

E-Book: Guide to Music Lessons

Written by ISM Faculty

This book is a gift to you from:

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Printed in the US by the International School of Music, LLC

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This guide provides information to help you and your child have a successful and rewarding experience in studying music. Many parents often have questions such as: At what age is it best to start music lessons? Should I choose private or group lessons? What should I expect from a music school? How much practice is necessary? How can I help my child practice? What is the value of music lessons?

A child's success in enjoying and learning music depends on several factors such as: the readiness of the child; the learning style of the child; the attention span and interest of child; the amount of time the parent is available to assist the child practice at home; the compatibility of the teacher with the student's learning style; the educational environment; and recital opportunities and the school's curriculum.

This guide answers these commonly asked questions; emphasizes the importance of the parents' involvement in their child's learning process, and provides practical tips that can significantly affect the quality of lessons and that can make the learning experience pleasurable for the entire family.

When Should a Child Start Music Lessons?

For children 6 months to 5 yrs old we recommend Early Childhood Music classes, which provide an excellent introduction to music rhythms and sing-along songs. These classes are a great preparation for private instrumental lessons.

So how young is too young when it comes to private instrumental lessons?

For children, starting at the right age is a key element to the success of their lessons. Some people will tell you "the sooner the better," but this approach can actually backfire if the student is not ready for musical study. While some recommended ages for each instrument are provided below, it is important to remember that the best age for your child to begin lessons depends on the particular child. For instance, if your child has trouble sitting still for ½ hour, or is unable to listen to the teacher, it may be preferable to wait a bit longer to begin lessons. If the child starts lessons too early, he or she may feel overwhelmed and frustrated and may develop a premature distaste for music lessons. The last thing you want is for your child to reject music lessons because he or she had one early unpleasant experience that could have been prevented. Sometimes, if the child waits a year to start lessons, their progress can be much faster. Children who are older than the suggested earliest starting age usually do very well. On the other hand, if your child listens well and shows early musical aptitude, he or she may be able to begin lessons earlier than the suggested ages given below.

The following are guidelines we have found to be successful in determining how young a child can start taking music lessons for each type of instrument. If a child wishes to begin lessons and is younger than the recommended age, one can arrange a trial/audition class to determine a child's readiness.

- **Piano, Keyboard, Violin and Cello:** The minimum age recommended for starting private lessons is five years old. At this age children have begun to develop longer attention spans and can retain material with ease. In some cases, children can start at age four, if the trial class shows that the child is ready. Violin and Cello come in different sizes to suit the age and height of each child. Young pianists start to play on a full-sized piano from the beginning, with an adjustable bench and foot stool.
- **Guitar: Acoustic, Electric and Bass:** The minimum age recommended for starting guitar lessons is seven. Guitar playing requires a fair amount of pressure on the fingertips. Children under age seven generally have small hands and may find playing uncomfortable; however, a smaller guitar and nylon strings are recommended for an enthusiastic younger guitar student. Bass students are generally ten years of age and older.
- **Voice Lessons:** Most teachers recommend starting formal voice lessons after a child's voice changes in puberty. However, children can start earlier with general singing lessons that do not involve formal vocal technique (which can be as young as six). Since the younger body is generally not yet ready for the rigors of vocal technique due to the physical nature of voice lessons (proper breathing techniques, development of the vocal chords and lung capacity), singing lessons with a younger student involve learning to sing on pitch, basics of breathing, rhythm, notation, and basic musicianship.
- **Drums:** The minimum age recommended for starting drums lessons is seven, but this varies greatly depending on the height of the child. The child must be able to reach the pedals and the cymbals.
- **Woodwinds and Brass instruments:** The minimum age recommended for starting woodwind and brass lessons is nine, due to the need for additional lung capacity and, in the case of some instruments, the size of the instrument. For the younger student, it may be better to begin on a different instrument such as the piano or recorder first and then switch later to the preferred instrument. This may give the student a head start in learning to read music and becoming familiar with general music foundation and other musical concepts.

