

International Festival for Creative Pianists Feedback

2001 to present

www.pianofestival.org

Sent: Thursday, January 11, 2001 6:14 PM
Subject: Great idea

Hello Arthur,

Your International Festival for Creative Pianists is a splendid idea! I especially like your inclusion of embellishing a classical work, featuring a work by a female composer, and, of course, best performance of a work by Chopin, as well as the other special awards.

I hope Albertson College gives you lots of support. All the best,

Dr. Sandra Rosenblum

Noted musicologist, author of "Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music"

4/8/01

Dr. Houle,

I wanted to email you to thank you for all of the work you put into the piano competition. I had a great time and it was a neat experience! I really appreciate the money I won. I'm planning to save it to help pay for part of college or a piano of my own. Thank you so much for a neat opportunity. I look forward to participating again next year.

Anarie White

\$500 Winner from Richmond, Utah

4/12/01

Congratulations, Arthur, on an obviously tremendously successful competition. And congratulations to you on doing something really innovative and important. Bravo, bravo, and here's to the future of the concept and its influence across the field.

Dr. Rayna Barroll-Aschaffenburg,

Professor Emeritus, Arizona State University

Sent: Friday, April 13, 2001 2:48 PM
Subject: Congrats!

Dear Art,

Bravo and congratulations! It sounds as if you had a rip-roaring success at the Festival. And I'll bet you're VERY glad that it's all over with (except for the shouting). I would love to have heard that final jam session!!!

Marianne Uszler

*Editor, Piano & Keyboard
San Juan Capistrano, CA*

Sent: Monday, May 21, 2001 2:24 PM
Subject: Looking forward to next year.

Hello Dr. Houle!

The International Festival for Creative Pianists...was a wonderful experience that I will never forget. The money I earned at the Festival is helping me go to Europe to study piano performance--it will be very helpful. I am looking forward to next year and am planning with my teacher.

Sincerely,

Lauren Barney

Mesa, AZ

Sent: Tuesday, April 23, 2002 9:28 AM
Subject: Festival

Thank you for all of your hard work for the children. This is such an awesome opportunity for them.

Sincerely,

Deanna Rhinehart
Founder & Director, Northwest Conservatory of Music

Sent: Monday, April 29, 2002 12:29 PM
Subject: Many Thanks!

Dear Art,

Many Thanks for a quality festival! I am so appreciative of all the work that went into it. The students and parents were so pleased with the friendly atmosphere, the generosity of everyone, the provision of food and snacks, and the fine facility.

Kudos to you and all that helped.

Thank you for the changes in requirements that allowed Stephanie Sherwood to participate. We are delighted with her honors and money. It also was an eye opener about the quality of playing we heard.

I am still in shock and laughing over the Teacher's Creativity Award I received. Talk about frosting on my Cake of Life! What a generous honor that was.

Thank you again for all your hard work.

With best wishes and admiration,

Gay Pool
Piano Director, Idaho Suzuki Institute, and Idaho Music Teachers Association President-Elect
Boise, ID

[Gay Pool was recipient of the "Creative Teaching Incentive" award and teacher of Stephanie Sherwood, the youngest and biggest prize winner of the '02 festival]

Sent: Monday, May 6, 2002 11:36 AM
Subject: Re: Congratulations

Dear Dr. Houle,

Thank you for all the uncounted hours of work that go into such a well-prepared festival. This festival celebrates the strengths of the individual pianists--concepts in which I am very much in favor! I so enjoyed the Saturday evening Jazz lecture/recital. The judges were so personable. Everything about the festival made it so enjoyable for me and my students. We'll be seeing you next June.

