

MEMOIRS OF THE ANN ARBOR AREA PIANO TEACHERS GUILD
ITS HISTORY AND EVOLUTION

by FRANCES A. DANFORTH

edited by
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September 1986

ABOUT THE CHARTER PRESIDENT

Frances A. Danforth was born in Chicago, Illinois. She received her A.B. degree from the University of Michigan. She studied another year with Joseph Brinkman, then head of piano department of the School of Music and received her Bachelor of Music degree. Another year was spent in New York City studying piano with Eugene Heffley and composition with Robert Russell Bennett. She married Percy O. Danforth in 1927 and they have two sons, both musicians.

Frances has taught piano for fifty years and throughout this time her abiding interest has been the study of various pedagogical methods of piano teaching. She attended summer workshops every year for 15 years. Many were at Michigan State University, the University of Michigan, the University of Maryland and Wayne State University with Anna Husband, then director of the Detroit Community Music School. She completed her Masters degree in Music Literature and Composition at Eastern Michigan University in 1973. She then studied electronic music with Dr. Anthony Iannaccone at EMU, harpsichord with Alice Lungershausen and clavichord with Bernard Braucle. She was voted "Teacher of the Year for 1978" at the Michigan Music Teachers Association (MMTA) Convention in 1977. She is listed in the Tenth Edition of the Marquis "Who's Who of American Women."

Her interest in Pedagogy is motivated by the philosophy that since everyone is an individual, what impresses one student does not impress another. In addition to the weekly private lessons, she holds monthly workshops for three age levels. At these meetings students listen to recordings illustrating different periods of music history and various composers' styles, do games and notation drills, and perform before each other (no parents to inhibit them!).

Frances is an eclectic person whose interests over the years have exposed

her to sculpturing, newswriting, art and even cooperative nurseries! For her, there are so many things to discover and explore!

N.B. The above is an updated excerpt from the AAAPTG Newsletter, where announcements of upcoming AAAPTG events, programs, and highlights of the activities of various members are published.

ANN ARBOR AREA PIANO TEACHERS GUILD

Charter Membership List

1961

Marybelle (Mrs. Richard) Blodgett
Kitty (Mrs. John) Carow
Pauline (Mrs. Kenneth) Crocker
Frances (Mrs. Percy) Danforth
Frances (Mrs. Howard) Farrar
Antoinette (Mrs. Ray) Kehoe
Marjorie (Mrs. Kent) Leach
Elizabeth Rohns
Louise (Mrs. R.I.) Stanley
Sieglinde (Mrs. Henry) Onderdonk
Agnes Wardroper
Carol (Mrs. Kenneth) Westerman

CHARTER BOARD MEMBERS

(Installed September 1961)

PRESIDENT: Frances A. Danforth
VICE PRESIDENT: Carol Westerman
SECRETARY-TREASURER: Alice Johnson
PROGRAMS: Helen Rae Bracklein
PUBLICITY: Delmar Rogers
MEMBERSHIP: Marjorie Leach
SOCIAL: Marybelle Blodgett
HISTORIAN: Kitty Carow
TELEPHONE: Antoinette Kehoe
LIBRARIAN: Lola Scheidel
CONSTITUTION-PARLIAMENTARIAN: Carol Westerman

Piano Teachers To Attend Workshop



CLASS FOR TEACHERS: Prof. Ava Comin Case of the University's School of Music (standing right) will conduct a master class for members of the Private Piano Teachers Club at 9 a.m. Wednesday in the home of Mrs. Percy Danforth, 1411 Granger Ave. Mrs. John Carow (standing left) listens as Prof. Case gives Mrs. Kent Leach (seated) a few advance pointers.

MEMOIRS OF THE ANN ARBOR AREA PIANO TEACHERS GUILD

According to the Random House College Dictionary, one definition of a Professional is "a person who makes a business of an occupation or hobby in which amateurs frequently engage." That definition crystalized the thinking of the group forming the Ann Arbor Area Piano Teachers Guild. Over the past twenty-five years the foremost thought has been the realization of the difference between those who teach as trained musicians and those who teach for "pin money."

To trace the beginnings of the AAAPTG, one must start with the inspirational leadership of Ava Comin Case, faculty pianist and instructor at the University of Michigan. It was Ava who persuaded local piano teachers to be certified as a testament to their qualifications for being professional educators in piano. This would set them apart from the teacher who was discovered to be giving lessons while doing her ironing! It was also Ava who advocated that the local teachers organize a professional group.