And lastly, remember, it's never too late to start music lessons. If you are an adult and wish you had had piano lessons as a child, or would like to continue your studies on an instrument you studied at some point in your life, find yourself a teacher!

What Instrument is Right for My Child?

Selecting an instrument to study is an exciting decision and an important one. Discuss the various instruments with your child before enrolling him/her in private lessons appropriate for their age. Factors to consider are: age, size (height and physical development of the student), cost of renting or buying an instrument, school requirements (bands, orchestra, etc), personal preferences, and more.

- In the earlier paragraph we discussed the age guidelines for different types of instruments.
- The size of the instrument matters, since taller or larger people will have an easier time playing instruments such as string bass, saxophone or tuba. Additionally, one may also think about whether it will be difficult to carry the instrument around – instruments such as the cello or harp can be awkward and/or heavy.
- Since it is difficult to know how long children will want to stay in lessons, parents should not invest a significant amount of money in an expensive instrument right away. Obviously, some instruments cost less than others (e.g. guitar compared to piano). Teachers often recommend that parents rent an instrument first, which also allows the parent to trade in the instrument for a bigger one or better one as the child grows taller or becomes more advanced. Also, one can buy a used instrument, in which case we strongly suggest talking to a professional (teacher or a tuner if it is piano), so one does not make a bad investment. Additionally, for used pianos, one should check www.bluebookofpianos.com, which provides informative guidelines on costs based on the year, model, serial number of the piano to help you make an educated purchase.
- If your child is excited and attracted to a particular instrument, he/she will be more motivated to practice. If your child is not sure what to study, you may want to arrange a few trial lessons in different instruments to give him/her a hands-on experience to see what he/she finds most drawn to. Another factor to consider is the child's preferred style of music—if a child loves jazz music, perhaps a better choice may be saxophone or piano versus cello; or if he/she loves rock music it may be best to pick up a guitar, or bass. Regardless, it is often recommended to start with classical training since that will provide the student with a great foundation from which he/she can develop any particular style down the road.

Which Setting to Choose: Group or Private Lessons?

While group classes work well for preschool programs and for studying musical theory, private lessons are far superior when learning how to play a music instrument. In private lessons, each student receives the benefit of one-on-one attention and a program of study that is tailored to his/her individual needs. A teacher can introduce new pieces and exercises according to the student's individual learning pace, and can cover specific musical goals of that student. A teacher therefore has the time and focus to work on the individual student's strengths and weaknesses, addressing each student's specific challenges, such as learning a particular range, bowing, pedal, articulations, interpretation, and so on.

When a student takes private lessons with an expert teacher, he/she has an opportunity to ask specific questions, and receive information that only a seasoned instrumentalist would know. The student can also ask specific questions about the instrument, and receive meaningful feedback. Best of all the teacher can adjust to the student's learning style and help him/her achieve his/her specific goals, help expand the student's repertoire and concentrate on music the student wants to study – from Classical, Jazz, to Rock or pop and folk music.

How Are Lessons Structured?

Each student usually meets with his/her teacher once a week at a prescheduled time reserved through the registration process. The length and frequency of each lesson depends on the student's age, experience, developmental readiness, and teacher's recommendation. The general guideline is as follows: beginners take a 30 minute lesson once a week, intermediate students 45 minute lesson once a week, and advanced students 60 minute class once or twice a week.

The first skills covered in lessons are note reading, tone production, articulation, and fingering. The teacher has the job of making sure the student can read, write, and listen confidently, and have at least a fundamental understanding of the basics. The teacher will also establish principles of musical expression, setting the basic technical foundation, which is essential so that the student does not play with tension or awkward movements that could, if left uncorrected, lead to tendonitis or similar problems. As the student begins to gain control of his/her instrument, etude (study) books, scales and repertoire (musical pieces) are introduced. Early pieces are usually short in duration, usually focusing on a specific technical issue. Over time, the student is introduced to increasingly more challenging works such as sonatas and concerti.

