

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE LEGACY OF MASTER PIANO TEACHER MARVIN BLICKENSTAFF:  
HIS PEDAGOGY AND PHILOSOPHY

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

SARA MARIE ERNST  
Norman, Oklahoma  
2012

THE LEGACY OF MASTER PIANO TEACHER MARVIN BLICKENSTAFF:  
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A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE  
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

BY

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Dr. Jane Magrath, Chair

---

Dr. Barbara Fast

---

Dr. Joy Nelson

---

Dr. Sanna Pederson

---

Dr. Paula McWhirter



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My gratitude is extended to the following individuals and organizations:

***Marvin Blickenstaff*** for his generosity in all regards and for his open and candid approach to sharing his thoughts and life stories

***Mr. Blickenstaff's students*** who allowed for my observation of lessons

***All those interviewed and surveyed*** who gave of their time and shared their stories and ideas

***My husband John*** for his countless cheers of support and helping me follow this project to its completion

***My parents and parents-in-law*** who helped care for my family when I needed time to write

***My committee chair and advisor Dr. Jane Magrath*** for her patience and expertise throughout each step of my doctoral degree

***My music education professor Dr. James Sherbon*** for his stellar guidance on creating a proposal with a clear vision

***Evan Chambers***, editor extraordinaire from the OU writing center, for his careful reading of numerous drafts

***Frederick Harris Music*** and ***Carl Fischer Music*** for providing copies of Mr. Blickenstaff's materials from their catalogue

***Goshen College Music Department*** for providing me with key resources and for compiling email lists to facilitate the survey

***The New School for Music Study*** for welcoming me to observe Mr. Blickenstaff's teaching and interview others

***Interlochen Center for the Arts*** for allowing me to conduct research during Mr. Blickenstaff's visit as a guest pedagogue

Teachers from the ***Maryland State Music Teachers Association*** and the ***South Dakota Music Teachers Association*** who completed the surveys

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## ABSTRACT

The legacy of master piano teacher Marvin Blickenstaff (b. 1935) is documented in this study through an analysis of his philosophy and pedagogical style and of his contributions to the field of piano pedagogy. Blickenstaff's extensive career includes teaching piano to all ages for over fifty years, giving presentations to teachers both nationally and internationally since the later 1960s, and publishing writings on teaching and materials for students. His major professional positions have included a professorship at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for ten years (1969–78) and at Goshen College for twenty-one years (1978–99), and presidency of the Board of Trustees of the Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy since 2000.

The primary resources for this study were Blickenstaff's publications and presentations, recordings of his piano lessons and classes, interviews, and surveys. The principal investigator conducted six interviews with Blickenstaff and interviewed twenty-two of his colleagues and students. To span the breadth of Blickenstaff's career, thirty-seven additional students and thirty-six teachers were surveyed. The interviews and surveys revealed how Blickenstaff's professional works impacted individuals within the field of piano pedagogy and established his philosophy and teaching style. Twenty-one piano lessons, a small-group lesson, and two classes were observed in 2009 at his home studio in Pennsylvania and at the New School for Music Study in New Jersey. These lessons are excerpted

throughout this study to validate and demonstrate the tenets of Blickenstaff's philosophy and his pedagogical strategies. Blickenstaff's output as a presenter was analyzed through his presentation notes and through videos of his workshops and masterclasses. The major publications that Blickenstaff coauthored are the *Handbook for Teachers* published in conjunction with the *Celebration Series*, and *Music Pathways*, a method for beginning pianists. In addition, Blickenstaff's articles in the journal *Keyboard Companion* were consulted.

The eight chapters of this study document Blickenstaff's career, philosophy, and pedagogical style. In the introductory chapter, the purpose and justification of the study is established. The methodology and research procedures are presented in chapter two along with a summary of related studies. Chapter three contains a biography of Blickenstaff that chronicles his significant professional activities. Blickenstaff's philosophy of music education is outlined and validated in chapters four, five, and six. Chapter four presents Blickenstaff's viewpoint on the definition of music, the teacher, and the student. In chapter five, Blickenstaff's foundations for music study are explored through an analysis of the value of music study and the qualities of the student-teacher relationship. His philosophy on the learning process is detailed in chapter six, which includes an examination of the learning environment and how humans learn. In chapter seven, Blickenstaff's pedagogical style is codified through a summary of his lesson content, teaching techniques, and style of communication. The final chapter addresses the research questions posed in chapter one and synthesizes his philosophy, pedagogical style, and contributions

to the field of piano pedagogy into his legacy. The ten appendices include lists of his publications, articles, recordings, and presentations, as well as transcripts of all interviews with Blickenstaff and reproductions of the questionnaires administered to piano teachers and his students.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The teaching and performing of piano are artistic professions that are commonly learned through observation of and study with a master musician and pedagogue. During the twentieth century, piano pedagogy has evolved into a new field of inquiry and expertise through the endeavors of many notable piano teachers. Master teachers in the twentieth century have influenced countless musicians, teachers, and students through their personal philosophies about music, knowledge of piano playing, theories of learning, and effective teaching practices. A large influx of teaching resources for all levels of pianism has resulted and includes professional publications on teaching and playing, conferences and workshops by master pedagogues, and opportunities for undergraduate and graduate studies in piano pedagogy. Marvin Blickenstaff is a master pedagogue whose legacy has extended to five decades of teaching pianists from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. He has contributed to publications for students and teachers, presented to teachers at workshops and conferences, provided dedicated leadership within national organizations of piano pedagogy, and instructed the next generation of piano pedagogues as a professor at colleges and universities.

### **Capsulization of Marvin Blickenstaff's Prominence**

Blickenstaff is a nationally recognized pianist and teacher and has been honored as a recipient of notable awards. At the Music Teachers National Association (MTNA) Conference in Atlanta in 2009, Blickenstaff received the 2009 MTNA Achievement Award. This is the organization's "highest honor, [and] is bestowed upon an individual who has made significant and lasting contributions to the music teaching profession."<sup>1</sup> In Toronto in 2007, during the Collaborative Conference between MTNA, the Canadian Federation of Music Teachers' Associations, and the Royal Conservatory of Music (RCM), Blickenstaff was presented with an honorary fellowship by RCM. Blickenstaff was initially honored by MTNA in 2001 through a named Endowment Fund that supports grants for both students and teachers in their pursuit of music study.

Since 1999 and until time of this study, Blickenstaff has held several prominent positions of leadership within the Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy (Frances Clark Center).<sup>2</sup> He has served as the chair of the executive

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1. Music Teachers National Association, "Awards Program," <http://www.mtna.org/Programs/Awards/tabid/284/Default.aspx> (accessed May 1, 2009).

2. The Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy is comprised of the New School for Music Study, the National Conference for Keyboard Pedagogy, and the journal *Clavier Companion* (formerly entitled *Keyboard Companion*). Frances Clark (1905–1998) was a highly respected teacher and pedagogue, whose teaching and philosophy has been researched and documented. In 1999, the Frances Clark Center was created and named in honor of Clark. The New School was founded by Clark and Louise Goss in 1960.

planning committee for the National Conference of Keyboard Pedagogy (NCKP) and the president of the Board of Trustees. At the New School for Music Study (the New School), Blickenstaff has taught both group and individual lessons for all ages and abilities. As director of the Program for Excellence in Piano Study (PEPS), he has led students with exceptional musical talents. His leadership within the Frances Clark Center has been and continues to be a testament to his significance within piano pedagogy.

Additional accolades given to Blickenstaff include recognition at national conferences and writings in prominent publications. In 2005, Rebecca Grooms Johnson, associate editor of *Keyboard Companion*, invited Blickenstaff as an authority on piano pedagogy to contribute to a two-part journal series regarding the changes within the profession during the final decades of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, Blickenstaff served on an organizing committee and a panel comprised of pedagogues at the National Conference on Piano Pedagogy in 1992 in a series of seminars titled “Teacher Training for the Pianist in Preparation for the

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3. Rebecca Grooms Johnson, Marvin Blickenstaff, and Louise Goss, “How Has Keyboard Pedagogy Changed over the Last 20–30 Years? Part Two,” *Keyboard Companion* 16, no. 3 (2005): 30–34. The other contributors in part one were Frances Larimer and Marienne Uszler, all of whom maintain widely respected stature as pedagogues. Larimer was the founder of the pedagogy programs at Northwestern University. Uszler authored *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher*, a widely used pedagogy text. Goss was a long-time colleague of Frances Clark and a co-founder of the New School for Music Study.



21st Century.”<sup>4</sup> These awards, honors, and positions of leadership document Blickenstaff’s presence as an authority within the profession.

