

THE THIRD SIDE OF THE TRIANGLE: PARENTS AS PARTNERS
(Presented to Parents at a Regional Music Festival in the early 2000's)
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What is success in music study? Is it opportunities for performance, recognition, and high test scores on evaluations? These are all desirable accomplishments, of course, and we as teachers and you as parents are pleased when they occur. However, true success is the development and nurturing of a lifelong love of music. The real test will be to see how many of the students studying today are taking lessons 20, 30, 40, and 50 years from now. How many are attending concerts and taking their children to concerts? How many are regular financial supporters of arts organizations in the cities and towns where they live?

How can we help these goals for the future come true?

You have taken the first steps already. You have enrolled your child for music study. Hopefully, you did careful research on teachers to find the best fit for your child regarding personal rapport, like-mindedness of goals, and a professional atmosphere with a positive approach. You have planned for regular attendance at lessons. You have encouraged your child to set goals and to reach for them. You have encouraged regular practice at home.

What else can we do to reach the lifelong love of music mentioned earlier?

If a child begins music study at an especially young age, parents must commit their own time to potentially attend lessons, to sit with the child during daily practice, and to help the child form habits for the future. These include daily practice, and an approach of solving problems in practice (not just playing through but organizing the practice session constructively—perhaps breaking it into 2 or more segments per day). Sometimes a reward system of some sort helps establish these habits for young children. If you need help setting up these goals, talk to your child's teacher. Communication with the teacher is critical. If you need help, say so! The teacher cannot read your mind. He/she will know if practicing is not occurring but may not know why or know what help you need. Try to follow up on the teacher's requests at home. Suggestions can only help if they are followed every day, not just at the lesson.

As the child gets older and can work independently, continue to ask him/her to play for you. Ask him/her to share what is being studied. In cases when a child complains about practicing, your encouragement is critical, and means a lot. Recordings made by the child make great gifts for friends and relatives who live far away!

Show an interest in music yourself by taking lessons or by playing music in your home regularly. Why should a child be enthused about something to which parents only pay lip service?

Most importantly, take children to live concerts! I attribute a big portion of my early love of music to the fact that I was taken to concerts regularly. The inspiration of those concerts I attended when I was 7-10 years old was so strong that I can still, in many cases, picture in my mind where I was sitting, how I felt, and how the performer looked. Seeing live people making music in front of you is a totally different experience from hearing a recording or the radio. I am personally shocked when I see

how few young people are in the audiences of the concerts I attend. There are many concert series which offer very inexpensive student tickets, and many which are free! If you need help identifying appropriate concerts, talk to your child's teacher.

Make music a priority, not something that is dispensable if something else comes up. Practicing and lesson attendance should not be optional on days of birthday parties, athletic practices and events, any more than homework and school attendance are optional.

YOU are an EQUAL partner in your child's success in and love of music. The student and the teacher are indispensable, but YOUR support and encouragement on the other 6 days of the week are what makes the difference. We teachers thank you!