More advanced students who have a working knowledge of their instrument and basic music theory skills may choose to study specific techniques, better tone production, and interpretation, as well as learning different styles of music in more depth. At this point, the student's own interests can start directing the course of study. A more thorough study of harmony and voice leading (whether classical, jazz, pop...) will broaden the student's understanding and ear.

Besides being able to tackle a greater range of repertoire, other opportunities will become available that can be of great use to the student's musical development.

How Do I Go About Acquiring an Instrument?

To get started, a student needs more than just a good teacher and enthusiasm. He or she will also require proper equipment.

Renting an instrument from a reputable music shop is a good idea when getting started, as rental agreements usually include a service plan. Students usually receive a better deal when they buy an instrument outright, rather than with a rent-to-own plan; however, this will vary from store to store, and some stores will apply the full amount of the student's rental payments to a purchase.

We recommend asking our child's prospective teacher before you acquire an instrument. The teacher can provide students with the information on rental or purchase of instruments, and can recommend the most appropriate size of instrument, the best brand of instrument, and dealers where the student can buy or rent a reasonable-quality and reasonably-priced instrument. Good sources of information about instruments can include your local music shops, www.craigslist.org, or www.bluebookofpianos.com for used pianos, online music companies, national music companies and other reputable sellers who are willing both to ship instruments to you and to take back instruments that are not acceptable. Parents should check for any warranties and return policies as well as insurance on the instrument. Parents can speak directly to the International School of Music for our list of reputable local music shops that we trust.

Buying low-cost instruments from magazines or general stores may be a bad investment, as these instruments are often made of poor quality and materials, and your repair costs may be more than what you have paid for an instrument in the first place. In the last decade, the market has become flooded with a great deal of inexpensive instruments of questionable quality, and it can be difficult to make an informed choice.

Additionally, once the instrument is rented or purchased, it will need to be regularly maintained.

What Should I Look For and Expect from a Great Music School Program?

When looking for a good music school, it is important to find a program that is focused on high-quality music education and provides a professional teaching environment. A reputable music school interviews teachers, checks references and their background, and makes sure that instructors are well-qualified and experienced teachers. Additionally a reputable music program should use well-recognized teaching materials, have a specific curriculum and course of study,

and offers performing opportunities, certificate programs, and written evaluations of students' progress.

- **Take Lessons in a Professional Teaching Environment:** Learning music is not just a matter of having a qualified teacher, but also having an environment that is focused on music education. In a professional school environment, a student will not be distracted by television, pets, ringing phones, siblings or anything else. With only one-half to one hour of lesson time per week, a professional school environment can produce better results since the only focus at that time is learning music. Students who study music in a music school are motivated by listening to their peers who are at different levels, and they may benefit by being exposed to a variety of musical instruments, and the camaraderie that comes with it.
- **Find a qualified and experienced teacher:** In a music school, the lessons are not just a hobby or side-line for the teacher but a responsibility that is taken very seriously. Each school usually has several teachers in each instrument, therefore allowing you to find just the right teacher for your child's needs. Your child's teacher should have patience, good communication skills, and a sincere desire to help students learn and grow. The teacher must have an ability to explain concepts and simplify the music in order to help students at all levels. The teacher should be able to break down the music into segments and help the student identify the patterns and the techniques used by the composer. Ideally you want the teacher to be able to relate his/her teaching to each student's individual learning style and personality.
- **Use recognized teaching materials:** There are excellent materials developed by professional music educators that are made for students of different ages and backgrounds. Some are designed especially for young beginners and others for adults with or without previous music experience. These materials have been carefully researched and are continually upgraded and improved to make learning easier. They ensure that no important component of learning the instrument is inadvertently omitted. If you ever have to move to a different part of the country, qualified teachers and institutions will recognize the materials and be able to continue smoothly from where the previous teacher left off.
- **School should have a curriculum:** A specific curriculum helps teachers and students set goals, plan the lesson time and use it more efficiently. Lessons can include several activities such as technique, reading, learning new concepts and new repertoire, and reviewing and polishing older pieces to bring them to performance level. Materials should be prepared in advance so that lesson time is not used to write out exercises and search for repertoire. When students see a clear plan and they understand that their musical education is a gradual, step-by-step process, they see the results, stay motivated and eventually accomplish more and reach higher levels of accomplishment. Additionally, the curriculum can guide and prepare interested students for exams/juries and evaluations, which provide students with constructive feedback on their abilities.