Thanks again,

Kathleen Lloyd
Smithfield, UT
Teacher of Ruth Belliston, who won First Prize in the "Jazz/Pop/Rag" category (\$1000)

from the mother of Joshua Archibald Seiffer, '01 & '02 winner:

Sent: Monday, May 20, 2002 10:10 PM
Subject: Re: Student compositions solicited by Keyboard Companion

Art,

Thanks for sending Josh the website info [concerning student compositions solicited by Keyboard Companion]. We are looking into it and will keep you posted. Also a note of interest. Josh entered the National Fed. of Music Clubs' composition competition and placed first in the state and region and went on to the national level where we found out today that among 62 contestants, he took second place in his class (they award 1st and 2nd place) for his "Concertino Dramatico" (a piano piece with strings and timpani accompaniment). He is still waiting to hear from BMI, ASCAP, and National PTA Reflections, on their competition results. We'll keep in touch.

You were, as you might remember, his first composition teacher!

Thanks again for the info.

Cathy Archibald-Seiffer
Boise, ID

sent by letter:

June 12, 2002

Dear Dr. Houle:

John Salmon [your perennial judge]...has all the ingredients -- background and knowledge, a sense of adventure, and performance skills of such a wide range that I find him quite incredible.

What you are attempting to do in your festival is most laudable, especially in eliminating as much as possible the "winner take all" dynamic, and encouraging improvisation in both jazz and classical music.

Yours sincerely,

Dave Brubeck
Renowned composer & jazz artist
Wilton, CT

Sent: Saturday, June 29, 2002 1:44 PM
Subject: Re: Congratulations

I just read of your festival and it's most impressive! You even have a category of improvised embellishments, and this was won by a ten-year old??? Do you know that there will be a whole conference on this subject at the University of Michigan this September? Anyway, many thanks again, all best,

Dr. Malcolm Bilson
Professor of Music, Cornell University, & renowned recording artist

Sent: Sunday, December 8, 2002 2:55 AM

Thank you so much for all you do to encourage budding young musicians. You have been extremely kind and encouraging to Josh through the years. They (and I) sincerely appreciate your support.

Thanks!

Dr. Del Parkinson
Piano faculty, Boise State University

Sent by letter:

April 1, 2003

Dear Arthur:

I hope your inspiring ideas will catch on with others. It's good to shake things up - I think you are good at it.

All the best,

Judy Nelson
Editor, Clavier magazine

Date: Mon, 07 Jun 2004 22:01:08 -0600

Subject: RE: Piano festival

Dr. Houle,

I truly appreciate the time and effort you have put in to make the piano festival a success!!! I really do thank you for keeping such a unique festival alive!!! Thank you again for your amazing dedication to such a noble and good cause!!!

Good Luck and Best Wishes,

Emily Inderrieden
Kaysville, Utah

Date: Mon, 21 Jun 2004 09:16:06 -0600
Subject: good festival

Dear Arthur,

I am writing to share our experience of your piano festival and let you know how meaningful it was for us. What you did changed our lives.

My son did not compete but we attended several of the workshops, masterclasses, and concerts (At the Jazz improv class with Justin, he was the one of the three who didn't compete).

My son plays piano (intermediate level), cello, and flute and always enjoys picking up a new instrument, but his love is composing. He also has two little sisters who play piano and one plays harp. We can't begin to afford lessons for all of this, so I teach the children piano (although I'm only an intermediate player myself). We have books on composition that he has worked through and we put a lot of emphasis on music theory -- Antony was tickled when theory questions were asked of advanced players and he knew the answer but they didn't.

We learned so much at the festival last week. I can't begin to tell you. Antony got many ideas to use with improv and composing. I learned a lot on how to ask the right questions to spur him on. And I did a lot of thinking of how to incorporate improv into piano for my younger children so they can start earlier. Other than private lessons, there are so few resources for musical creativity. This was such a glorious opportunity for us and it was a price we could afford. You created an environment where the kids felt safe to explore and learn, both by just being welcoming and also with your humor.

We will be back. Antony will probably compete next year, and I will be back to learn more as a teacher. I know you understand when I say this... when you have music in your bones, not having the resources to pursue it is like malnutrition for the soul. Thank you for feeding us!