THE GUILD IS FORMED

When the Ann Arbor Music Teachers Club, a group composed of various categories of music teachers (e.g., string teachers, voice, brass, winds, folk, pop instruments and public school music teachers) dissolved itself in 1959, a dozen academically-trained classical piano teachers continued to meet informally bi-weekly. Those teachers played for each other, sight-read piano music and presented recommended teaching material for discussion. They met for about a year and a half and enjoyed the opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences encountered in the teaching world. These piano teachers would eventually form the nucleus of the

AAAPTG. Their names are included at the beginning of this article.

At one of these early meetings, held at Kitty Carow's house, the possibility of sponsoring a public lecture-demonstration led by a respected clinician was discussed. However, since the group did not collect dues, there was no money to offer for such a service. This dilemma would prove to be the catalyst needed to move the group from its informal status to a professional one. First of all, further discussion reminded some teachers of the unused dues collected from the former Music Teachers Club. Secondly(when Frances Danforth and Marjorie Leach mentioned this situation to Ava Case, her response was a firm and enthusiastic, "Why don't you piano teachers get organized? You need to form a professional group with officers and a constitution and then you will be eligible to apply for assistance from the School of Music Fund for such purposes. It pays half the expenses for such events providing that a faculty member is the clinician."

Encouraged by Ava's remarks, Frances Danforth contacted her personal attorney, Ray Klaassen, for professional advice. He drew up a document that was sent to the treasurer and the president of the former Music Teachers Club, Geraldine Seebach. The document requested release of the dues monies paid by the piano teachers who were members of that group, and a transfer of that money to the new AAAPTG. When personally contacted by Frances, Geraldine was pleased with the solution to the use of those dues. She stated that the board had been concerned as to what to do with the money and had even thought of giving it to a charity. When the former board members were contacted, they released the entire amount of remaining dues money to the AAAPTG. Reuel Kenyon, President of the Ann Arbor Federation of Musicians, was then asked to draw up a constitution acceptable to professional musicians. Antoinette Kehoe offered to hold the first organizational meeting at her house. All teachers who had expressed an interest in such an organization were notified and approximately twenty-five came. This meeting was held in January or February of 1961.

THE FIRST MEETING

On the agenda of this initial meeting was the discussion of the constitution, duties of the various officers and committees, qualifications for membership (a degree from a recognized School of Music or its equivalent, have taught for a couple of years and to be able to present students in an audition before the Board of AAAPTG) as well as goals and dues. The constitution was accepted as written. Officers were nominated from the floor, voted on and seated. The business of having a public lecture-demonstration by a U. of M. School of Music faculty member was enthusiastically received. Prof. Ava Comin Case was chosen. It was decided to let dues-paying members have free admission and to charge a small fee to others. The date and financial arrangements were processed through the School of Music as outlined by Ava Case. Prof. Case gave a Master Class in which several of the teachers performed for her instruction and comments. A photograph of two of the performers was printed in the Ann Arbor News and is recopied here. The audience was impressed with the goals and standards of the new group. We were launched!

ACTIVITIES OF THE 60'S

This period represents the contributions of ideas from individual members about what they wanted in an organization: progress, creativity in teaching, impeccable integrity, high standards and democratic attitudes.

As part of the effort to establish good musical taste in students, a series of monthly workshops was established for students to perform publicly before parents and other students and their teachers. Preparation was carefully studied, considering emotional readiness of the students as well as ability in execution. The goal was to build good listening audiences who were knowledgeable about performance practices.

In September, 1962 Professor Benning Dexter was the chosen clinician. Mary Ellen Logan offered to hold the function at her parent's home on Cambridge Road where there was a fine grand piano available and a

sufficiently large parlor to accommodate an audience. Prof. Dexter selected Beethoven's piano sonata Op.79 no.1 as a vehicle suitable for Independent Piano teaching material. His performance and discussion were most enjoyable and instructive.

The success of Ava Cases's Master Class and Prof. Dexter's Lecture-Demonstration led the AAAPTG to continue presenting Lecture-Demonstrations and Master Classes by well-known clinicians. Guy Duckworth (then of Northwestern University) was the third clinician. He was followed by Prof. Marian Owen-Hunt and then Prof. Charles Fisher, both from the U. of M. In the 70's there were many fine clinicians, Marvin Blickenstaff, Prof. Joseph Gurt from Eastern Michigan University and Gloria Gurt, Prof. Dady Mehta, also of E.M.U., and Theodore Lettvin of the U. of M. Marjorie Leach, Carol Leybourn, and Eric Van De Vort were among the members who performed in Lettvin's Master Class. The School of Music co-sponsored this event and also the next Lecture-Demonstration given by Nelita True, who received her DMA from the U. of M. In the 80's the AAAPTG invited, among others, Edna Golansky, who is an assistant of Dorothy Taubman of New York City, and Dr. Anthony Iannoccone from E.M.U.