- **Look for Performance Options:** Look for a variety of performance options, such as recitals, concerts, festivals, and workshops to fit the needs of each student. All performance opportunities should be encouraged but optional, and they should be suited to the desires of each student. These opportunities provide students with motivation, confidence and performance experience.
- **Convenience and Flexibility of the school:** Extensive teaching hours and flexible scheduling can be a huge help to busy families. Simple things such as scheduling all siblings, or a parent and a child, at the same time can be a great convenience for parents, and allow them to reduce hours of waiting and driving to several different classes each month.

How Do I Find the Right Music Teacher for Me or My Child?

Finding a teacher who meets your expectations and your child's needs is very important. Your private teacher is the person who is going to guide you and your child towards mastering the instrument and developing a love for musical study. Your teacher will, of course, help with technical challenges of playing. Perhaps more important, your teacher will give you ideas for developing your own signature sound and style. It is important that you agree and feel comfortable with your teacher's teaching philosophy, and know what his/her expectations are. One parent may prefer a strict and demanding teacher who produces winners in musical competitions; another may be more comfortable with a teacher who uses a nurturing, gentle approach to makes lessons fun; a third may choose a teacher who emphasizes improvisation and creativity over classical technique. What style do you and your child prefer?

Ideally, you want to take lessons at a school that is committed to matching every student with a teacher according to that student's learning style, level, goals, and interests. Prospective students should discuss with a teacher their practice expectations, placement level, the course of study and their goals.

Besides finding a teacher with a passion for teaching, it is also important to find a teacher with the expertise that you and your child need. Some teachers specialize in working with a specific age group, or with advanced students, or with a specific style of music, such as jazz improvisation. Find someone who resonates with you and who can help you on your unique musical journey.

Students should have the option to try different teachers in order to find a teacher whose personality they like, and whose judgment they trust, so they can follow his/her instructions and recommendations. This will increase the opportunities for a long-lasting and healthy student/teacher relationship.

What is the Right Amount of Parental Involvement for the Aspiring Student?

Parental involvement is very important for a young child. Parents can help by providing a quiet environment for practicing and performing; this will help the student's concentration. Also, try to eliminate any distractions such as phone calls, visitors, television, etc. It is important to find time to listen to something your child can play and allow them to "perform" at home. Notice and praise even small improvements, provide positive feedback, try not to criticize, and don't expect perfection. It can discourage a child to feel that he/she cannot meet your expectations. Remember that this is a long and gradual process and it takes time to play an instrument really well. Arrange performance opportunities with supportive audiences, such as mini-recitals for friends, relatives and neighbors. Practice is always more meaningful when the student has an opportunity to share what he/she has learned; it makes the study of music real, exciting and rewarding.

How Should One Practice?

Practicing is very essential to train the fingers and the mind to work together, which is essential to be able to play well. Practicing should not sound like a concert; it includes lots of repetitions and in a way is similar to solving a puzzle. Ideally, parents and teachers should work together as a team in order to keep students motivated and excited about their progress. You can find many books and guides about practicing but here are some main points:

- Having a "**practice area**" is crucial – if a child has to set up a practice area every time he or she is expected to practice, it will be far less likely to happen. Leave a chair and music stand with the child's music sitting out, and have the instrument nearby, so it is easy for the child to get to the instrument and sit down to play. Provide a quiet environment for practicing: try to keep the room quiet during practice time, which helps concentration; and try to eliminate any distractions such as phone calls, visitors, television, etc.
- **Practice daily and plan your practice time:** Studies have shown that beginners retain more if they practice a short time each day than if they practice a long time every few days. Sit down with your child and plan the practice time together; be flexible and realistic. In addition to practicing your assignment, encourage your child to play something for fun. The student can review his/her favorite music, try something new or try to create his/her own music. Composers started this way and you never know where this might lead you. A good practice session should cover technique, new pieces, sight reading, and polishing up & reviewing pieces already learned.
- **How much time is required for practicing?** For a young child, twenty to thirty minutes can seem like an eternity. Instead of setting a time frame, it is often better to identify the number of repetitions. For example, practicing a piece or a small section five

times a day seems easier; students do not pay attention to the amount of time spent, but they know that practice must include all the required repetitions.