Blessings,

Mia Crosthwaite
Boise, ID

Reply-To: dbwohl@comcast.net
Date: Mon, 21 Jun 2004 14:51:59 -0600

Arthur,

I want to thank you for inviting me to participate in the festival. It was a great pleasure to reconnect with you and John Salmon, and to make new acquaintances from the piano world! I truly enjoyed myself with the students and teachers who attended. The performances by you, John, Matt and Chuck were excellent, and truly inspired me a great deal. Your jazz composition on Friday night was terrific fun and terrific music at the same time!

Dr. David Wohl,
Assistant Professor, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO
Clinician and recitalist for '04 festival

Date: Sun, 27 Jun 2004 15:36:56 -0600
Subject: Thanks and congratulations!

Congratulations on a very successful festival. It turned out beautifully. I was glad to be there for a portion of it.

I'm very impressed that the students are in such a good learning environment. Everything about the festival is positive and upbeat. It's so refreshing to not have a cutthroat competition. You have really developed something wonderful.

Thanks for the comments about Emily. Yes, she is a fine pianist and has wonderful potential. She has appreciated your support and encouragement through the years.

Christopher Doudy also enjoyed his participation in the festival. As you know, he's very passionate about music. His mother is a fun person, and enjoyed helping with refreshments. Josh Archibald-Seiffer appreciates all you have done for him through the years. You are always so positive and encouraging with him. His mother and he were glad to participate in this year's festival (even in a smaller way).

Thanks - and congratulations on a wonderful festival.

Dr. Del Parkinson
Professor of Piano, Boise State University

Date: Mon, 5 Jul 2004 10:21:24 -0600
Subject: Thank you

Dear Dr. Houle,

All of us benefit from the Piano Festival greatly. There are quite a few "great guys" connected with this festival. I just received a duo piano CD from Matt Cooper on Saturday.

Your creative musicians staff showed true-to-your-vision response! You all made it a *festival* indeed. There is an air of celebration about the event shown by enthusiasm, affirmation, delight, a sense of exploration and zeal for learning.

I'm thinking next year my student Bill might be prodded into performing the piece he first performed on the tiles in his shower--or so he told me. It must have been a rather long shower, but the boy has a terrific zest for rhythms so the transition from palms slapping tiles to fingers striking keys was simple and with good result.

I would enjoy knowing more about Dr. Paul Collins--"your principle sponsor". Teaching creatively sounds like "sic 'em" to me!!! I began life as a public school general music teacher. Due to a move, I soon became a private piano teacher. As I listened to the piano performances during the Winners' Recital, I realized I must make some serious decisions. Teaching music is strong in my training background, but teaching high-level piano performance could use some strengthening. I had to ask myself, "Do you want to do it? Should you make some changes?" I love writing curriculum, giving the tools for improvisation, directing "no-headphones-we-are-an-ensemble-style" class piano, fostering music appreciation, and laughing with any age group. My pedagogical growth is on a new journey, thanks to the International Festival for Creative Pianists 2004!

It was an amazing time.

Gratefully,
Mary Lou Koto
Fruitland, ID
Recipient of the 2004 "Creative Teacher Incentive Award"

Date: Thursday, August 5, 2004 11:02 PM
To: Azam Houle

...By the way, congratulate Arthur for me on the success of his piano festival...I had never really thought about improvising on classical music except I guess "switched-on Bach!"

Marcia Franklin
Journalist (moderator, PBS "Dialogue")

2008 feedback:

Marsha Waugh, Grand Junction piano teacher (former president of GJMTA), wrote:

"I just want to thank you for making the creative pianists festival come to pass. I feel like it is a breath of fresh air. The performances both nights were wonderful. I learned so much and was real pleased to have been able to participate in the event. Having 'chaired' other big events, a small thank you is hardly adequate to express the appreciation for the time, effort, and yes money, that you contributed. But, a BIG thanks anyway."