Regular meetings of the AAAPTG were held at the studios of various members. Central to the group's purpose at these meetings was the exchange of ideas and teaching materials. Reports from those who attended Pedagogy Workshops held at nearby Schools of Music in other cities and even other states were informative. New members continued to be added so growth began immediately, contributing fresh ideas.

*"SPIN-OFF" no.1: THE NATIONAL GUILD OF PIANO TEACHERS

In 1961, Frances Danforth established the first local chapter of NATIONAL GUILD OF PIANO TEACHERS (NGPT), which is based in Austin, Texas. Frances and Delmar Rogers had been taking their students to the piano playing auditions in Detroit. Delmar had come from Austin and was very familiar with the organization and its educational philosophy. Frances

*"Spin-off" refers to ideas of individuals in AAAPTG to which members of the AAAPTG voluntarily participated. The ideas were supported, but never sponsored by the Ann Arbor Area Piano Teachers Guild.

asked Delmar to assist her in starting a local chapter in Ann Arbor so other teachers could benefit from the experience without having to travel out of town. Delmar knew that it would take forty students to begin an audition center. He was too busy to be Chairman for the auditions, but he was willing to help Frances with that responsibility. The idea was presented to the AAAPTG and accepted. Exactly forty students were recruited and trained in the requirements for each level of proficiency. The School of Music was interested and offered use of its rooms between sessions in the Spring. A date was set and publicized. Roger Keyes of Austin, Texas was sent to judge in 1962. The students were proud of their accomplishments, the parents were impressed, and the NGPT auditions were rated a big success. From a one day audition, it has increased to a two week period for auditions held every Spring at the School of Music. About ten years later, Ruth Pignotti came to town from Texas. With Ruth's experience in the NGPT, Frances recognized a fine replacement and asked her to be the next Chairman.

CERTIFICATION

In June of 1962, the U. of M. School of Music held an audition for Teacher Certification in the Michigan Music Teachers Association (MMTA). Ava Case urged local piano teachers to be certified, noting that certification would establish them as dedicated, conscientious teachers who would be a credit to the profession.

To qualify for certification, each teacher was required to present three of her/his students, each of whom would play a short program of music representing the Baroque, Classic, Romantic or Contemporary periods. In addition, one student was to represent the Elementary level, another the Intermediate, and the third the Upper Intermediate or Advanced level of proficiency. Judges were Charles Fisher, Robert Hord and Lydia Courte (Mrs. Robert Courte).

Antoinette Kehoe, Marjorie Leach and Frances Danforth became the first local teachers to be certified by the MMTA. In 1966 Frances took the next step and became the first local teacher to become Nationally Certified

(MTNA). Margaret Bond became the second. After that it was about five years before any other local teachers saw the advantages that the MTNA could offer the group. Gradually, however, more teachers became State Certified until there were enough to have all the officers of the AAAPTG certified, this being a new requirement for chapter affiliation with MMTA.

"SPIN-OFF" no.2: JUNIOR MUSIC CLUBS

About this time, Tirzah Mailkoff came to town from California, where she had successfully organized Bach contests for young piano students. Her refreshing ideas about Bach contests became the catalyst from which the Junior Music Clubs evolved. Students of teachers met once a month to explore various aspects of music; creativity, rhythm games, composer reports, note-reading drills, ensemble playing, music history and solo performances. Several teachers were willing to participate as leaders and others participated by enrolling their students in the meetings.

The first of the more or less formal meetings of the Junior Music Clubs was held at Tirzah's studio with each teacher bringing some of her students. Bach's Brandenburg Concerto no.6 was played by recordings and discussed enthusiastically with Tirzah as leader. Several teachers volunteered as leaders of different age groups. Frances with Elaine Jacobson took the fifth grade. They chose to begin with the Gregorian Chants and Greek modes which preceeded Bach. Marjorie Leach took the sixth grade and Tirzah took the junior high school and high school students. Students began to recognize characteristics of different styles and of different composers and were inspired to excell in performance.

The second year Tirzah again took the high school grades, Margaret Bond and Linda McGowan took the sixth grade, Frances Danforth and Elizabeth Rohns were leaders of the fifth grade. This time, they introduced various orchestral instruments to the students. Faculty members from the U. of M. were asked to demonstrate their instruments. Among these were Louis Stout who brought his collection of horns, including an Alpine horn as long as

the two front rooms of Frances' house. A group of University students brought their collection of unusual instruments which included two kinds of dulcimers (Hammered and Appalachian), a psaltry, and a mandolin. Frances also presented some experiments in the physics of music.