*Blickenstaff’s Stature as Documented by His Colleagues and Students*

In January of 2007, a significant tribute was written to Blickenstaff in the *Piano Pedagogy Forum* in commemoration of the tenth year of this online journal’s existence. The seven contributors to this tribute included widely respected piano teachers, pedagogues, and performers who had professional associations with Blickenstaff. Sam Holland, Executive Director of the Frances Clark Center and prominent author and pedagogue wrote:

Few individuals’ life work is so influential that it can be said to have changed a discipline, even helped to chart the course for a discipline. That can easily and truly be said of Marvin Blickenstaff’s accomplishments. His accomplishments have dwarfed those of most who have earned doctorates and held more prestigious positions because of his immense talent, his tireless labor, his undying love, and his indomitable spirit. I can think of no one more completely deserving of a special tribute than Marvin Blickenstaff.<sup>5</sup>

Louise Goss wrote of her fervent desire to work with Blickenstaff and extended invitations to him, thus prompting his appointments to leadership roles within the

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4. A summary of the organizing committee’s thoughts was printed in MTNA’s journal; Barbara English Maris, Jean Barr, Marvin Blickenstaff, and Elvina Truman Pearce, “Teacher Training for the Pianist in Preparation for the 21st Century,” *American Music Teacher* 49, no. 6 (June/July 2000): 37–39.

5. Sam Holland, “A Tribute to Marvin Blickenstaff,” *Piano Pedagogy Forum* 10, no. 1 (January 2007), <http://www.music.sc.edu/ea/keyboard/ppf/10.1/10.1.PPFHolland.html> (accessed May 2, 2009).

Frances Clark Center.<sup>6</sup> Scott Donald, past director of the New School and a teaching colleague of Blickenstaff, wrote that Blickenstaff demonstrates expertise daily because of “his constant questioning and assessment of his own teaching” and his “breadth of knowledge” in piano interpretation, repertoire, and history. Donald stated that Blickenstaff has an “ability to organize and present sequential tasks to ensure that the student attains success.”<sup>7</sup> Nelita True, acclaimed concert pianist and esteemed faculty member at the Eastman School of Music, wrote of

Blickenstaff’s pianism:

Even with his busy schedule of teaching, workshops, and leading the Frances Clark Center, Marvin has managed to maintain a high level in his own piano performances. He proved himself early in his career as the First Prize winner in the National Federation of Music Clubs Competition, which led to performances in a number of different venues in the United States.<sup>8</sup>

As described through the words of these prominent musicians and teachers, Blickenstaff is widely admired as a teacher, pedagogue, and pianist.

Blickenstaff’s excellence in teaching has been further documented in his work with students and researchers. Beverly Lapp, an undergraduate student at Goshen College during Blickenstaff’s appointment, wrote of the deep inspiration

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6. Louise Goss, “A Tribute to Marvin Blickenstaff,” *Piano Pedagogy Forum* 10, no. 1 (January 2007), <http://www.music.sc.edu/ea/keyboard/ppf/10.1/10.1.PPFGoss.html> (accessed May 2, 2009).

7. Scott Donald, “A Tribute to Marvin Blickenstaff,” *Piano Pedagogy Forum* 10, no. 1 (January 2007), <http://www.music.sc.edu/ea/keyboard/ppf/10.1/10.1.PPFDonald.html> (accessed May 2, 2009).

8. Nelita True, “A Tribute to Marvin Blickenstaff,” *Piano Pedagogy Forum* 10, no. 1 (January 2007), <http://www.music.sc.edu/ea/keyboard/ppf/10.1/10.1.PPFTrue.html> (accessed May 2, 2009).

she felt during her lessons with Blickenstaff. In lessons with Marvin I remember affirmation being specific, non-redundant, and meaningful. His teaching was infused with solid pedagogy, strengthened with wisdom, and energized by humor and joy. He kept in focus the ultimate goal of teaching his students to think independently, summarized Lapp.<sup>9</sup> According to Louise Goss, Sam Holland touted Blickenstaff as “the best loved piano teacher in America,” and Goss declared that “parents fight for places [for their children] in his studio, and professional teachers and pianists clamor for his coaching.”<sup>10</sup> In 2007, Blickenstaff’s teaching of piano technique was studied by Julie Knerr. The design of Knerr’s study centered on the selection of four nationally recognized, exemplary teachers of young pianists, ages 5–11, with proven excellence in teaching technique. From a summary of her results, Knerr concluded:

There are many characteristics in Blickenstaff’s teaching personality that can be said to exemplify an excellent teacher of children. Although these characteristics may not relate directly to technique, they inform the way he teaches technique and the process by which he achieves such excellent results with his students.<sup>11</sup>

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9. Beverly Lapp, “A Tribute to Marvin Blickenstaff,” *Piano Pedagogy Forum* 10, no. 1 (January 2007), <http://www.music.sc.edu/ea/keyboard/ppf/10.1/10.1.PPFLapp.html> (accessed May 2, 2009).

10. Goss, “A Tribute.”

11. Julie Knerr, “Strategies in the Formation of Piano Technique in Elementary Level Piano Students: An Exploration of Teaching Elementary Level Technical Concepts According to Authors and Teachers from 1925 to the Present” (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 2007), 597.

According to these students and teachers, Blickenstaff is a sought-after and effective teacher who has taught a myriad of students during his impressive career of more than five decades.

#### *Dissemination of Blickenstaff's Pedagogy among Teachers*

An incalculable number of teachers have learned the pedagogical tenets and philosophies of Blickenstaff, as he has been a frequent and admired workshop clinician, masterclass teacher, and presenter at local, state, national, and international conferences during his career. His work has been featured at NCKP as a masterclass artist and as a presenter on pedagogical topics (see Appendix F for a listing Blickenstaff's contributions to national conferences). He has been a frequent presenter at the MTNA national conferences since the 1970s with his lectures, publisher's showcases for Carl Fischer Music and the Frederick Harris Music Company, and as a masterclass teacher. Blickenstaff has been invited to serve as a presenter, clinician, and teacher at state conventions for at least thirty of the state affiliates of MTNA; he has conducted innumerable workshops for local associations of MTNA.<sup>12</sup> Blickenstaff was a long-time lecturer and recitalist for the International Workshops (1988–2004), bringing his musical performances and pedagogical wisdom to numerous European cities. Other international

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12. MTNA has seven regional divisions, a state affiliate in each of the United States, and numerous local associations within each state. State affiliates often conduct yearly state conferences, whereas local associations often program smaller workshops.

engagements include presentations and recitals for the New Zealand Piano Teachers Association and the Alberta Piano Teachers Association Provincial Conference in Canada.<sup>13</sup>

Blickenstaff's philosophies, ideas, and pedagogy have been promulgated to numerous teachers and musicians in his publications and writings. He was an originating associate editor and frequent contributor to *Keyboard Companion* from 1990 to 2004 (renamed *Clavier Companion* in 2009), a journal commencing publication in 1990 that provides pragmatic ideas for piano teachers. Blickenstaff concluded his work as associate editor in 2004. In his final issue as associate editor, Editor-in-chief Elvina Truman Pearce wrote, "Hats off to Marvin Blickenstaff, a stunning pianist, a wonderful teacher, and above all, an exemplary human being who continues to unselfishly promote the highest standards of excellence in both performance and pedagogy."<sup>14</sup> Blickenstaff collaborated with Cathy Albergo and Reid Alexander as co-author of the lengthy and comprehensive teachers' guide to the past three repertoire collections of the *Celebration Series* (1996, 2001, and 2008) for the publisher Frederick Harris Music. These books, all over two-hundred pages, contain carefully sequenced and detailed lesson guides for teaching intermediate piano repertoire. Frances Larimer, then prominent

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13. Marvin Blickenstaff, Resume, February 20, 2009, Personal Files, Private Collection.

14. Elvina Truman Pearce, "From the Editor," *Keyboard Companion* 15, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 38.

pedagogue at Northwestern University, reviewed the 1996 edition as “a benchmark of high-quality study materials for teachers, students, and pianists . . . [and] an important general reference not only for pedagogy students but also for more experienced teachers.”<sup>15</sup> His piano method for young pianists, *Music Pathways*, was co-authored with the late Louise Bianchi and the late Lynn Freeman Olson. Not long after its second edition in 1983, *Music Pathways* was selected as one of the eight leading piano methods of the 1980s,<sup>16</sup> and it was favorably reviewed in *Piano Quarterly* by Frances Larimer.<sup>17</sup> Blickenstaff’s other publications include collections and anthologies of standard solo piano works for Carl Fischer Music (see Appendix A).

#### *Blickenstaff’s Longstanding Service in Faculty Positions*

During Blickenstaff’s lengthy and illustrious career, he has served on the faculty of several colleges and universities. Blickenstaff taught for nearly a decade at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH). His longest academic tenure was at Goshen College, a small liberal arts institution in Indiana, where he

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15. Frances Larimer, review of *Celebration Series Handbook for Teachers*, by Cathy Albergo, Reid Alexander, and Marvin Blickenstaff, *Clavier* 35, no. 7 (September 1996): 30.

16. Cathy Albergo. “Objectives for Elementary Level Piano Instruction: A Survey and Comparison of the Objectives of Eight American Children’s Piano Methods with the Objects of Piano/Piano Pedagogy Teachers” (DEd diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1988).