- **How should practice time be structured?** Students should divide each piece into smaller sections; it will keep them motivated as they achieve fluency and confidence bit by bit. Teachers can help by marking the hard measures so students know what needs to be practiced first. Afterwards, students can go on to playing longer phrases, longer passages, and then the entire piece. This is a great tool to get students through challenging passages. It is important that teachers, parents and students set realistic goals, as that will spare lots of frustration and disappointments. For example, one can set a goal to play a certain piece by a specific date, and then make a plan with the teacher in order to accomplish that goal.
- **Accuracy, slow practice and rhythm:** It is important not just to play through the piece. Students should skip the easy parts; they're easy! Finding the hard parts, slowing them down, and practicing them until they can be played right at the right tempo, is a good practice technique. In order to play well, students need to practice accurately, slowly, with a steady beat, in addition to paying attention to the correct notes, rhythm, appropriate fingering and dynamic markings. It is important for the student to be patient and not to play too fast too soon – this can create errors that will take too long to fix. After practicing the piece slowly and accurately, then the student can speed up the tempo and develop phrasing and dynamics. Using a metronome helps maintain the same tempo and avoids fluctuating rhythm, as students have a natural tendency to slow down during difficult sections. Eventually, with practice, students develop an internal sense of rhythm.
- **Be patient:** We have to remind ourselves that learning to play an instrument requires lots of patience and determination. So try not to put unrealistic expectations on yourself or your children to learn too quickly. *Take it easy and have fun*, and simply enjoy the process and let it happen naturally. Music should be something that you enjoy for a lifetime. Everyone learns at a different pace and the key is to be able to enjoy the journey.
- **Praise and reward:** At the beginning, it helps if parents and the teacher praise the act of practicing and reward a successful week of practice. With time, students will practice because they enjoy the process and they want to do it out of love and not because they have to do it. Praise tends to be the most coveted reward – there is just no substitute for a pat on the back for a job well done.
- **Guide and encourage:** It helps if parents read the practice assignment and sit down with the child during practice time. Practice can be a lonely time and children continuously seek their parent's approval. Simply sitting with the child for a few minutes during practice time can make a huge difference in the child's playing progress. If the assignment is not clear, parents can seek clarification from the teacher and can make sure that the child practices each item on the assignment sheet. Parents should be involved in

the process by asking the teacher what a child is working on and how the progress is coming.

Is It Important to Participate in Performances While Learning an Instrument?

No amount of study and preparation is effective without opportunities to perform. Performance is the most rewarding aspect of studying music, and recitals serve as great motivation and an opportunity to demonstrate progress. Recitals offer students a chance to see what skills are sticking, and what areas may need some more work. Additionally, the focus needed to prepare for a performance is an invaluable experience, as concerts give a sense of accomplishment, boost the student's self-esteem and encourage the student to tackle challenges.

If a student is nervous about recitals, perhaps a good way to start is to ask him/her to attend a recital as a member of the audience prior to his/her own recital. Another way to reduce anxiety is to video record the student's performance. Although it can be difficult to watch oneself initially, the more the student observes the performance, the less awkward it will feel to perform self-analysis. Video feedback provides the opportunity for the student to see what the audience will see. The student may say to himself "Oh, I like that!" and remember to do it again in the next performance. Or, a student may think "Oh, why is my hand doing that weird gesture when I sing?" which is very easy to fix after becoming aware of it.

Performance opportunities can be found in a place as familiar as the home for your family or friends, or perhaps in a school choir or ensemble. Your music school should also provide regular recital and other performance opportunities.

What Are the Benefits of Music Instruction at an Early Age?

