



## CERTIFICATE *of* MERIT®

**M**y first experience with Certificate of Merit® was when I was in middle school. I was studying voice with Leona Roberts, who is still an active member of the Orange County North Branch of MTAC. I participated in CM for voice through high school, and finished in the highest level (Level 7 at the time).

CM gave me the structure I needed for my college auditions. When I auditioned for the Voice Major at UCLA, some of the comments from the panel of professors were, “Wow, you completed CM Level 7 for Voice?” “Well, that explains why you were so well prepared today.” I was so grateful to Leona for enrolling me in the program, and helping me become not just a strong singer, but also, an educated one.

When I graduated from UCLA, I joined MTAC immediately. I had begun teaching students in college, both piano and voice, and wanted to give them the same experience I’d had. I joined the Long Beach Branch, and immediately felt like I had made 100 friends. These men and women watched me get married, have two children, and held my hand through difficult times, while being my biggest supporters through my triumphs.

I have served on the Long Beach Board for the past 7 years, was CM Chair

in 2013 and 2014, and am currently President of our Branch. In 2007, I was asked to join the CM Council as Voice Chair. Throughout the next 6 years, I had the honor of further developing the voice program to become more cohesive. I helped write the new syllabus and the technique component of CM. The overall theory scores for voice students are consistently over 90%, and the number of students enrolled across the state is increasing each year.

Whether or not these students go on to become music majors, they will have received a well-rounded musical education through their enrollment in CM, in addition to learning music, history, and culture that they would not normally be exposed to. Now, I get to watch my two boys participate in this program (they study with my good friend, Marla Devich). As I hear them playing their technique, Sonatinas, etc., I am so grateful that they are thriving in the structure that so CM provides.

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*The following is a sampling of personal thoughts written by former students who participated in Certificate of Merit®; how wonderful it is to read of their individual experiences and stories.*



*Sarah Sandvig  
Long Beach Branch*

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I grew up on the tropical island of Taiwan, where succulent fruits and colorful flowers are abundant, and in the summer, you can hear birds and insects calling from miles away. There, the cultures of the East meet the West. You can find a delicious sushi restaurant, a sizzling steak house, and traditional Taiwanese cuisine all on the same street.

Taiwanese people love the ballet, the symphony and the opera as much as they love the traditional puppet shows, shadow shows, and Chinese opera. The concert halls are always packed with world-renowned ballet companies and orchestras performing.

My parents were school teachers who were music enthusiasts. After school, my mother would teach the piano, and my father would teach the violin at home. As soon as we could, my sister started learning to play the piano, and I, the violin. At the age of five, I entered one of the Catholic schools in the city of Taipei, in the Music Special Education Program. By the time I left Taiwan and



*Tammy Tsai  
Whittier Branch*

immigrated to the US at the age of thirteen, I had undergone seven years of Music Special Education Programs in both the private and public school systems.

The Music Special Education Programs in Taiwan gave rigorous conservatory-style training to all students in addition to regular school work. All students received private lessons in a primary and a secondary instrument. All students participated in music theory, music history, rhythm, musicianship, music appreciation, orchestra, choir classes. Older students also had to learn a traditional Chinese instrument and play in a Chinese Instrument Ensemble. Of course, every semester, students gave recitals and went through the juries as their Final Exam.

When I came to the U.S., I was quite disappointed to find that there was almost no music in the school curriculum. The closest thing I found was during the E.S.L. (English as a Second Language) classes, the teacher played pop music for us to “fill in the blanks.” It was fun, but not very intellectually challenging in the musical sense.

That’s why I was thrilled when my violin teacher, Mrs. Janice Luna, introduced me to the Certificate of Merit® program. When I held the theory test in my hands for the first time, I was having the time of my life! I never realized counting intervals and writing scales could be so much fun! I remember, at that time, there were very few students in the program. During the exam, I was given a stereo to play the ear training cassette tape, and I didn’t even need headphones because I was the only student there.

A couple of years ago, when I was invited to join Certificate of Merit® Council, I finally realized what makes this program work so

well. Not only are the students, parents, and music teachers working year-round to prepare for the yearly exam, but there are twenty-some CM Council members, spread throughout the state of California, who volunteer their time, often working through the wee hours of the night, to make everything happen. I have never seen a more hard-working and cohesive group of people.

Now, the Certificate of Merit® program has grown to have tens of thousands of participants every year in California alone. I believe it's because people realize what a well-designed program this is. When I started teaching, the program I recommended to my students was the Certificate of Merit®. When my three daughters started learning to play musical instruments, I made sure they participated in the Certificate of Merit® program. It's because I believe it's important to be a well-rounded musician. Music history, music theory, and music analysis along with note reading and ear training are the core of a good musician. These elements provide the backbone to one's musical development.