17. Frances Larimer, review of *Music Pathways*, by Lynn Freeman Olson, Louise Bianchi, and Marvin Blickenstaff, *Piano Quarterly* 32, no. 124 (1983): 46–52.

taught for over twenty years. Following his resignation at Goshen, Lapp wrote a tribute to Blickenstaff in *Keyboard Companion*. She stated:

Most notable has been his unusual flexibility—willing and able to delight in elementary music-making with groups of beginners in the piano preparatory program, inspiring and challenging student teachers in pedagogy classes, and offering his advanced college pianists a wealth of technical and musical insight. Effects of the “Blickenstaff Years” will be felt here at Goshen College for a long, long time.<sup>18</sup>

While at UNC-CH and Goshen, Blickenstaff taught courses in piano studies, piano pedagogy, piano repertoire, class piano, literature, and history. In addition, he has served on the music faculties and instructed courses in pedagogy and piano at McPherson College in Kansas, Fort Hays Kansas State College (currently named Fort Hays State University), Oberlin Conservatory of Music, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the Catholic University of America, Peabody Conservatory of Music, and the Westminster Choir College of Rider University.

### **Justification for the Study**

The study and practice of piano pedagogy is rapidly expanding at universities and colleges and in professional organizations of teachers throughout the United States. However, carefully designed research and factual documentation in piano pedagogy have not equivalently materialized. The largest resources for information on piano teaching are subjective and non-empirical books and journal

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18. Beverly Lapp, untitled editorial box, printed in “Do You Ever Assign Arrangements of Tradition Repertoire?,” *Keyboard Companion* 10, no. 4 (1999): 36.

articles, yet few resources have resulted from the disciplined study into long-established piano pedagogues.

The documentation presented above substantiates the stature of Marvin Blickenstaff as a pianist and pedagogue of high esteem and regard. Research studies comprehensively documenting Blickenstaff's life, pedagogy, and philosophy were not present or published as a result of disciplined inquiry. Furthermore, this master pedagogue, his students, and colleagues were available for consultation, and a significant part of his legacy has been transmitted orally through his teaching and workshops. Therefore, a study designed from established and tested research procedures and principles was judicious and crucial. The current research elucidates and documents a valuable segment of the history of piano pedagogy and is an extensive collection of knowledge that will serve as a significant resource for piano pedagogy students and teachers.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to document the legacy of Marvin Blickenstaff by collecting information in many forms that, when analyzed, organized, and compiled will provide a comprehensive resource for piano students, teachers, and pedagogues. This study thus disseminates the tenets of Blickenstaff's pedagogy and philosophy and establishes how his contributions and professional presence has impacted the field of piano pedagogy. The following questions guided the researcher:



1. What personal, musical, and professional events and experiences led Blickenstaff to become a pianist, teacher, and pedagogue?
2. What are the teaching techniques and learning content of Blickenstaff's lessons?
3. What is Blickenstaff's philosophy of piano playing and piano teaching and how has this changed throughout his career?
4. How does Blickenstaff's philosophy of piano playing and teaching manifest itself in his teaching techniques and the learning content?
5. What are Blickenstaff's major contributions to the education of pianists and piano teachers as a result of his workshops and publications?
6. How is the core content of Blickenstaff's workshops related to his teaching strategies and philosophy of teaching?
7. What did Blickenstaff's work contribute to piano students, piano pedagogy students, and colleagues while a faculty member at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Goshen College?
8. How was the core content of Blickenstaff's piano pedagogy classes at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Goshen College related to his teaching and philosophy of teaching?
9. What are Blickenstaff's major contributions to the Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy, the New School of Music Study, and the National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy?
10. What do Blickenstaff's colleagues and former students identify as his legacy, in terms of his philosophy and pedagogy?

### **Delimitations of the Study**

This study was designed to document the legacy of Marvin Blickenstaff's life and career in regard to his pedagogical and philosophical tenets for piano teaching. An exhaustive survey and history of his recitals, workshops, and other professional engagements was not feasible because of their large number, broad history, and scarcity of documentation. Furthermore, his published musical materials (such as

*Music Pathways* and other piano student materials) were not extensively reviewed and summarized. These student materials were studied for the purposes of developing an understanding of his pedagogy and philosophy. Blickenstaff's life experiences, including his childhood, education, and career, are documented in an abridged biographical chapter. This biography presented in Chapter III contains a summary of his professional activities and the pertinent experiences and events of his life that significantly impacted his development and emergence into a leading master teacher.

### **Summary**

The field of piano pedagogy has progressed and grown as a result of the dedicated study and careers of outstanding teachers who are devoted to piano playing, understanding the process of learning, and developing the best techniques for teaching piano. In the current study, Marvin Blickenstaff's legacy is documented through an explanation of how his teaching is grounded in philosophical principles. In Chapter II, the research methodology is discussed. After a discussion of studies with related design, the research techniques, materials and documentation, and methods of analysis are presented in detail.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **METHODOLOGY**

Marvin Blickenstaff is a master teacher who has been a prominent figure in the field of piano pedagogy for more than fifty years. The purpose of this study is to document the legacy of Blickenstaff by collecting information in many forms that, when compiled, organized, and analyzed will provide a comprehensive resource for piano pedagogues, teachers, and students. The current study elucidates the tenets of Blickenstaff's pedagogy and philosophy and establishes how his work has impacted the field of piano pedagogy. This chapter contains a survey of studies with related methodology, a description of the research procedure, an account of the materials and documents utilized, and an outline of the major themes and subthemes that constitute the final research report.

#### **Studies with Related Methodology**

Several studies exist that document the contributions, lives, and works of piano pedagogues and music educators. These studies, although structured around individuals who are not associated with Marvin Blickenstaff, served as a resource for understanding possible research methodologies and the various types of materials and documents that may be beneficial. Furthermore, the studies conducted on other prominent piano pedagogues include interviews and questionnaires, which informed the design and procedures for the current study.

Baskins, Beauchamp, Beres, Fast, and Lane conducted research documenting the contributions of piano pedagogues who had careers similar to that of Marvin Blickenstaff.<sup>1</sup> These researchers all conducted interviews with their respective subjects, his/her faculty colleagues, and other professional associates. Questionnaires primarily were used for gathering information from the subjects' former piano pedagogy students. The standard procedure in survey research of pilot testing to establish practicality, accuracy, and reliability was employed for questionnaires. Interview guides and questionnaires from these studies served as models for structuring the methodology and documentation used for this research.<sup>2</sup>

Beauchamp and Lane surveyed piano teachers who were members of national organizations. Beauchamp, in her dissertation on Boris Berlin, administered surveys at a Canadian music teacher's conference to determine the dispersion and scope of Berlin's publications and to identify past workshop

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1. Carol Ann Baskins, "The Contributions of Celia Mae Bryant to Piano Pedagogy" (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 1994); Laura Denise Beauchamp, "Boris Berlin's Career and Contributions to Piano Pedagogy" (DMA doc., University of Oklahoma, 1994); Karen Elizabeth Beres, "Marienne Uszler's Contributions to Piano Pedagogy" (DMA doc., University of Oklahoma, 2003); Barbara R. Fast, "Marguerite Miller's Contributions to Piano Pedagogy" (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 1997); Sheryl Rich Lane, "Maurice Hinson: His Life and Contributions to Piano Pedagogy" (DMA diss., University of Memphis, 2003).

2. Baskins, Appendixes A to H, 117–51; Beauchamp, Appendixes F to I, 354–72; Beres, Appendixes C to H, 274–304; Fast, Appendixes A to E, 284–312; Lane, Appendix 3, 243–52.

participants and piano students who were willing to contribute additional information.<sup>3</sup> Lane, in her dissertation on Maurice Hinson, included a comprehensive survey of university faculty and nationally certified piano teachers to determine the scope and use of his numerous publications.<sup>4</sup> The surveys of Beauchamp and Lane assisted in designing the methodology for gathering information on Blickenstaff's publications and presentations.

### **Research Procedures and Documentation**

The research for the current study was framed by discovering, creating, and analyzing primary and secondary source material. All compliant materials, documents, and human resources were utilized in the following phases of research. Each phase was conducted in the order listed below, although in several instances, some overlapped out of necessity and without detriment to the research process. The specific phases of research included:

1. Collect and study existing materials and documentation
2. Conduct field research in Pennsylvania and New Jersey for interviews, teaching observation, and to study archives of Blickenstaff
3. Study pertinent archives at Goshen College
4. Outline a draft of Blickenstaff's philosophy of teaching and conduct a final interview of Blickenstaff

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3. Beauchamp, Appendix F, 354–60.

4. Lane, Appendix 3, 243–47.

5. Conduct field research at Interlochen Center for the Arts (Michigan) on Blickenstaff's presentations and masterclasses
6. Interview Blickenstaff's colleagues and students
7. Administer questionnaires to Blickenstaff's former students and workshop participants
8. Analyze recorded source material
9. Analyze primary and secondary written sources
10. Solidify the final version of Blickenstaff's philosophy

During phases 6-9, numerous revisions occurred to the written outline of Blickenstaff's philosophy as new information was gleaned from the analysis of additional resources. Prior to determining the outline of this research document and writing Chapters IV-VII, all resources were thoroughly reexamined such that Blickenstaff's philosophy was wholly established and validated.