There is an undeniably strong correlation between music education and the development of skills that our children need to become successful in life. These skills follow children on whatever path they choose in life. Music lessons can have a formative influence that may be second only to the love we give our child. If you're looking for a way to provide your child with a source of life-long joy, satisfaction, and accomplishment, childhood music education is an excellent first step.

Studying music in the formative early years helps the child develop musical memory and tonal sensibility that would otherwise take years of training to acquire. Exposure to music helps children develop listening skills, a sense of rhythm, a mode of self-expression, creativity, communication and expressive abilities, problem-solving, logical reasoning, and a lifelong appreciation for music.

Learning to play an instrument also improves fine motor skills and coordination, intelligence, focus and concentration. Listening to and/or playing classical music has been proven to increase IQ, according to a number of scientific studies, due to the complexity of the music itself. Studying music may also improve a child's study habits, as the self-discipline needed to commit to a daily practice routine can carry over into how a child handles homework from school. While students' performances help students develop self-confidence, teamwork skills are developed through ensemble playing where students learn to work in a fun and positive environment with other students.

What If My Child Has Lost Interest and/or Does Not Like the Teacher?

Occasionally a child, for various reasons may become frustrated with lessons because he/she expected that learning music would be easier. The problem may be solved by using a different method book, by switching to music that is more appealing to the student, or by providing more guidance from parents during practice time. Students will also go through phases as they grow and mature; providing consistent encouragement (without excessive pressure) will allow the child a reasonable amount of time to work through bumpy spots, learning "plateaus" and personality phases.

If your child seems not to respond well to the teacher, doesn't seem to understand what or how to practice, feels unchallenged, or dreads going to lessons, or if the student's goals do not match the teacher's expectations or progress has become stagnant, a different teacher may suit his needs or personality better. Don't be afraid to share your concerns with the school, and don't be afraid to try a different teacher if the first one you choose is truly not working out. Parental support through this period is essential. Students and parents should seek guidance from the school; often the staff can work through any problems that the student might have. Good music school programs have a cohesive curriculum that makes moving to a new teacher a smooth process.

What If I Am More Interested in Styles of Music Other than Classical?

We encourage parents, students and instructors to discuss what pieces the student is learning and what styles of music are most suited to that student. You may find that one particular style just fits better than others. This can certainly help you in your search for direction. One suggestion is to listen to a lot of music, and play what moves you in hopes that you will be able to move others. If unsure of where to start, classical training provides a solid foundation in technique and

other basics of music, and from there you can always move to any other styles of music at any point.

So, what is the difference in training between classical, jazz, musical theater, and rock/pop/folk music, for example? There are many differences in how one would sing opera as opposed to jazz. However, the fundamentals of all different genres will maintain the same framework. After these concepts (and others) are well in hand, we can think about different styles and interpretations. If, for example, you would like to study opera, you may choose to work with someone who has an operatic background. However, many jazz singers have a great knowledge of opera and musical theater, just as opera singers may know every Ella Fitzgerald song ever recorded.

Jazz musicians focus on basic chord forms and their extensions, improvisation, and a variety of scales and modes. Musicians interested in folk, rock, or pop styles learn varieties of scales, and rudimentary chord progressions true to that style of music. In general, all students learn to read standard musical notation, rhythm patterns, scales and their fingerings, melodies, chords, and other advanced techniques.

Whatever you or your child's interest in music learning (whether classical, jazz, pop, rock, folk, etc...), you should always feel free to communicate that interest with the school and the faculty so your needs and interests can be accommodated.

How Do I Stay Motivated?

Often the best motivation comes from choosing to play the music that you love. First of all, there is so much music at our disposal that you should never feel narrowed or stifled in your choices. A good teacher can help present different options consistent with your musical tastes. Sometimes, a student may need to develop a certain set of skills in one mode of music before progressing to his/her most desired style of music. While certain steps may need to be taken before undertaking a virtuosic piece of music, we can still find music that contains elements of the musical mountain we wish to climb.

