



Chamber Music for the Piano Student?

Why should private piano teachers be interested in chamber music for their students? Can chamber music play an important role in music education for the piano student?

Consider real "life after piano lessons". Often a piano or keyboard player will be asked to accompany a singer for weddings or events, play for a congregation or with a praise team, play for holidays which often include singers and/or other instruments, play for school events, nursing homes, birthdays, and the list goes on....

The best preparation for piano students to share their music in these situations is the experience of playing with others. Timing skills, listening skills, the knowledge of other musical voices with the piano, and working with other musicians to create music all adds to their own skills as a pianist, equipping them to take it into life. Also, it is just plain FUN to create music with other musicians and why Chamber Music is called "the music of friends". Before home "entertainment centers," people played together to create music for their own and each other's enjoyment.

Today, musicians of other instruments consistently have this experience in bands, orchestras, ensembles, etc. Piano students do not have so many opportunities. I saw this recently when working with a trio consisting of piano, violin, and cello. The violin and cello students were used to "cueing" and playing with other instruments. The piano player had worked with a piano quartet before but not other instruments. I saw how being a part of a chamber group helped the piano student understand the dynamics of playing with other instruments, cueing, timing, voicing, etc. As a result, the pianist was taken to a new level of playing and inspiration for the possibilities of music. A bonus, when playing with others, was the reinforcement by peers of musical concepts the teacher had taught the student.

So often, piano students spend hours alone in the practice room to give solo performances. To have the opportunity to practice and play with other musicians produces a creative energy not experienced alone. Working together with others to create a successful performance is a positive motivator to give the piano student new skills. Sharing musical ideas, tips, and information among the players energizes and enlarges individual creativity for their own playing. Musical initiative is encouraged and developed.

How to get students involved in Chamber Music? Start where the student is. To begin, the student should be given music slightly below their level of playing, especially if they do not have experience playing with other instruments. Resources for beginner and intermediate chamber music are harder to find, but it is out there. Joanne Haroutounian's books 1 - 3 Chamber Music Sampler series published by Kjos is a great resource for intermediate piano students. The books also have practical tips for playing in a chamber group. The MTNA website has an excel file to download of chamber music works. Another option is to take a piano piece the student already knows and together create parts for other instruments that complement the piece. For example, for an online class I created an arrangement of Pachelbel's Canon for 3 instruments by adding a complementary violin and cello part to the piano part. Doing a project like that together with your students opens up to them the possibilities of arranging and creating their own music, a great teaching tool! Google searches are also helpful.

Taking the musical skills at the level a student has already learned to work with other musicians to create music increases the student's own musicianship for their instrument. Listening, timing, musical communication, performance, and playing skills are all developed. It is a joy to watch the different instrumentalists and witness the players subtly communicate with each other as they create their delightful chamber music together. This is the gift they give to us. Give this gift to your students!