### *Phase 1*

The numerous workshops, masterclasses, recitals, and presentations that Blickenstaff conducted were surveyed to the extent of practicality. Blickenstaff did not hold a personal library of video footage nor was aware of any other holdings. Blickenstaff provided one tape of a repertoire class at the New School for Music Study.<sup>5</sup>

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5. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Repertoire Class for the Program for Excellence in Piano Study*, VHS, (Kingston, NJ, The New School for Music Study, ca. 2002).

An exhaustive library and internet search was conducted to discover extant recordings of Blickenstaff's teaching and workshops. The Music Teachers National Association records its annual conferences and the researcher was able to secure recordings from Blickenstaff's contributions in 2005–2007.<sup>6</sup> Through an internet search, the researcher located videos of Blickenstaff as guest artist for the Montana State Music Teachers Association in 1994. Additional recordings were found in university libraries, two of which provided unique and valuable interviews from 1983 and 1989.<sup>7</sup> Four individual lessons that were taught to beginners (ages 7–9) in Blickenstaff's home studio in Pennsylvania were videotaped by Julie Knerr in 2006. These lessons were specifically designed to demonstrate Blickenstaff's instruction of technique to beginners and were not completely demonstrative of his general approach to lessons.<sup>8</sup> These tapes were viewed prior to the

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6. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Technical Training for the Elementary Piano Student*, CD, (Austin, TX, Music Teachers National Association, 2006); Marvin Blickenstaff, *Intermediate Piano Masterclass*, CD, (Toronto, Canadian Federation of Music Teachers' Associations, Music Teachers National Association, The Royal Conservatory of Music, 2007); Marvin Blickenstaff, Fern Nolte Davidson, and Phillip Kevern, *Basics at the First Lesson and Forever More*, CD, (Seattle, WA, Music Teachers National Association, 2005).

7. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by Robert Dumm, Interview at Shenandoah College Conservatory of Music in Winchester, MA (Audio Cassette held at Stetson University's duPont-Ball Library, 1989); Marvin Blickenstaff, *Doing What Comes Naturally: Nature's Clues to Interpretation*, CD, (Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Music Library, 2004); Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by Jane Magrath, VHS (University of Oklahoma, ca. 1983).

8. Knerr consented and provided a copy of each DVDs to the researcher.

researcher's visit as an introduction to his teaching style (Phase 2) but were not analyzed as part of Phase 8 because of the aforementioned limitation.

Primary written resources of Blickenstaff were discovered and analyzed (see Appendix A for a complete list). The largest singular resource of Blickenstaff's written oeuvre is *Keyboard Companion* (see Appendix B). While his monthly contributions as Associate Editor were often brief, these articles included anecdotes and teaching approaches relevant to this study. Other miscellaneous articles were discovered in *American Music Teacher*, the periodical of the Music Teachers National Association. The principal researcher surveyed *Music Pathways*, the beginning piano method created by Blickenstaff, Lynn Freeman Olson, and Louise Bianchi, to establish an understanding of Blickenstaff's curriculum for elementary-age students. Additional study time was given to the three editions of the *Handbook for Teachers*, which were compiled by Blickenstaff, Cathy Albergo, and Reid Alexander.<sup>9</sup>

Four printed interviews with Blickenstaff were discovered, three published in professional journals and one in an unpublished dissertation. Rob Hallquist's interview contains brief information regarding Blickenstaff's early education,

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9. Cathy Albergo, Reid Alexander, and Marvin Blickenstaff, *Handbook for Teachers*, Celebration Series (2nd ed.) (Mississauga, Ontario: Frederick Harris Music, 1996); Cathy Albergo, Reid Alexander, and Marvin Blickenstaff, *Handbook for Teachers*, 2nd ed., Celebration Series: The Piano Odyssey (Mississauga, Ontario: Frederick Harris Music, 2001); Cathy Albergo, Reid Alexander, and Marvin Blickenstaff, *Handbook for Teachers*, 3rd ed., Celebration Series: Perspectives (Mississauga, Ontario: Frederick Harris Music, 2008).



teaching techniques for young beginners, and his teaching philosophy.<sup>10</sup> Knerr's detailed interview includes information on his life and early career and how he works with young pianists to develop their piano technique.<sup>11</sup> Nancy Bachus's interview in *Clavier* consists of a wide variety of topics including his life history, teaching techniques, and philosophy.<sup>12</sup> Arthur Houle's one-page interview contains a brief report of Blickenstaff's teaching philosophy.<sup>13</sup> These interviews were used to document his history and analyzed for tenets of his philosophy and traits of his pedagogy.

Writings on Blickenstaff and dissertations on pertinent pedagogues were studied to develop an understanding of Blickenstaff's collaborations and teaching style. Knerr's dissertation contains an exhaustive account of Blickenstaff's instruction of piano technique to elementary students, and Gail Lew's Master's thesis contains a summary of Blickenstaff's pedagogical contributions, largely

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10. Rob Hallquist, "Learning Music Together: An Interview with Marvin Blickenstaff," *Early Childhood Connections* 8 (Winter 2002): 7-14.

11. Julie Knerr, "Strategies in the Formation of Piano Technique in Elementary Level Piano Students: An Exploration of Teaching Elementary Level Technical Concepts According to Authors and Teachers from 1925 to the Present" (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 2007), Appendix A, 800-04.

12. Nancy Bachus, "With a Passion for Teaching and Music Played Beautifully: An Interview with Marvin Blickenstaff," *Clavier* 41, no. 7 (September 2002): 6-10.

13. Arthur Houle, "5 Minutes with . . . Marvin Blickenstaff," *American Music Teacher* 54, no. 3 (December/January 2004/2005): 51.

focused on *Music Pathways*.<sup>14</sup> Steven Betts researched the contributions of Lynn Freeman Olson to music education; Olson was one of Blickenstaff's two collaborators on *Music Pathways*.<sup>15</sup> The third collaborator on *Music Pathways* was Louise Bianchi, and her contributions to the field of piano pedagogy were documented by Samuel Holland.<sup>16</sup> Blickenstaff was interviewed in both of these dissertations. These sources contain information pertinent to the biography and background of Blickenstaff.

### *Phase 2*

The principal investigator traveled to conduct field research at Blickenstaff's home studio in Collegeville, Pennsylvania, and at the New School for Music Study in Kingston, New Jersey. Over five days beginning on Monday, November 16, 2009, interviews were conducted and lessons and classes were observed (see Appendix D for a list of lessons observed). On Monday and Thursday, Blickenstaff taught in his home studio and on Tuesday and Wednesday, Blickenstaff taught at the New School for Music Study. In total, the researcher observed and recorded videos of twenty-one piano lessons, eight at the New

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14. Knerr; Gail Lew, "The Pedagogical Contributions of Leading American Piano Pedagogues from 1950 to 2009" (MA thesis, California State University, East Bay, 2009).

15. Steven Lee Betts, "Lynn Freeman Olson's Contributions to Music Education" (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 1995).

16. Samuel Stinson Holland, "Louise Wadley Bianchi's Contributions to Piano Pedagogy" (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 1996).

School and thirteen in his home studio. In addition, two classes and a small-group lesson were observed (but not recorded) at the New School. Blickenstaff was interviewed in a series of five in-depth interviews. These formal interviews, each for approximately one hour, were audio recorded and transcribed. Blickenstaff declined the opportunity to review these transcriptions. Numerous informal interviews were interspersed in between lessons as time permitted. The principal investigator took detailed field notes throughout each lesson, class, and interview.

Blickenstaff provided access to numerous personal files and resources. Digital computer files from the 1990s (during Blickenstaff's Goshen College years) contained all of his course files and some personal correspondence. Blickenstaff provided a hard copy of his current workshop notes from all of his existing presentations. Furthermore, past workshop presentations were also provided for the researcher to study during her visit to Pennsylvania. Lastly, pertinent photographs were provided by Blickenstaff to document important events in his life. Blickenstaff reviewed a preliminary list of interviewees (see the final listing of interviewees in Appendix G), provided contact information for most on the list, and also suggested additional individuals to be included. The individuals who were not interviewed were given the opportunity to contribute via questionnaires (see Phase 7).

*Phase 3*

In January 2010, the principal investigator traveled to Goshen, Indiana, for a week to study the video archives held in the Goshen College's Music Department and to conduct interviews. The video collection includes video and/or audio recordings of the presentations and masterclasses given each year of the Goshen College Piano Workshop. Out of the thirty-nine recordings of Blickenstaff's work, twelve were masterclasses. These were viewed in the resource room of the Music Department, and the researcher was granted permission to temporarily retain the most significant examples for further study. Of the recordings of Blickenstaff's recitals, only two could be studied as they were the only ones that had been transferred to compact disc. While in Goshen, Kathryn and Lon Sherer (faculty colleagues of Blickenstaff) were interviewed at their home, and Beverly Lapp (former student and colleague) was interviewed on campus. Lapp provided her pedagogy notebook, repertoire notebook, and lesson journals for use as archival resources.