Secondly, it is a great idea to set specific, realistic goals for ourselves. If we strive to meet a time line of well-planned goals, we feel even more motivated as we achieve each flag point. Our goals don't even have to include learning a specific piece of music by a certain date. The goal can be to have practiced a tricky passage for 10 minutes a day over the course of a week. Also, keeping a journal can also be a great source of motivation. Not only does it assist in keeping a focused path, but it also helps to reflect upon a concept that may have been more difficult previously, but is much easier today. Hopefully, when we reach a challenging goal, we can recall how we have jumped a few hurdles on the athletic course of our instrument and move ahead with determination, confidence, and motivation.

Inspiring students is an important role of the teacher, but many outside resources are also available to further develop and encourage interest in the instrument the student studies. The

Washington metropolitan area hosts numerous concerts, performances, master-classes, and workshops that give students the opportunity to see professionals from around the world perform and teach. For competitive students, a number of competitions are held each year in the region, and participation in the competitions will allow students to experience the preparation and focus needed to pursue a career in music, if one is interested.

How Does a School Evaluate and Track the Student Progress?

Outside opinion and direction from a musical jury or exam is critically important with private music study. Playing for another musician like a judicator can reinforce what the student's teacher is saying and/or may help the student see another view of a musical interpretation or technical concept. Ideally, a music school should have a sequential musicianship curriculum that defines each level of achievement, in order to ensure that a student's progress merits continuation in his or her program of study. This kind of guidance provides an opportunity for a student to demonstrate his/her musical ability at the end of each year, and offers a method of measuring progress, in addition to providing a tangible representation of his/her progress and accomplishment. A student's progress is usually evaluated based on playing accuracy, continuity, rhythm, phrasing, pedaling, dynamics, tempo, tone, production, interpretation, style, technique, memorization, bowing, vibrato, and more. A guided music curriculum prevents aimless drifting, gives definite direction and provides a way to measure progress.

In addition to the music school's juries and exams, there are several local, national and international organizations that offer similar opportunities for outside evaluation of the student's progress. For example the ABRSM/Royal School of Music, the National Piano Guild Auditions/American College of Musicians, and the American String Teachers Association, Suzuki Association of America, National Association of Teachers of Singing, all offer such evaluations.

Do You Recommend a Music Program for Toddlers/Preschoolers Who Are Not Ready Yet for a Formal Music Instruction?

For children younger than five, we recommend group classes such as the ISM Early Childhood Music Program. These classes are nurturing, fun, and offer interactive group programs where children develop physically, emotionally, cognitively, and socially through playful participation and exploration.

Group classes expose children to music exploration with whole body movement, dance, rhythm, instruments, singing, ear training, & introduction to notation with a variety of musical instruments. The goal of the classes is to make music a part of everyday life and allow children to express themselves through music, song and dance. This educational methodology helps

introduce children to the joy of music early on and provides a good foundation in music which will be helpful for private lessons that follow.

Through these classes, children develop their creativity, self expression, gross motor skills, coordination, language development, inhibitory control, listening, self esteem, pre-reading skills, and an emerging sense of imagination. Additional benefits are: development of love for music, self-expression, social interaction and teamwork, and caregiver/child bonding, among many others.

Is It Too Late to Start Music Lessons as an Adult?

It is never too late to start learning a music instrument. Many adults have found that learning to play a musical instrument is a stimulating, rewarding way to relieve stress. Professional adults often enjoy being involved in a creative, self-expressive and recreational activity while also making new friends who love music. Often a teacher can tailor lessons to suit each person's learning style and personality and can teach music that you want to learn, whether it is a Beethoven Sonata or a popular tune you have been humming for years.

It is important to note that one should look for an experienced, supportive and patient teacher who loves teaching adults. A teacher's encouragement helps adult students develop the necessary basics in a fun manner. Classes generally cover technique, note-reading, rhythm, theory, and interpretation. Repertoire should be based on a variety of musical styles in order to enhance enjoyment and maintain interest. Most schools provide adult students with optional classes and activities such as private instruction, classes, ensembles, workshops, performances, and recitals.