I also realized, after working as volunteers for other top-notch music schools, how lucky we are to have such a supportive State Board who works so hard to make MTAC to have one of the most technologically advanced systems where efficiency is apparent in every aspect of every program. It has truly made our organization the leader for others to follow.

I am truly thankful for the MTAC, and for the Certificate of Merit® Program.

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*Sharlae Jenkins  
Santa Barbara  
Branch*

I participated in CM during high school. Honestly, doing CM made me incredibly nervous, but in the end, I saw the positive benefits. I joined the MTAC in 1990, mainly because I wanted to offer my private students more performance opportunities. This was one of the best decisions I have made in 30 years of teaching! Taking my piano and voice students through the CM program has created many strong musicians who continue to use their talents well beyond college.

My first piano student who went to the state Convention is now a music teacher at an elementary school and teaches voice and piano privately. Several former voice students are actively singing on stages all over the world, Disney cruises, YouTube channels, and operas. Many have contacted me over the years, saying how grateful they are to have done CM, how it prepared them for college and gave them confidence.

I am honored to join the MTAC CM Council. The recent changes and updates to the CM Voice program have made it a strong program, and I'd like to help it grow and flourish in the coming years.

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*Michelle Rumley  
San Diego Branch*

I vividly remember my sense of anticipation as I patiently waited outside the door of my first CM Evaluation. Though I had played for several years in my school band program, I was aware that my performance level was well below that of the other freshman in my new teacher's studio. When I was enrolled in the Certificate of Merit® Program, I knew I wasn't entered in a division of like-aged students against whom I would compete; instead, I was working toward a standard that my teacher felt was attainable for me. After 9 months of study with my teacher, and a lot of practicing, I successfully completed my Level 4 CM Flute evaluation. This was a meaningful victory for me—this benchmark was a visible measure of my musical growth, which is sometimes difficult for a student to see during daily practice. Over the next three years of high school, my teacher set high goals for me and I earned the opportunity to perform at Convention in Festival and Panel Honors Recitals. As a student, I saw the CM Program as an arena for me to raise my playing to and above the standard, as stepping stones to musical knowledge, as well as an avenue for performance opportunities.

As a Music Major, I began to grow my own teaching studio and I wanted my students to benefit from a comprehensive music education, as I had experienced as a student.

I became a student member of MTAC and began to use the Certificate of Merit® curriculum with my students. As a new teacher, the CM Syllabus was an invaluable resource as I learned how to structure lesson plans for my students; it helped me to learn how to set reasonable expectations for both the average and exceptional students. As a teacher, I see one of the greatest aspects of the CM Program is its ability to systematically grow a student's musical learning with its many levels, yet also allow a student to grow as a young performer with performance opportunities, like Branch Honors, Convention, and Panel. This broad spectrum of possibilities in one program makes it an ideal program for many of my students, whether they take lessons to do well in band or they wish to pursue music as a career.

When it came time to choose a piano teacher for our oldest son, there was no doubt that we would choose a colleague who was an MTAC teacher whose students participated in Certificate of Merit®. I want my children to play music, to understand music, and to love music. I see that, with excellent instruction, the CM curriculum will help them attain this; my children, as do most, thrive on goals. My oldest son performed his first CM evaluation in 2014 and, upon completion, had a huge sense of accomplishment. He was able to see the culmination of his growth over the five months preceding his evaluation and was ready to look forward to the new theory, technique and repertoire he would learn in the next level. A few months ago, my son was assigned to memorize a piece he had previously learned and had analyzed. While he was practicing this piece, he paused, turned to me and said,

“Mommy, it’s easy to memorize because I just have to think of the chord progression.” I love that he is applying his theory knowledge and that it is reinforcing his playing. As a parent, I see that the progressive curriculum presents my child realistic goals for him to achieve and his gained knowledge increases his appreciation of music.

I have benefitted greatly from MTAC and the Certificate of Merit® Program as a student learning and growing with the curriculum, as a teacher utilizing the curriculum in my studio, and now as a parent as I watch my son learn, grow, and perform in this program. All of these reasons compel me to give back to MTAC and the Certificate of Merit® Program so that my MTAC colleagues and all of our students may know the same joy in music education I have experienced from this wonderful program and organization.

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*Susan Beaty  
Santa Clarita  
Valley Branch*

**T**he CM program has always been really important to my teaching and making sure that my students’ progress properly from year to year. And I have gained students solely because I offer the CM program. Because it means so much to me, naturally when I was asked to come onto the council, I was very excited and happy to join the ranks!

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**I** thought it was a unique opportunity to participate in an organization that I grew up in. I participated in CM evaluations from 8 years old until I was 15. I completed Level Advanced CM in the 9th grade, and went on to Panel and Master Classes, and received the senior medallion in my last year of high school. CM offered me a goal to strive for and made me a more well-rounded musician.

*Annie Chen  
Los Angeles Branch*