*Phase 4*

Following the researcher's exposure to Blickenstaff's teaching and the videos of his presentations, the first outline of Blickenstaff's philosophy emerged. To validate its accuracy, the researcher conducted the final formal interview with Blickenstaff. This interview occurred at the Music Teachers National Association Conference in Albuquerque in March 2010. Cathy Albergo and Joel Harrison, two of

Blickenstaff's former students, attended this conference and were interviewed at this time.

#### *Phase 5*

In July 2010, observational and participatory field research were implemented by the researcher during workshops conducted by Blickenstaff. Blickenstaff was engaged as a guest pedagogue at the Arts Camp of the Interlochen Center for the Arts in Michigan. Two masterclasses of junior high pianists were given by Blickenstaff, and he presented *Piano Pedagogy 101* to the faculty and high school students. In addition, the researcher participated in an informal gathering of faculty members and teaching assistants for a question and answer session. Jeffery Weaver, a teaching assistant at the camp and a former student of Blickenstaff, was interviewed.

#### *Phase 6*

Personal interviews were conducted as a principal manner of data collection and used to determine Blickenstaff's teaching techniques and philosophy as perceived by his students. The interviews occurred long-distance via telephone, except those previously indicated. In total, the researcher conducted twenty-two interviews. For those interviews that were digitally recorded, each audio recording was transcribed by the researcher via the software program

Transana.<sup>17</sup> While most interviewees consented to audio recordings, two interviewees did not. Elvina Truman Pearce submitted typed notes in response to the questions on the interview protocol. For Kathryn Sherer's interview, the researcher wrote detailed notes during the interview and completed a comprehensive transcript from these handwritten notes. Sherer reviewed the transcript, clarifying and augmenting the written report. Each interviewee was given the opportunity to review and validate the transcript of the interview.

Interviews were conducted with the following groups of individuals (see Appendix G for an annotated listing of interviewees):

1. Former piano and pedagogy students of Blickenstaff at UNC-CH and Goshen
2. Former colleagues of Blickenstaff at UNC-CH, Goshen, *Keyboard Companion*, and the International Workshops
3. Current colleagues of Blickenstaff at the New School for Music Study and the Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy

Four students and one faculty colleague were interviewed from UNC-CH. From Blickenstaff's Goshen years, three college students (two of whom later became faculty colleagues), three pre-college students, and two faculty colleagues were interviewed. To document his most recent position with the Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy and the New School for Music Study, the researcher interviewed two faculty colleagues from the school, two members of the Board of

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17. David Woods and Chris Fassnacht, *Transana v2.42b*, Computer Transcription Software, <http://www.transana.org>, (Madison, WI, The Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, 2010).

Trustees, and one editor from *Keyboard Companion*. To further diversify the interview pool, the researcher included one independent music teacher from the Goshen College Piano Workshop, a parent of one of Blickenstaff's recent pre-college students, and two colleagues from the International Workshops.

### *Phase 7*

The researcher conducted two surveys, one to former students and another to piano teachers who have observed Blickenstaff's workshops, via the web-based application SurveyMonkey.<sup>18</sup> The questionnaires were pilot tested by five individuals and revisions were made to improve the clarity of questions and the organization of sections. Both surveys were conducted online to participants around the country, and links to the survey's webpage were sent via email to all participants. Respondents were given the choice to remain anonymous or allow their names to be indicated alongside their responses.

To broaden the student population to include students from as many years as possible, the researcher sent online questionnaires to a large group of former students. Goshen College compiled an email list (unknown quantity) of Blickenstaff's former students and sent a cover letter and link to the online survey on behalf of the researcher. An additional group of more than 20 students who were Blickenstaff's students at other institutions was emailed; these individuals

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18. SurveyMonkey™, Palo Alto, California: SurveyMonkey.com, LLC, [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com).

were recommended by Blickenstaff, identified during interviews, or discovered during general research into Blickenstaff's career. The researcher received 37 complete survey responses, and from these, 14 responders asked to remain anonymous. The survey pool included 32 responses from Goshen College students who had studied with Blickenstaff between the 1978 and 1999. Furthermore, 5 additional participants were UNC-CH students who had studied with Blickenstaff between 1969 and 1977. All respondents had taken piano lessons with Blickenstaff and 15 had taken at least one pedagogy course with him.

Teachers in Maryland and South Dakota who were members of the Music Teachers National Association were surveyed to assess what they gained from attending Blickenstaff's workshops, sessions, and masterclasses. Administered on SurveyMonkey, this questionnaire was sent via mass email to piano teachers of the Maryland State Music Teachers Association and the South Dakota Music Teachers Association. These two organizations hosted Blickenstaff at a conference during the fall of 2010. Both organizations forwarded an email cover letter with a link to the questionnaire to their members who attended the conferences. The researcher received 36 complete survey responses, from which 9 opted to register their name with their remarks.

### *Phases 8-10*

All five categories of video and sound recordings that were analyzed in Phase 8 were imperative for determining Blickenstaff's teaching philosophy and



pedagogical strategies. The following categories of resources were Blickenstaff's primary professional activities (see Appendix C and D for complete lists of each category) and interviews:

1. Lessons and classes with piano students
2. Masterclasses with piano students
3. Workshops for piano teachers
4. Interviews with Blickenstaff
5. Interviews with his students and colleagues (see Appendix G).

In presenting the first two categories in this research document, all student names have been changed to maintain anonymity. For the lessons recorded by the principal investigator, students were assigned names alphabetically in the order in which the lesson occurred.

Based upon the philosophy of teaching determined in Phase 4, a qualitative analysis criterion was developed and included his pedagogical strategies, tenets of his philosophy, and biographical information. Each criteria, which eventually grew into the chapter structure of this research study, was entered into the qualitative analysis software Transana.<sup>19</sup> The software allowed segments of recordings to be tagged and sorted based upon the qualitative analysis criterion. All recorded resources were outlined and summarized, and essential portions of key resources

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19. Woods and Fassnacht. Transana's organizational structure defines categories and keywords. The researcher created a category for each philosophical tenet and a keyword for each pedagogical strategy, thus allowing portions of videos and recordings to be cross-labeled and allowing for complex searches.

were transcribed and coded in detail. Throughout this rigorous investigation, the categories and substructure of this rubric that constituted Blickenstaff's belief system was modified and expanded. While this process was tedious, the result was a categorized and itemized listing of key resources that substantiated each tenet of Blickenstaff's philosophy and each teaching technique.

Each additional, non-recorded resource was analyzed and coded by the same rubric, thus triangulating the researcher's direct observations with the perspectives of those surveyed and with written resources, both published and private. The resources beyond the recorded resources are categorized as follows:

1. Surveys of students and teachers (see Appendix I and J)
2. Blickenstaff's workshop preparation notes and handouts (see Appendix E)
3. Blickenstaff's published articles (see Appendix A and B)
4. Digital course files from Goshen College in the 1990s
5. Archival journals and notebooks from students and colleagues
6. Field notes of the principal investigator

To complete this phase of the analysis, the researcher created a color-coded, numerical scheme (based upon the qualitative analysis criterion) to identify each philosophical tenet and teaching technique. Key areas of each written resource were labeled using this schematic, and a master list organized by the numeric scheme was compiled. Upon the conclusion of this process, each tenet of Blickenstaff's philosophy and each teaching technique were further validated

through numerous written resources. A final outline of the research study was solidified prior to expanding Chapter III and creating Chapters IV-VIII.

### **Organization of the Research Report**

Blickenstaff's philosophy was divided into three overarching themes, which are presented in Chapters IV through VI. Following the biography in Chapter III, Chapter IV presents Blickenstaff's viewpoint on the definition of music, the teacher, and the student. In Chapter V, Blickenstaff's foundations for music study are explored through an analysis of the value of music study and the qualities of the student-teacher relationship. His philosophy on the learning process is detailed in Chapter VI, which includes an examination of the learning environment and how humans learn. In Chapter VII, Blickenstaff's pedagogical style is codified through a summary of his lesson content, teaching techniques, and style of communication. The final Chapter VIII provides answers to the research questions and synthesizes his philosophy, pedagogical style, and contributions to the field of piano pedagogy into his legacy.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **BIOGRAPHY AND PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES**

For more than fifty years, Marvin Blickenstaff has contributed to the field of piano and piano pedagogy through his performing, teaching, workshops, and professional leadership. The purpose of this study is to document the legacy of this master teacher by compiling a comprehensive resource that disseminates his teaching philosophy to piano pedagogues, teachers, and students. This chapter contains his biography and an account of his career, focusing on those events that are directly related to his growth into a pianist, teacher, and national figure in piano pedagogy. Furthermore, Blickenstaff's professional activities demonstrate how he contributed to the growth and futures of the organizations and institutions for which he worked.