What Is the Difference in Training Between Traditional and Suzuki Methodologies?

The Suzuki method is a way of teaching music to young children (as young as toddlers) based on the same principles used when learning language - listening, imitating and repeating. Dr. Shinichi Suzuki developed a teaching method that focuses on ear-training, production of a beautiful tone and good instrumental technique. Suzuki teachers develop the student's motor coordination and train the ear before the eye: students are first taught basic listening and playing skills before note reading is introduced, in the same way children learn to speak and comprehend before they learn to read. Parental involvement (parent responsibility, loving encouragement, and constant repetition) in the lesson is essential to the success of the Suzuki learning method.

One notable difference between Suzuki methodology and traditional musical training is that Suzuki students will first learn to play music by rote memory, while most traditional method students learn to read written music from the beginning. The Suzuki method requires parents to

be strongly involved in the lessons, becoming a co-learner and daily home teacher. Both methods have weekly private lessons. Students of either method will become a musician with proper technique, aural (listening) skills and music notation reading skills.

As there are many pedagogical methods in learning a music instrument, we often feel that it is more important to find a good teacher than to use a particular method. The school staff can help you determine what method is best for your child.

How Important Is It to Participate In an Ensemble?

Playing in a group, or ensemble such as piano duets, trios, string quartets, flute choir, clarinet choir, woodwind quartet, jazz combo, percussion ensemble, vocal ensemble, or rock band is a fun and rewarding experience for students. Depending on the size of the group, playing with others allows for each musician to participate equally while also contributing to the sound of the whole. Group play expands the student's experience with rhythm, phrasing, blending, balance, ability to listen to multiple sound sources at the same time, intonation, communication, rhythmic security, and cooperation. Each participant is expected to practice his or her part alone at home so that the group can practice the various parts together. Teamwork is an integral part of every ensemble, and students learn to work well together under the guidance of their ensemble teacher. In addition to making new friends who love music, students are able to refine their musicianship, which reinforces their reading & listening skills through fun and teamwork.

How Do I Know If My Child Has a Talent for Music?

Every child is born with some talent. Children who are musically gifted usually show early signs such as singing a lot and having naturally good pitch, noticing off-key music, making up their own songs, desiring to play an instrument, enjoying listening to music, feeling the rhythm precisely, learning and remembering songs quickly, and trying to sing parts that are not the melody (harmony, bass line, etc). However, talent is often deceptive. No one can draw conclusions about who is and who is not musically gifted.

For the beginner, musical talent will have little impact on early progress - what you first develop is hand-eye coordination. Having good hand-eye and ear coordination can take you pretty far, and, as with most other skills, it can be trained. A child's sense of pitch and rhythm are usually developed over a period of time. Slow learners may become late bloomers; children who "can't carry a tune" may develop vocal skills later; a beginner who is having rhythm problems because of hand coordination may become much more adept with practice.

By far the most important factors affecting musical success for the beginner are the student's desire, motivation, interest, dedication, and hard work. We have seen over and over that if a child really loves studying music, he/she will work hard regardless of innate talent or lack of talent. It

is possible to have talent and not love an instrument or fail to become musically accomplished because of the lack of practice.

Finally, all children can benefit from music instruction, and many of the children who enjoy it the most are not the ones who have enough talent to be the next Mozart. The music education can have a profound impact on mental and physical health, social development, motivation, analytical and reflective thinking, problem solving, creativity, and appreciation of the arts.



Learning and playing music can be fun and enjoyable for the whole family! We provide the tools and guidance you need to bring music into your life. Our helpful staff consists of knowledgeable, trained professionals that take the time to help you find what you need or make suggestions.

If you would like a little more guidance about music lessons for Children and Adults by experienced and carefully qualified instructors in one of the best music schools in Montgomery County, we encourage you to contact us. Our current faculty consists of over 90 teachers, and our enrollment consists of over 1,000 motivated students and parents who, through learning and practice, are creating beautiful music in our region and around the world.

Call 301-365-5888 to receive more information on music lessons, or to schedule a trial lesson with the International School of Music faculty.