Monte Atkinson, colleague and one of the three judges for the event, wrote:

"Arthur, I just wanted to formally congratulate and thank you for the endless hours spent putting together one of the most rewarding festivals of which I have ever been a part. The entire concept is inspired, and a vision far above the norm. Judges, participants and all in attendance were so uplifted by the creative vision, sharing, performance excellence and worth of individual goals and ability and effort. It was so touching to hear the repeated comments from parents, contestants and the other judges as to how wonderful the experience was.

Thank you for inviting me to be one of your judges. Never have I had such a fulfilling adjudicating experience, providing positive feedback with two other major pianists to young pianists of such wide diversity, from performing only original compositions to those who played creative mixtures of all kinds of repertoire to young artists of the highest level performing the traditional great works, well on their way to the possibility of a concert career. It was simply a grand concept of celebrating all aspects of the human spirit of music making and performing, all through the medium of the piano.

I am in awe of the careful attention to detail you individually put forth in the large task of organizing and running this festival. We are so fortunate here at MSC for your willingness to offer such a creative festival. I'm grateful for Calvin's support, as this is the kind of thing that brings vision, diversity and vibrancy to our mission of music teaching and music making as a department.

Well done, and I am so honored by your kind invitation to be a standing judge for your festival. I look forward to next year and the years after and hope I can keep bringing the kind of adjudication that you seek and the festival participants deserve. Again, thank you for trusting my input enough to make such an invitation. I am humbled.

I know the Festival for Creative Pianists will only grow in scope and impact. There is nothing else like it to my knowledge, and as word continues to spread, we will have more pianists applying from in and out of state than we can handle.

Thank you again and super congratulations. The Honor's Concert Saturday evening was unbelievable, as was the feature concert by the two visiting artist/judges on Friday...

Again, you deserve the highest kudos and recognition for this monumental achievement."

2009 feedback:

Dr. Vera Oussetskaia Watanabe, (piano faculty, University of Utah) wrote:

"We took your advice and added ornamentation and figuration to the Mozart Variations on the repeats (duet team with Elise Petersen and Alie Yorgason). They had a wonderfully unique and creative time doing it--we are encouraging them to be as spontaneous as possible with it!...You have such a refreshing and inspiring view on our art and performance that is much needed in our world... I just wanted to send our deep appreciation for all the countless hours that you spend to make the festival happen. "

Later Vera wrote:

"Our students called yesterday and said they had the most inspiring and fun experience in music that they have ever had. They are very grateful for the wonderful opportunity to learn, interact, and perform. You are such a positive influence in the lives of these music students--your emphasis on creativity will be deeply felt by not only the kids but by their teachers as well."

2010 feedback:

Jeanie & Chuck Thomas, Grand Junction musicians, wrote:

"[The judges/director program] Friday evening [which I attended] was wonderful! All of you are so extraordinarily accomplished and we enjoyed every note!...[we] didn't realize this whole thing was totally your idea.... hats off to you, big time, for it was just fabulous and deserve all of our gratitude for bringing these talents and 'happenings' to Grand Junction. Thank you very much!!!"

John Salmon, one of the judges, wrote:

"I thought it rocked! I've already gotten a lot of mileage out of mentioning [the festival] to various groups -- just last Friday to the Roanoke, Virginia piano teachers, to whom I gave a presentation called 'Improv 101,' encouraging them to start wiggling out with their students."

2013 feedback:

Elise McKinch, parent of one of the festival winners, wrote:

"Thank you so very much for your efforts toward making the Festival for Creative Pianists such a huge success! My daughter Emma enjoyed herself immensely and was very inspired by taking part in your festival. She only had positive comments about her time spent there and is still riding on a wave of enthusiasm and excitement from having spent time there with all of you. Well, besides the extra time she spent sleeping due to being thoroughly exhausted... Accolades to all of you for creating a unique festival that gave so much to each attendee. I am so very grateful that my daughter was able to be a part of it. ."