#### **Early Years**

Marvin Blickenstaff grew up as the youngest of three sons in the family of Ray and Margaret Blickenstaff. He was born on May 19, 1935, in Nampa, Idaho. His father was a dentist who had his own practice, and his mother, educated only through the eighth grade, was a homemaker; their eldest sons are Wayne and Loren. Blickenstaff reflected upon the life lessons taught to him by his parents when the Music Teachers National Association honored him with the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2009. He stated in his acceptance speech:

My parents raised their three sons in a household founded on love and affirmation, and disciplined work. I cite my parents as part of my success story as a piano teacher, for they instilled in my brothers and me a value system which has been the foundation of my profession life. They taught us that in order to achieve success in life, one must work hard and that the fulfilled life is one which focuses on what you give to others, not what you can gain for yourself. Can you imagine a better value system for a budding piano teacher? Work hard, and give your best to your students.<sup>1</sup>

The work ethic instilled through his family life is witnessed through Blickenstaff's stories about chores and summer work:

Dad earned a good living, and they taught their boys to work. . . . We were allowed to sleep in on Saturday mornings to a certain extent, but when we got up, Dad would have a list of chores for each one of us to do that day. Marvin, you're going to have to weed the barberries, Loren, you are to mow the lawn, Wayne, you have to clean out the chicken coop.<sup>2</sup>

Modeling the importance of giving to others, father Blickenstaff would offer gratis dental work to individuals from their community:

Dad probably did more free dentistry in Nampa than anybody in the history of medical practice in Idaho [laughing]. For every minister in town, he would do their dental work free of charge—missionaries coming through, poor people. I remember during the late years of the depression, . . . nearing the 1940s, we would have big, five gallon tins of honey up in the attic because the honey man could not pay for his dentures, and so he gave us honey. . . . Dad had a soft heart, and dentistry for *him* was a *service* profession [emphasis his]; he felt he could help other people by being a dentist. And if that meant not charging people, then he wouldn't charge them. . . . He was just a fabulous model to have as a father.

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1. Marvin Blickenstaff, Response to the MTNA Achievement Award, Personal Files.

2. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by author, Interview 3 of 6 (Collegeville, PA, November 18, 2009).

Music was found in the Blickenstaff home, albeit it was not initially integral to the family life. His mother, although far from a professional, played piano in the home, as did his two older brothers. Blickenstaff recalled:

Mom played a little piano, and I don't even know where she learned to play the piano because they were poor farm people. . . . One of my early, early childhood musical memories is Mom playing the piano and we'd stand around and sing. Kind of pop stuff, sheet music from those days. And she sang in the church choir, but she was truly an untrained musician. She could never have taught piano.<sup>3</sup>

Blickenstaff's parents raised him in a home environment where he learned to be dedicated and generous, and where music was welcome.

#### Beginning Piano Study

Blickenstaff began piano lessons as a child in first grade, at the age of six (ca. 1941), and studied with several teachers. The first two teachers he described as "average neighborhood teacher[s],"<sup>4</sup> but he later transferred (ca. 1945) to a more accomplished teacher, Ona Mae Morris, who had a grand piano and a record player. Blickenstaff wrote, "[She would] occasionally treat me to recordings by Jose Iturbi during my lessons. That was a truly awe-inspiring experience for a grade school piano student who had no record player at home."<sup>5</sup> During his sixth and

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3. Ibid.

4. Rob Hallquist, "Learning Music Together: An Interview with Marvin Blickenstaff," *Early Childhood Connections* 8, (Winter 2002): 8.

5. Marvin Blickenstaff, "Do You Use Recordings to Reinforce Your Teaching of Repertoire?," *Keyboard Companion* 15, no. 1 (2004): 42. José Iturbi was a

seventh grade years (ca. 1946 and 1947), Blickenstaff gave his first public recitals at his church under the guidance of Mrs. Morris. At this age, he performed on both organ and piano, and his repertoire included the complete *Moonlight Sonata* (Op. 27, No. 2) by Beethoven, including the technically challenging final movement. Blickenstaff nearly stopped lessons at this age, assuming he should follow in the footsteps of his older brothers; his two brothers played piano, but they discontinued piano studies and focused on various sports when reaching the seventh grade. Despite his initial inclination to quit lessons, Blickenstaff continued throughout his high school years, although with a different teacher.

#### Studies with Fern Nolte Davidson

Blickenstaff's subsequent teacher was Fern Nolte Davidson (1907–2008), a prominent and celebrated teacher in the Boise Valley in Idaho. After Blickenstaff had studied several years with Mrs. Morris, his mother realized that he was not challenged sufficiently, and in the eighth grade, enrolled him in lessons (ca. 1948) with Davidson. Davidson gained further acclaim after being selected for a concert in Carnegie Hall. Blickenstaff recalled:

When I first came to her, all Nampa was abuzz because Fern Davidson was going to play in Carnegie Hall. So I started out with her for a few lessons, and then a former student who was a wonderful pianist . . . took over her studio for a couple weeks while she practiced and went to New York and played in Carnegie Hall. The occasion was sponsored by the National Guild of Piano Teachers—they used to have contests for teachers—and she won that contest. The prize was that the Guild would present you in Carnegie

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conductor, composer, keyboardist, and movie star, who reached his highest fame in the 1940s.

Hall, and I think there were two or three other people on that program. But she played. She did the big Haydn E-flat [Piano Sonata in E-flat Major, No. 52].<sup>6</sup>

Blickenstaff has publically voiced enthusiasm about the tremendous teaching received from Davidson:<sup>7</sup>

She had very high standards. . . . She really taught me to read a score meticulously. . . . I can't believe how much repertoire I covered during junior high and high school. . . . And it was just really, really exciting. She had a wonderful way to lift standards and yet to affirm along the way.<sup>8</sup>

His piano lessons continued with Davidson throughout high school and his first year of college study at the College of Idaho.<sup>9</sup>

Davidson's training of Blickenstaff inspired and motivated the young man to seriously pursue piano studies. He frequently exclaims: "After a few lessons with

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6. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by author, Interview 2 of 6 (Collegetown, PA, November 17, 2009).

7. Marvin Blickenstaff, Fern Nolte Davidson, and Phillip Kevern, *Basics at the First Lesson and Forever More*, CD, (Seattle, WA, Music Teachers National Association, 2005). Blickenstaff, along with Phillip Kevern, interviewed their former teacher Davidson in a public presentation at the MTNA national conference. Both Kevern and Blickenstaff were enthusiastically outspoken in their respect for her teaching during this open interview.

8. Julie Knerr, "Strategies in the Formation of Piano Technique in Elementary Level Piano Students: An Exploration of Teaching Elementary Level Technical Concepts According to Authors and Teachers from 1925 to the Present" (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 2006), 800–01. Appendix F (pages 800–27) of Knerr's dissertation is a transcript of an interview she conducted with Blickenstaff on June 21, 2006.

9. *Ibid.*, 802.



her, I would have signed a contract [with God] to be a musician for life.”<sup>10</sup>

Interviewer Robert Dumm asked Blickenstaff in 1989 what Davidson did differently to create a “turn around” in his playing, and Blickenstaff mused:

It was the challenge I think. She made music seem a bigger challenge than anybody ever had before. It was not that she made it seem harder, she made it seem more exciting, like it demanded my very best self. It was not something that I could just do easily—it demanded my very hardest work and rigorous discipline and my best self.<sup>11</sup>

She required him to devote his time to piano by providing him with a broad spectrum of activities to promote musical growth; for example, Blickenstaff participated in a series of theory classes she taught over the summer at her home to a group of high school students.

When Blickenstaff was in high school (1949–53), Davidson paired him with another young man near his age, Elman Anderson, to play together in duos. The boys performed a duo recital each year and also presented complete solo recitals each year. Blickenstaff recollected:

She had two uprights in her basement recreation room, and we would meet there and practice. And, Elman and I during our high school years would give each year a memorized duo piano recital and our own memorized solo recitals. I talked about going through literature, it was truly inspiring what

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10. Nancy Bachus, “With a Passion for Teaching and Music Played Beautifully: An Interview with Marvin Blickenstaff,” *Clavier* 41, no. 7 (September 2002): 9.

11. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by Robert Dumm, Interview at Shenandoah College Conservatory of Music in Winchester, MA (Audio Cassette held at Stetson University’s duPont-Ball Library, 1989).

she had us do. And that was sort of the carrot that she would dangle in front of our noses. You will give these recitals, and we had great fun.<sup>12</sup>

Davidson took the adolescent duo team to receive a lesson from the famed professional duo pianists, Arthur Whittimore and Jack Lowe. Blickenstaff reflected on this experience:

We actually [thought], as naive high school kids might think, that we were going to be a duo piano team. And one time, Whittimore and Lowe came through and played on the community concerts, and we arranged to play for them. The next day we went over to Boise and we played a whole bunch of pieces, and they were kind of tickled, I think, at what we were doing, and they gave us some little hints. . . . We really had stars in our eyes; we were going to be a duo piano team.<sup>13</sup>

At the Music Teachers National Association 2005 Conference in Seattle, Blickenstaff, Davidson, and Phillip Kevern (also a former student of Davidson), presented a session titled *Basics at the First Lesson and Forever More*. During this interview-style workshop, Davidson teased Blickenstaff about the name the young boys gave their piano duo, “The Keyboard Kings.”<sup>14</sup>

While Blickenstaff was in high school, Davidson also facilitated the travel of several of her students to observe masterclasses (ca. 1950) at Boise State University with Sergei Tarnovsky, a Russian teacher who taught the famous

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12. Blickenstaff, Davidson, and Kevern, *Basics at the First Lesson and Forever More*.

