

The MTAC

# ADULT PERFORMANCE *Program*

*Five Reflections and Reviews*

*Jennifer Griest, Alison Edwards, Gwen Churchill,  
Lynn Kidder and Yasmin Haddadi*

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*hat exactly is Adult Performance?"*

## **Jennifer Griest**

I was asked this question quite often during the past year as the new Northern Chair for the Adult Performance program (AP). Since fall 2013 I found myself copying and pasting the program description in e-mails to students and teachers. I became adept at paraphrasing during phone calls, and soon I could recite the entire webpage. The following is a statement from the webpage for Adult Performance:

*MTAC offers the Adult Performance program for adult students and teachers. Each solo or ensemble participant prepares three compositions and can receive individual evaluation, study with a private coach, participate in a master class, and perform in a recital. Auditors are welcome at master classes and recitals. Recital*

*participants may be considered for the Adult Performance Recital at the State Convention.*

Then came the inevitable next question:

*"So what exactly is going to happen there?"*

People were asking what was going to happen, but more importantly: *what were they going to get out of it?* There were no cash prizes, no specific repertoire requirements other than "Level 6 and above," and participants could choose their own instructional mode. To some, it likely seemed like a free-for-all. I explained that the instructional mode had three possibilities of participation: a private lesson, a masterclass, and a recital. The private lesson or the masterclass could take up all of the hour allotted or the time could be divided equally. The recital was optional and, if the participant specified, it could be used

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*The MTAC Adult Performance Program  
is a largely undiscovered gem.*

as a selection process for the State Convention by the judges.

This year, fourteen individuals registered to spend the day working with two amazing musicians – Sharon Mann and Markus Pawlik. Participants travelled from all over Northern California, and represented nine of the state’s Branches. There were college students, professional composers, music teachers and polished amateurs. The range of ages and length of study were equally varied.

The day of the event, Gwen Churchill and I welcomed the nervous and excited participants. After an introduction in the performance hall, they scattered to practice rooms, private lessons, and the first masterclass. Many confessed to feeling nervous and excited. Playing in a strange place on a new piano with a new teacher was something many had not recently experienced.

The participants quickly became a community, supporting and encouraging each other. Leaving the last event, they often stopped to discuss the instruction they had received. Many rushed to the practice rooms to try out new techniques and musical ideas. One participant, thrilled with the instruction in her private lesson, exclaimed “Who would have thought you could get so much done in twenty minutes!”

This sentiment was repeated frequently. Time management became a regular topic of discussion. As busy professionals, most of us are pressed for time on a daily basis. I have heard from my own adult students similar frustrations. “I only have *ten minutes* on this day to practice” or “I didn’t have a much time so I didn’t even bother.”

Probably because we lack sufficient practice time, it is easy to squander what little we have because it does not seem worth it. It is not just adult musicians who face this issue. A quick search of the Internet will bring up hundreds and thousands of articles on time management. It will also provide equal amounts of advice, and quotes ranging from inspirational -

*“I recommend to you to take care of the minutes; for hours will take care of themselves.” – Lord Chesterfield*

to morbid -

*“Time is a great teacher, but unfortunately it kills all its pupils.” – Hector Louis Berlioz*

During a conversation, a participant deliberated which measures to focus on in the half hour before the recital began. She wondered aloud how progress was possible in the short amount of time. The challenge of the program, she decided, was achieving as much as possible within that limit. This challenge did not discourage her. On the contrary, she was motivated

by the judges and excited at the chance to perform.

In addition to praising the quality of the private instruction, many commented on how much they enjoyed the masterclasses. Because the repertoire was widely varied, participants felt they learned even more than they anticipated. One teacher, having watched a Bach *Invention* played and critiqued, said she had taught the piece many times but never considered the ideas the judge demonstrated. It was like hearing the piece again for the first time.

The day ended with a successful recital. Composers featured were Chopin, Beethoven, Scriabin, Bach, Piazzolla, and even some new compositions. Both performers and judges received a standing ovation. As the judges deliberated whom they would select for the Convention Recital, new friends exchanged congratulations and goodbyes. Many participants expressed gratitude for the experience and promised to be in attendance the following year.

