.

Electric/Digital Keyboard with Weighted or Semi-weighted keys – The technology in this area has come a long way. Most of these instruments are about the same size as acoustic pianos, but these instruments need a power supply. With the push of a button, some even offer the option of different sound patches (different keyboard sounds, organ sounds, string or brass sounds, etc.). These instruments also allow a student to practice while wearing headphones, decreasing disturbance within the household. The weight of the keys is very important. Fully-weighted keys are the best option, in terms of serving the student's study. Semi-weighted is second best, but the student may struggle mastering certain elements of technique without being able to practice with the proper weight. The length of the keyboard is also important. A full piano has 88 keys. As students progress, it's important that they're able to practice using the full range of the keyboard.

Electric Keyboard or Synthesizer, unweighted keys, 61-note or less – This is often a more economical option for those who are investigating a student's interest in piano. This is the least optimal vehicle for piano study. However, beginner students can use a keyboard like this to learn how to read notes, to learn chords, and to learn basic songs. However, As piano study progresses, these students often get frustrated for these reasons: 1) not being able to play all of the notes in a song because their keyboard doesn't have enough keys 2) not progressing in their technique because the feel between the piano at the lesson and the piano at home is so different (the keys of the lesson piano are heavier and students often prefer the quick easy touch of the keyboard and give up on the piano) 3) the size of the keys on an electric keyboard is usually smaller than an acoustic piano and the student gets tripped up when trying to play what they've practiced 4) keyboards are easily damaged and practicing stops when the keyboard breaks, 5) it's impossible to play scales or drills into multiple octaves with both hands 6) keyboards are being practiced somewhere that encourages poor posture or focus (i.e. on a couch near a tv, on the edge of a bed, on the floor, in the car on the way to the lesson, etc.).

For beginning students who start on an undersized, unweighted keyboard, piano study usually lasts 6 months or less. When/if they resume lessons, they usually have to start over from the beginning because they didn't have the cognitive benefit of merging note study with technique.