13. Blickenstaff, Interview 2 of 6. Arthur Whittimore and Jack Lowe were a nationally and internationally recognized duo team that concertized for decades following World War II. They were known for their arrangements of Classical and popular music for duo piano.

14. Blickenstaff, Davidson, and Kevern, *Basics at the First Lesson and Forever More*.

concert pianist Vladimir Horowitz as a youth. Blickenstaff remarked with amazement at the experience of witnessing an expert teacher:

That guy knew everything and could sit down and play anything—I mean, he was *old school Russia*. . . . But, he *knew* the repertoire and he knew the Russian way of performing [emphasis his]. He taught pedaling, and voicing, and fingering habits and everything. He would come out every summer, for what, a week, maybe, and every day . . . we would sit up on the stage with the grand piano and he would teach away.<sup>15</sup>

This experience inspired Blickenstaff, and he decided he would like to study in college with Tarnovsky, who was then a faculty member at DePauw University in Chicago. He recollected saving his pocket money to fund this coveted training:

In the old days, we used to get gallons of ice cream in round, big, thick cardboard boxes. . . . In my closet I kept a gallon ice cream container with a slot in the top, and on the outside, I had drawn in crayon, “The DP Fund.” I was going to save money for my college career at DePauw. I was going to study with Tarnovsky!<sup>16</sup>

Even though Blickenstaff did not study with Tarnovsky in his college years, these masterclasses made a strong impression on him as an aspiring pianist in high school.

Davidson created and organized a concert of ensemble piano music, which included the founding of the Idaho Eight Piano Symphony. She managed the teachers, selected the music, and conducted the eight-piano ensemble, the grand finale of the concert. Blickenstaff recalled that this occurred on a semi-annual basis in the local gymnasium, beginning in the late 1940s. Local music stores donated

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15. Blickenstaff, Interview 2 of 6.

16. Ibid.

some pianos, and additional pianos were supplied by local teachers who moved their studio pianos to the gym. Blickenstaff explained the event, which he hypothesized was the first “monster concert” of its kind:<sup>17</sup>

The pianos were arranged on the gymnasium floor in a horseshoe and Fern would stand on a podium and conduct. For the final number or two, eight uprights would be rolled in and some of us more advanced students were allowed to play along with the teachers. Her favorite finale was an arrangement of the overture to the opera *Semiramide* by Rossini, arranged for eight pianos and thirty-two hands by Percy Grainger! It was a barn burner. . . . The audience erupted at the end!<sup>18</sup>

In addition to all the solo and ensemble performance opportunities, Davidson frequently enrolled Blickenstaff in competitions, including the Federation of Music Clubs.

Blickenstaff is unreserved in his compliments of Davidson’s teaching and remained in close contact with her throughout her life. Blickenstaff has reiterated that under her tutelage, he learned a vast amount of repertoire, to precisely read a musical score, and a solid technical foundation:

I’ll tell you two things at the outset that are truly a testimony to my legacy of studying with Fern; no teacher that I had after ever had to help me read a score accurately. Now I’ve learned things about performance practice that were not available to us in Nampa, Idaho, in the 1950s, but the attention to what the composer really marked on the score and what that has to do with the sound and the emotion that that sound is portraying, that happened to me when I was in the eighth grade. And I will always be grateful to her for that. . . . I studied with Fern since the time I was in the eighth grade through

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17. Blickenstaff, Davidson, and Kevern, *Basics at the First Lesson and Forever More*.

18. Marvin Blickenstaff, 2010–2012, Personal Correspondence with Sara Ernst.

my freshman year of college, and since that time I have had a number of teachers and gone to conservatories and graduate schools, and no teacher after that has done anything substantial with my technique. It was so solidly founded there in Nampa, Idaho, at the hand of Fern Davidson [spontaneous applause from audience]. . . . I will say this other thing, and Phillip [Kevern] can also give testimony to this, I have never had a student who came to me as a college piano major who had the same kind of repertoire background that I had from Fern. We went through sonatinas, and through Haydn sonatas, and we studied Mozart before we could go to Beethoven. We did Bach dances and we did inventions and preludes and fugues. And I had this incredible background of piano literature before I ever went to college.<sup>19</sup>

After Blickenstaff had taught professionally and worked with many pianists in high school and college, Blickenstaff understood how remarkable these lessons were.

Blickenstaff, growing up in a rural Idaho community, was fortunate to find a teacher who could successfully mold him into a strong pianist.

In 2007, Davidson celebrated her 100th birthday (see fig. 3.1), and Blickenstaff, along with numerous former students, presented a recital in her honor in Caldwell, Idaho, at the College of Idaho. Not only did Blickenstaff perform at the event, he gave a spoken tribute to the audience of more than 900 attendees.<sup>20</sup> Blickenstaff declared:

The goal of every piano teacher is to give the gift of beautiful music to their students. This statement could summarize why we are here this evening, for Fern Nolte Davidson gave the gift of beautiful music to hundreds of students during her 70-plus years of teaching. . . . From Fern we learned that discipline and diligence has its tangible rewards and that the

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19. Blickenstaff, Davidson, and Kevern, *Basics at the First Lesson and Forever More*.

20. Andrew Van Dam, "Caldwell Music Legend Turns 100," *Idaho Press-Tribune*, September 3, 2007.



Figure 3.1. Picture of Fern Nolte Davidson and Marvin Blickenstaff, taken at her 100th birthday celebration at her home in Nampa, Idaho, 2007. Photograph from the personal collection of Marvin Blickenstaff.

performance of music is a noble calling. What a legacy! - - To have added the beauty and nobility of music to thousands of lives.<sup>21</sup>

He opened the concert with a set of piano pieces: Romance (Op. 28, No. 2) by Schumann, Arietta (Op. 12, No. 1) by Grieg, Impromptu (Op. 90, No. 3) by Schubert, “Un sospiro” by Liszt, and Prelude in C Major (Well Tempered Clavier Book I) by J.S. Bach.<sup>22</sup> Davidson guided and molded Blickenstaff at a crucial age, and her influence has been truly lasting on his career and life.

Blickenstaff’s parents supported his talents as they sought out Davidson, purchased a grand piano, and allowed him to major in music in college.

Blickenstaff reminisced on how his parents secured a Baldwin grand piano in 1950:

Blickenstaff: But, we had an old upright piano. I learned on that piano and studied on that piano. It was a Brewster piano, and then, when it was pretty clear that I was going to go on, and they [my parents] built a larger house, they bought a Baldwin grand piano. My dad had a cousin in Boise who was the Baldwin dealer, so he gave him a good deal. Do you know what S&H green stamps are?

Ernst: No.

Blickenstaff: It was a promotional device where so many different stores would give stamps according to the amount of your purchase, and you would fill up your books with your stamps. And then you’d go in and claim prizes. You could get electric appliances and things like that. We got green

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21. Marvin Blickenstaff, Fern’s Recital Tribute, Personal Files.

22. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Fern Davidson: 100<sup>th</sup> Birth Celebration*, DVD, Personal Files.

stamps for the grand piano! [laughing] The whole family gathered around for hours, licking the green stamps for buying a grand piano.<sup>23</sup>

One of the anecdotes Blickenstaff ingeminates is how he became a music major. Blickenstaff's family was traditional in its hierarchy; his father was the dominant figure who approved or disapproved all family decisions. Blickenstaff remembered:

I have this vivid recollection of being home with my mother and father. My brothers were already away from home. And we were at breakfast one morning, and my dad put down his fork and his knife, and he looked across the table and he said, "Mother, I think if Marvin wants to major in music, we'll let him." . . . They basically were not in favor of my being a music major, because they thought it was an insecure profession. But I was winning contests all over the place and really wanted to major in piano, and so they decided that that would be okay.<sup>24</sup>

Blickenstaff maintains that "Without this [his parent's consent], I probably would have gone into medicine since my father was a dentist and my older brothers were in the medical field by that time."<sup>25</sup> Blickenstaff's parents aided him in his pursuit of music as a career, allowing him to forgo his likely path of becoming a dentist.

#### Other Notable Activities

Throughout junior high school and high school, Blickenstaff participated in extracurricular activities beyond piano lessons and worked part-time summer jobs. He held active membership in church groups, the Key Club, and the Honor

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23. Blickenstaff, Interview 3 of 6.