From the Adult Performance recitals held in the North and the South, twelve were invited to perform at the state convention. The Convention recital performers represented over ten Branches. AP South Chair Joseph Matthews hosted the recital, and at the close of the performance each participant received a rosette.

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So back to the original question:

*“What exactly is Adult Performance?”*

As I learned this year, it is much more than the program description. It is a unique opportunity for adult performers to challenge themselves and connect with their peers, a forum for addressing the problems serious adult musicians face, and a place to uncover and illuminate the necessary skills that will facilitate a successful musical life. Though we may leave school behind at young age, aren't we musicians always learning? We continue our education by dipping our toes or diving headfirst into new pieces, collaborations, experiences, and responsibilities.

This year I look forward to the inquiries about this program, and am excited to share ideas and goals for its growth and focus. Hopefully we will continue the discussion of time management, expand the program's exploration of teaching repertoire, and encourage more performers and auditors to take advantage of this unique opportunity. We look forward to having many more students and teachers participate in the 2015 Adult Performance program!

*Many thanks to Joseph Matthews, Karl Goldstein, Gwen Churchill, Stephanie Austin and Amy Chen-Huey Martin for their support and guidance.*

### **Alison Edwards**

Last fall, when I received a phone call from Joseph Matthews (South Chair AP) asking me to be a judge for AP South, I immediately responded, “YES!” (I can never say “NO” to my dear colleague, Joe!)

What transpired after that was beyond my expectations...

Working with these adult students, from the avocational to the vocational musician, in a format of private lessons and masterclasses, was a privilege.

We had a great time. We worked on particular passages (those nasty technical challenges!), talked about the setting of the piece, tried getting particular sounds, refined the voicing, and discussed interpretive features of a composition. Sometimes, we dug into a couple of measures. At other times, we sought to see the piece as a whole and how everything in it related to the whole. From pedaling and fingering to tone color and articulation, my day was completely filled with musical discoveries.

However, I must reveal that despite my pedagogical “moments,” the thing I got the most out of during this entire event was the INSPIRATION exuded by the participants. I was inspired because they got better, learned more,

and shared their performances. I aim for the same objectives in my own work as a musician. With an outlet like Adult Performance, we have the chance to pursue these objectives!

It is indeed a privilege to play music, teach music, and most of all...share music. Adult Performance gives us this grand opportunity!

### **Gwen Churchill**

I first attended the program as an auditor in 2008, at Diablo Valley College. I sat in on Master Classes and the final recital. It was very inspiring to me to witness the courage and the expertise of pianists just like me! If you have any reservations about the program, I recommend starting it as an auditor. It gives you a chance to be on site, to experience the energy and to imagine becoming a participant.

The second year I attended was 2010 and the program was held at the Crowden School in Berkeley. I had a private lesson (William Wellborn) and I participated in a masterclass (Mac McCray). The master classes are somewhat small, three to six performers and the audience is rather small, so the feel is intimate. I came away from the experience with a renewed commitment to study and performance, inspired by the

wonderful coaching and the excellent performances.

My third experience was in 2014, at Contra Costa College. I attended to offer support to our new AP North Chair, Jennifer Griest. It was a very successful program with many wonderful performances and classes. We are all very grateful to have found Jennifer and Contra Costa College!

The program offers a great opportunity for adult students. As teachers, we don't often have the time or opportunity to enhance our skills. This program offers three distinct ways that this can be accomplished. Where else can you get a private lesson with conservatory level teachers, a master class or two and a final performance? All of this is offered in a very supportive environment. I highly recommend this program to anyone who might be interested.

## Lynn Kidder

The MTAC Adult Performance Program is a largely undiscovered gem. MTAC hires master teachers to give private lessons and master classes for adult students and teachers. The day culminates in a public recital. The northern section takes place in San Pablo in early March. State board members attend – this is an important event in the organization. A player signs up with three pieces, choosing private lesson, master class, or recital for each piece. Instruction is limited to 20 minute slots for lessons or class. Most of the participants this year were intermediate or early advanced.