ACTIVITIES OF THE 70'S

During the 1970's, the AAAPTG became even more firmly established as younger teachers brought new ideas from their own backgrounds to the organization. Many pedagogical workshops were presented in nearby (and not so nearby) cities which more teachers attended: Oakland University, Wayne State University, Michigan State University, the University of Maryland, the Frances Clark School at Princeton, N.J. and many more. Some famous pedagogues came to Ann Arbor to give workshops or lectures, i.e. Marvin Blickenstaff, Edna Golansky and Elvina Truman Pearce. All had individual approaches to teaching which were absorbed in various ways by the members of the AAAPTG. These clinicians were a source of growth shared by the whole group. This was the vision that the charter members had held.

THE REPERTOIRE GROUP

The Repertoire Group, sponsored by the AAAPTG, is made up of members who come together to perform for each other and to study the vast amount of piano repertoire. The first monthly meeting was held in February, 1976. Members have since expanded their goals to include the preparation of two or three programs each year. Programs are performed for Retirement Homes, for students, and for the AAAPTG itself. Members have invited Flavio Varani of Oakland University and Louis Nagel of the University of Michigan to give master classes in which they performed and to which all members of the AAAPTG were invited to attend.

THE SEMINAR GROUP

A Seminar Group is also sponsored by the AAAPTG. This group meets

informally to discuss topics in greater detail and share teaching ideas.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT TESTING DAY

MMTA sponsors a Student Achievement Testing Day. Performance is judged by four outside teachers. Theory, aural awareness, sight-reading, transposition, and technique are tested by AAAPTG members. Students enter at a level of proficiency comparable to their age and number of years studied. The experience is motivating to serious students. This annual event, begun in 1975, is supported by Eastern Michigan University and the University of Michigan.

"SPIN-OFF" no.3: "FRIENDS OF FOUR HAND MUSIC"

The "Friends of Four Hand Music" , conceived by Naomi Donaldson in August, 1969, is enjoyed by those who like to play duets and two-piano music. Beginning in January, 1970, Naomi spent eighteen months compiling a directory of 115 people from twenty-five states and three foreign countries. The directory, which had grown to 155 names in thirty states and four foreign countries, was absorbed by the Amateur Chamber Music Players' directory in 1974. In Ann Arbor, the meetings are held monthly through the winter at the studios which have two instruments. A great variety of fine piano music is performed.

"SPIN-OFF" no.4: BACH COMPETITION and SONATA/SONATINA COMPETITION

More opportunities for student performances developed in the form of the Bach Competition and the Sonata/Sonatina Competition. In 1970, Tirzah Mailkov and Ruth Pignotti organized a Bach Competition similar to what Tirzah had set up in California. Accredited judges have come from the environs of Ann Arbor for each competition. Natalie Matovinovic and Ruth Pignotti organized the Sonata/Sonatina Competition five years later which also stimulates students to reach for greater heights. These two competitions have become annual events and have been supported by the

University of Michigan and Eastern Michigan University.

ACTIVITIES OF THE 80'S

MUSIC EXPLORER'S DAY

One of the most creative activities sponsored by the AAAPTG, Music Explorer's Day was developed in the early 1980's. It is a well-known fact among pedagogues that discovery is a vital incentive to learning. Children allowed to "discover" music will retain it longer and will progress further in the expression of their individuality. Carol Flower conceived and organized the first MUSIC EXPLORER'S DAY and the University of Michigan graciously lent its facilities.

At the first Explorer's Day one member, Elsi Sly, showed students how to improvise and how to jazz up a melody. Alice Sano was invite by the AAAPTG to perform for the students on her Japanese instruments. Another member demonstrated the styles of Early music and Early instruments such as harpsichord, Forte-piano and Baroque strings. Frances demonstrated the physics of music with two experiments. With the assistance of her husband a plate glass was fixed firmly to an immovable post. Salt was sprinkled on the glass evenly but sparsely and a cello bow was drawn down and across the glass edge half way between the corners to divide it in half. Then the children could SEE sound move as the salt danced over the surface of the glass to settle at the nodes. The second experiment using a set of gears attached to a long bar and rotated by a motor showed HOW pitches are formed. The gears were arranged by sizes to form a major scale and students had fun picking out melodies by pressing hard cardboard against the edges of the gears. One student achieved "The Stars and Stripes Forever." These graphic experiments are more explicit than MANY words!

The Music Explorer's Days that have followed have continued to use the talents of AAAPTG members and invited other musicians to share their talents.

MUSIC CAMP SCHOLARSHIPS

Each Spring the AAAPTG offers two music camp scholarships to piano students of members. One scholarship is for a junior high student and the other scholarship is for a senior high student.

WASHTENAW COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS

Lastly, the AAAPTG has become a member of the Washtenaw Council for the Arts and supports their activities.

With these goals and achievements, the charter members are proud that they stood by their professional standards and lived up to the goals that Ava Case set before them. It is an organization worthy of being used as an example for others.