Brian Skaret, father of Wiley Skaret (11-year-old winner from Virginia) wrote:

"Thank you, Dr. Houle. You and your team did a fine job organizing the weekend. Wiley had a GREAT time. It was unlike any festival he'd ever been to. Piano festivals/competitions that he usually goes to are so uptight it seems! Anyway, he had such fun. The Friday night concert was a treat...and the other kids were so kind to him. What a great environment. This is just what he needed. We're so glad he could participate."

Lauren Danforth, winner from Wisconsin, wrote by letter:

"Thank you for hosting the Festival for Creative Pianists. It was so fun to work with the judges and watch all the other adjudications. I learned a lot about piano from my adjudication and from other contestants' adjudications as well. This festival was wonderful. I loved it so much that I am already planning to come back next year! ☺ Maybe I'll bring my sister! Thank you so much for making this festival happen. It makes me want to learn more and work harder at all the piano endeavors that come my way. I hope you have a great summer!"

Drea Wagner, teacher from Wisconsin, wrote (by card):

"Thank you so much for all your work to organize the Festival for Creative Pianists! My students and I had such a thrilling and profitable time. Emma told me 'I'm going back even if I have to walk!' (I'm pretty sure she means it, too! ☺). Lauren had an equally good time! I had the two of them share about their experiences at the Festival with their fellow students in group lessons, and now I have even more students excited about it and considering attending! ☺."

2014 feedback:

Lauren Danforth & Emma McKinch (students from last year's festival), wrote (card):

"Thank you for all the work you put in the festival [last year]. We had so much fun, and we can't wait to come back next year [2015]."

Greta Thoresen, prize-winning student, wrote (card):

"Thank you for offering the Creative Pianists festival to many people like me. I got to meet a lot of new people and got feedback from the judges. The judges were great. I liked playing my composition and improvising the best. It is a great opportunity. Hope to see you next year."

2015 feedback:

Michelle Vargas, parent of a contestant, wrote (email):

"We had such a great time at the Festival this past weekend. Andrew was like a sponge as the judges spoke at the adjudications and he enjoyed learning from all of them. Being a growing teen, he especially identified with Dr. Tu's food analogies and he relayed all of them to his Daddy! ☺ I [will] put comments by the judges in Andrew's portfolio that I am keeping for home school records and for his portfolio for college. Andrew was humbled by all of the awards that he received this past weekend. He was very surprised and honored. Thanks again for mentoring all of these students and parents....it is a great blessing!"

Leila Viss, Centennial, CO private piano teacher, wrote (email):

"My student had a great time (good feedback from his parents, too) and of course was so happy with his award. Thought I'd share a post I wrote about the event. Please share if you are so inclined.

<http://88pianokeys.me/improvise/finally-a-festival-for-creative-pianists>

Jeremy Wilburn, parent of a contestant, wrote (email):

"I wanted to thank you for the festival...Leslie appreciated the vocal feedback of the adjudication. It really was a master class and competition in one...Thanks again, we really enjoyed the festival."

Dr. Koji Attwood, judge, wrote (email):

"Thank YOU Arthur for inviting me to such a fantastic festival. I had a wonderful time, and the students were terrific...it was a wonderful experience! "

Janet Ali, Littleton, CO private piano teacher, wrote (email):

"...[the] Festival was again an amazing experience!"

Elise McKinch, parent of a contestant, wrote (email):

"My daughter Emma enjoys this festival very much and this year was no exception. I thought the judges did an excellent job interacting with the students. Their words of guidance and encouragement were kindly spoken and showed their deep understanding of the music and the technical aspects of playing. Bravo on your selection of them. Last but not least, Dr. Salmon's playfulness was such fun for my lively girl Emma. Thank you so much for your dedication and your efforts in making this Festival a truly special one."