This is an excellent triple opportunity for us:

1. Adult students can learn via private lesson or master class, and they get performance experience via master class or recital.
2. Teachers are welcome to participate equally, choosing lessons, class, or

recital, getting excellent feedback and performance experience as desired.

3. Teachers can attend the master classes all day, watching how various problems are addressed - for a nominal fee. This alone is worth the drive.

My teacher, a member in Richmond, suggested I participate this year - with great results. In addition to the useful feedback I got in the lesson and class, at Convention I performed in one recital as a soloist in the Adult Performance Program and the next night on the Teacher Convention Recital with Carol Panofsky in an oboe and piano sonata.

Start thinking now about what you might like to play next March, and consider which of your adult students might benefit from this as well.

## Yasmin Haddadi

I recently turned 19. This fall, I will be starting my second year at American River College in Sacramento, CA

as a Microbial Biology Major. My piano instructor, Mr. Bill Becker, is a member of the MTAC Sacramento County Branch.

Last March, I had the opportunity to participate in the MTAC Adult Performance Program (AP). The School of Applied and Commercial Music at Contra Costa College in San Pablo, CA hosted this event. I was new to the masterclass and recital performance part of this process (the private lesson being the third part). Therefore, I enrolled thinking it was stepping stone to Convention and that my preparation at the Certificate of Merit, level 8, would be sufficient.

The two judges, Sharon Mann and Markus Pawlik, blew our minds during the Masterclasses. Their knowledge regarding each piece performed that day was beyond impressive. During each masterclass, endless tips were given to the pianist, and these tips related to every individual in the room. The informative discussions, formed from a particular question, gave

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Jennifer Griest (*left*) earned the Bachelor of Arts degrees in both Music and English at Ohio State University, and her Master of Music degrees in both Piano Performance and Pedagogy from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She serves MTAC as the Adult Performance Chair North. A faculty member at Contra Costa College, she teaches private and group piano, College Chorus and serves as the staff accompanist. She maintains a private studio for all ages of students in Oakland.

Alison Edwards (*middle left*) is Assistant Professor of Piano and Chair of Piano Pedagogy at California State University,

Fullerton. She is active nationally as a performer and teacher and is known for her innovative lecture-recitals. For MTAC, she has served as a Music Reviewer for the *California Music Teacher*, as an Evaluator and Instructor for the Adult Performance Program, and now serves as the South Chair for the AP Program.

Gwen Churchill (*middle*) received a B.A. in piano from Humboldt State University and currently runs a private studio in the Santa Rosa area. She is an active chamber musician, performing at both Sonoma State University and Santa Rosa Junior College. She has been a member of the Sonoma County Branch for 8 years having

served various positions including Treasurer. She stays active in the Branch assisting with recitals, festivals and fund raising events. She has served one term on the State Board as Recording Secretary and is currently serving her second year as Treasurer.

Lynn Kidder (*middle right*) has performed extensively as a soloist, chamber musician, duo-pianist and accompanist, and is also a piano teacher and vocal coach. She has a B.A. in Music from CSU Fresno and a M.Mus. in Piano Performance from the UW in Seattle.

Yasmin Haddadi (*right*) is a student of Bill Becker.

the experience a very personalized feeling.

My private lesson teacher was Judge Mann, who had the most intriguing way of explaining the story behind my piece. She compared the tempo of my piece to the rhythmic movement of a train as it begins moving up until the moment it comes to a halt at its new destination. After three or four measures, we would stop and meticulously break down specific measures and discuss my performance. The piece I had chosen for the masterclass and recital was the J. S. Bach Prelude No.2 in C minor (WTC Bk. 1). The opportunity to

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analyze a piece so well-known for its open-ended interpretations from musicians who know the piece to the core really affected my perspective. This event allowed me to connect further with the Baroque Era and the hidden emotional movements throughout J.S. Bach’s music.

The whole day was a great opportunity to expand my knowledge in music performance.

Reflecting on the whole process at the end of that day, I concluded that the Adult Performance program was the most mentally stimulating piano event that I had ever participated in, in the MTAC programs. ♪