

The Ann Arbor Area Piano Teachers Guild

The Ann Arbor Area Piano Teachers Guild emerged in 1961 as an outgrowth of the Ann Arbor Music Teachers Club, which was composed of various categories of music teachers. The original ideals of Frances Danforth, the charter president, and the other eleven charter members, are still evident: "progress, creativity in teaching, impeccable integrity, high standards, and democratic attitudes."

The first official presentation of the Guild was a lecture-demonstration master class presented by University of Michigan School of Music Professor Ava Comin Case, who was an inspirational leader for the charter members. The lecture-demonstration format continues to be used in monthly formal meetings at Kerrytown Concert House. The earliest student recitals for Guild members were held monthly in members' homes. Now there are usually three school-age student recitals a year, which are held at Kerrytown Concert House. Adult students have their own workshop recitals where an extremely supportive group plays and listens to all levels of experience.

Another early development, the Junior Music Club, no longer exists, but may have been an inspiration for the development of Music Explorer Day, which began in 1982. The Junior Music Club, in founder Francis Danforth's words, evolved to "explore various aspects of music creativity, rhythm games, composer reports, note-reading drills, ensemble playing, music history and solo performance." Music Explorer Day is a biennial event of varied music discoveries in which Guild members and guest presenters share their talents with youngsters. Students and their parents choose from a menu of sessions that have included "Early Keyboard," "Dances of India," "How a Piano Works," "Gamelon Instruments," "Rhythmicon," "Instrumental Petting Zoo," and much more. Thousands of local families have been delighted with Music Explorer Day for two decades.

Monthly seminars and repertoire group meetings provide for the exchange of information, ideas, and experience within the AAAPTG and support one of the principal goals of helping members further their knowledge and expertise in teaching piano. Seminars allow for informal discussions, hands-on learning, viewing of teaching videos, book discussions, and follow-up discussions after formal programs. Seminar topics have included: "The Taubman Technique," "Teacher Burn-Out," "Yoga for Pianists," and "Sharing Our Studio Forms and Policies." The Repertoire Group offers informal performances, discussions on literature, and preparation for its master classes and recitals. The group has given recitals at schools, churches, and retirement homes, often with themes such as music of one composer or all American music. They are now practicing two-piano music to be played at the Guild's special two-piano event in March.

As an affiliate of MMTA, the Guild's big yearly project is Achievement Testing. The Guild began sponsoring SATD in 1975 and the program has grown into two days of testing that involve over 600 students. There are currently 20 state certified members in the Guild, most of whom are nationally certified.

The University of Michigan School of Music has long been an integral part of the AAAPTG. From the earliest collaborations of public lecture-demonstrations, to the generous use of its building, it has supported the group's activities. Jointly sponsored workshops for piano teachers, with such

superlative educators as Lynn Freeman Olson, Marvin Blickenstaff, and Jane Magrath, have been a yearly “shot in the arm” for teachers in southeast Michigan. Access to the pedagogy library and to special open forums or classes are additional ways the School of Music benefits the AAAPTG membership.

As members have looked for increased professional involvement and opportunities for students, the Guild has supported many complementary activities through the years. The first local chapter of the National Guild of Piano Teachers was established by Frances Danforth in 1961 and the auditions have grown from involving 40 students that year to between 200 and 300 in recent years. AAAPTG members make up almost all of the represented teachers, its members organize the event, and some members have become NGPT judges. The Ann Arbor Bach Association’s Bach and Sonata/Sonatina Festivals were begun by Guild members and continue to be popular yearly events. The Guild often helps sponsor special musical events such as the Beethoven Conference in 1995 that was also presented by the Academy for the Study and Performance of Early Music, the University of Michigan School of Music, and the Midwestern Historical Keyboard Society.

The Guild has offered awards since 1980 when summer study scholarships began to be awarded through auditions each year. In 1993 the Ann Arbor Area Piano Teachers Guild Foundation was formed to create an off-shoot non-profit organization which would assume responsibility for certain fund-raising and award granting events that were previously handled by the Guild. The Foundation started the annual Mostly Music Camp in the summer of 1995 as a fund-raiser and an opportunity for students to experience various music related activities in classes such as “Renaissance Music and Art” and “Creative Music Exploration.” Guest performers also present programs for the campers.

Also in the 90's, fund-raising “Just for Fun Recitals” were begun by the Foundation, giving students a venue to perform lighter music than the repertoire played in regular student recitals. The latest “Just for Fun Recital” was more fun than usual since students and many teachers wore Halloween costumes.

Other fund raising events are Music Explorer Day, sales of spring bulbs, and Borders Benefit Days. Awards presented by the Foundation include student awards that are given each year through auditions, with winners presented in recital; partial scholarships to the Mostly Music Camp; discretionary assistance to students of Guild teachers; support of organizations such as the Brighton Celebration of Music; and teacher enrichment grants.

The AAAPTG has been serving the music profession and the community for 42 years. It now has over 90 members. Through its offerings of continuing education, professional involvement, and growth experiences for students, it is constantly evolving in the music profession and supporting the highest musical standards.

Mary Bates and Lynne Waggoner