Dr. Hsiang John Tu, judge, wrote (email):

"I want to thank you for making me part of the festival, which was like nothing else I've ever experienced, and I mean that in a good way! It was wonderful to hear and interact with all these students...some of them did things that I couldn't do myself! ...John Salmon showed us the way. We were all floored by his mesmerizing improv skill and his charming and witty way of connecting with the audience. He is a tremendous talent and I learned a lot from him...Greatly appreciated!"

Jenny Freeman, parent of a contestant, wrote (email):

"The [new] Written Composition category is a great idea and having the judges play the compositions is helpful for contestants to see if they have accurately represented what they intended when putting it on paper (did the composer write and communicate it as they meant it?), and to see if it translates well from written form to being picked up and played. It's also really neat to hear student compositions played by accomplished musicians such as the judges! ☺"

Carolyn Kelly, parent of a contestant, wrote (email):

..."we had a wonderful [Saturday] evening! In fact, the entire event was very inspiring, especially for Catherine! Thank you so much for all that you have done to make it happen. I know it's a labor of love and so much work! Catherine received very constructive advice from all three judges, which she took to heart and it improved her [Saturday] evening performance! In fact, I know that she will be able to apply what she learned to her future music making!

Thank you again, with gratitude,
Carolyn Kelly"

Lauren & Emma McKinch (student contestants) wrote by card:

"...We had a great time at the festival. We really want to come back next year. We'll see ☺!"

Caroline Danforth (student contestant) wrote by card:

"I had so much fun at the festival."

Karen Combs, donor, wrote (email, after viewing a video of the Thursday Written Compositions Recital):

"Wowie zowie I am so very impressed. What talent -- from such youth! Just blew me away. I especially liked 'Wonders...' and 'Journey'. As I have yet to attend an entire festival, is the [written] composition aspect new this year? Thank you so much for sending these links and for all your very hard work to make this happen. It is a treasured experience for these kids (and families)."

2017 feedback:

Janet Ali, teacher, wrote (email):

"Your festival was an inspiration and joy to all who participated, award or no award! Every single student agreed that it was the most fun festival ever! All of you treat each student as a valued individual and member of the community with only helpful remarks.

...You are all such caring individuals that really are out to promote good, not how good you are! (Although that is obvious!) It is the care and nurturing of every child that all of you come into contact with that makes this festival what it is.

Wynne Anne Rossi was such a positive addition to your judges' line-up!

...I very much look forward to many more festivals!"

Michelle Evans, a parent, wrote (email):

"Thank you so much, Arthur, for the helpful and lovely comments for Maria's piano pieces and composition piece. What an extraordinary festival you have put together! Scott and I were so very impressed with it all!

Loved you, Evelyn and the judges!

We look forward to next year!...

From a contestant and her mom (email):

Dear Mr. Houle,

Thank you so much for the lovely email! I'm glad you liked the performance; I really enjoyed playing the pieces! The comments were very constructive and helped me look at the music I played in a completely different way. I'm glad I got the chance to talk to and work with such talented and friendly composers! The workshops were especially interesting and I'm sure I never would have learned what I did without going to the festival. Overall, this festival helped me see music as more than just notes... I saw firsthand the passion, artistry, and care that everyone poured into their pieces. (Especially at the judges' recital) Thank you for giving me an experience I'll never forget!

Sincerely,

Samantha Ng, age 13

Dear Arthur,

This is Lay-Leng, Samantha's mom. Thank you for putting on such a fun festival, we both enjoyed being part of the event. There were many special moments: watching the talented young pianists perform, listening to the judges' commentaries and getting to know them, attending the Friday & Saturday evening performances and most of all, seeing how much fun it was for everyone there! Samantha has been most encouraged by this experience and I am sure she'll remember this for a long time!

Please convey our sincere thanks to everyone who has worked hard to make this a success! We hope we'll be able to do this again in 2018!

Regards,

Lay-Leng Chan