24. Knerr, 802.

25. Hallquist, 8–9.



Society, and served as one of the editors for the school annual. In junior high (1945–49), he first learned to play the trumpet, but upon receiving braces learned the tenor saxophone because it was easier on his mouth. In high school (1949–53), he became disinterested in the saxophone and studied the oboe, even entertaining a fleeting desire to discontinue piano in favor of the oboe. As a junior high student, he would pick peas in the summer. Blickenstaff recounted:

When I was really young, like in seventh grade, about the only job you could get in the early summer was to pick peas. . . . I'd get up about four or five o'clock in the morning. . . and truck drivers would take you out to the fields and you'd pick peas. . . . It was *hard* [emphasis his] work. And you got something like 60 cents for a full bushel of peas. And I'd come back home with my couple of dollars, and I'd say, "Do I have to go out in the morning Mother?" She'd say, "Yes, you won't have another opportunity to do much work this summer. You've got to go."<sup>26</sup>

As a high-school student, he worked on his uncle's farm and as a soda jerk at the local drive-in. Blickenstaff reminisced:

That was actually pretty hard work too because the crowds would come in after a movie, most especially after the rodeo. And it was a drive-in . . . and the curb service gals would ring the bell and give you their order and you had to get the hamburgers up [laughing]. The first summer I worked there, they hired me as a dish washer and potato peeler for 50 cents an hour. . . . I worked so fast as a dish washer and French fryer. . . . Then they assigned me to make the hamburger patties. They found out that I could make potato salad, so they added that to my job. I ended up covering the jobs that had been divided between two people, and they fired the other guy! I was fast enough that I could do everything [laughing], and they raised my salary by 10 cents an hour. On Saturday nights they were open to at least midnight, and then I had to mop the floors and do the waxing, and I wouldn't get

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26. Blickenstaff, Interview 3 of 6.

home until one o'clock or so. But that was no excuse for not going to church the next morning, so I'd get up and go to church.<sup>27</sup>

Throughout his childhood and high school years, Blickenstaff's parents and Davidson imbued him with a grounded moral compass, a strong work ethic, and a commitment to and passion for making music at the piano.

### **College Years**

Blickenstaff first studied at the College of Idaho in 1953 and completed volunteer service abroad from 1954 to 1956 before enrolling in the piano performance program at Oberlin Conservatory of Music. Blickenstaff enjoyed his first year at the College of Idaho, exclaiming "I was really so glad to get off to college to get rid of all this extraneous stuff,"<sup>28</sup> referring to his numerous extracurricular activities from high school. He explained his first year in college:

I had a full ride at the College of Idaho. I think I went to my Freshman year of college on two hundred dollars. . . . I lived at home and commuted back and forth. It was not much of a college life, commuting from home. I didn't even study with one of the college teachers; I studied with Fern.<sup>29</sup>

After his first year at the College of Idaho, Blickenstaff traveled to Linz, Austria, in 1954, to complete two years of requisite military service. The Church of the Brethren, which was his family's denomination, commissioned Blickenstaff to

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27. Ibid.

28. Blickenstaff, Interview 2 of 6.

29. Ibid. Blickenstaff arranged to receive credit for lessons with Fern Nolte Davidson, and she later became a long-time faculty member at the College of Idaho.

serve refugees in refugee camps, and he learned to speak German fluently during this service.<sup>30</sup> Blickenstaff reflected:

I was actually working with refugee families who wanted to get out of refugee camps and immigrate to America. And so I was our church's representative over there interviewing the families and writing up dossiers, and then the organization in the United States would find church sponsors here, and then the refugee families could immigrate. And that was just a whole different look of the world and what the Second World War had done to the lives of these people.<sup>31</sup>

Blickenstaff, along with other Americans in service, traveled to Vienna on the weekends to hear concerts of the Vienna Philharmonic and Vienna Boys Choir.<sup>32</sup> While in Austria, Blickenstaff continued his piano studies, working with a teacher in Linz who arranged performance opportunities and supervised his audition tape into Oberlin.<sup>33</sup> Blickenstaff received a scholarship to enter the conservatory at Oberlin and returned to the United States. During his college years, his intense focus upon the piano and pursuit of music study blossomed.

### Oberlin College

In the fall of 1956, Blickenstaff enrolled at Oberlin College Conservatory of Music (see fig. 3.2), which allowed him to focus intensely on his piano skills. He

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30. Gail Lew, "The Pedagogical Contributions of Leading American Piano Pedagogues from 1950 to 2009" (MA thesis, California State University, East Bay, 2009), 69.

31. Knerr, 802.

32. Sara M. Ernst, 2009, Field Notes, Blickenstaff's Home Studio, Collegeville, PA.

33. Knerr, 802.

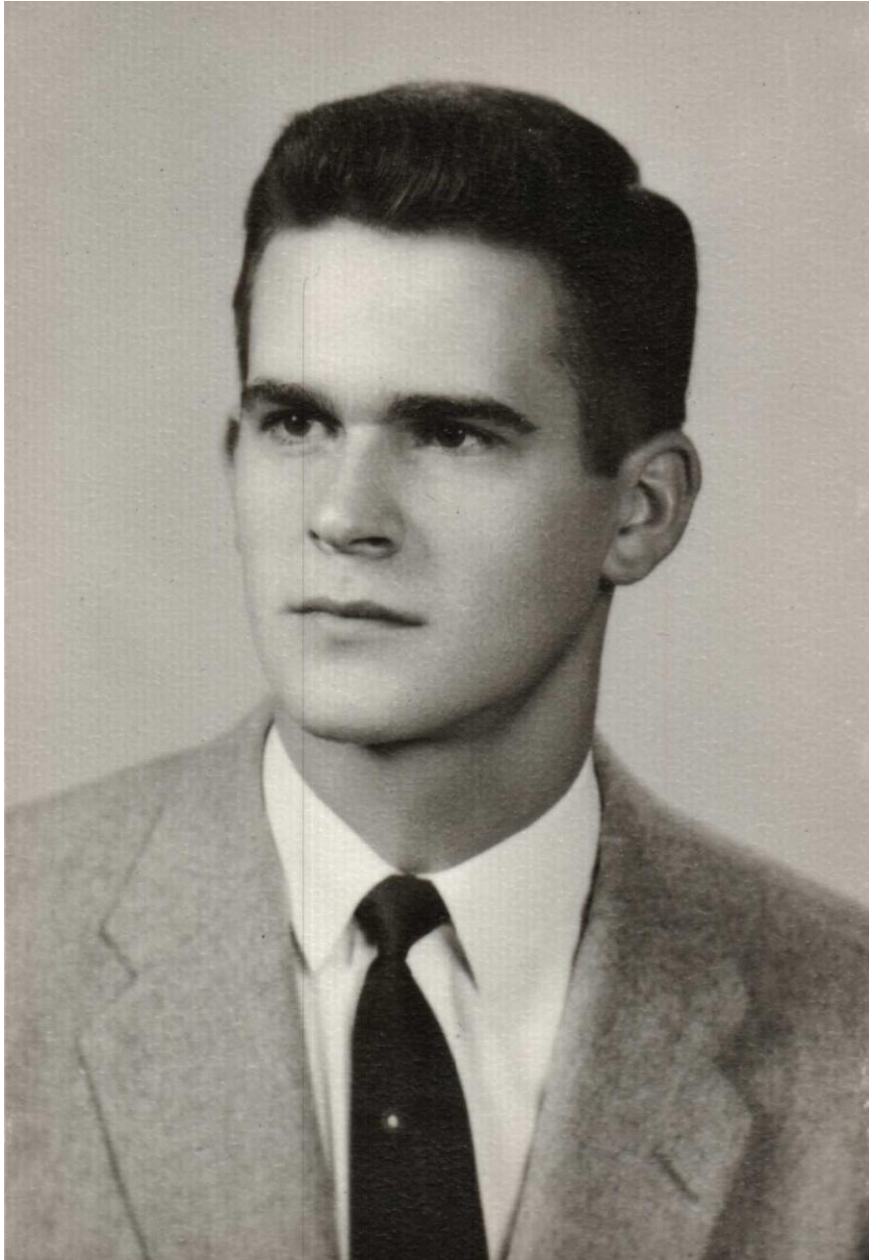


Figure 3.2. Marvin Blickenstaff, Oberlin College, yearbook photo, October 1958. Photograph taken from the private collection of Marvin Blickenstaff.

studied both piano and piano literature under the tutelage of pianist Emil Danenberg (1917–82). Blickenstaff speaks highly of the piano literature courses, stating that he learned “everything under the sun” and that he would “run into a burning house to save his Danenberg literature notes.”<sup>34</sup> Blickenstaff described him as a “major performer:”

He played recitals every year and did an awful lot of the accompanying. I heard him do all of the Beethoven violin and piano sonatas. And his recitals were spectacular. He was an outstanding exponent of the Twelve Tone School. He performed the Schoenberg Concerto with an orchestra in Darmstadt, and he would do a lot of Schoenberg and Webern on his recitals. But he also was a superb Schubert player. And so his recitals were real learning experiences.<sup>35</sup>

In his performance studies, Blickenstaff continued to excel. The Oberlin Orchestra featured him as a concerto soloist in a performance of Beethoven’s Concerto No. 5, “The Emperor,” in March of 1959.<sup>36</sup> As his sole musical endeavor beyond piano study, Blickenstaff received vocal training as a required elective and he sang in the chorus; Blickenstaff stated that his best musical training occurred during his time as a chorister under Robert Fountain, then conductor of the Oberlin College Choir.<sup>37</sup> This was his only vocal training during his entire career. Blickenstaff’s study at Oberlin expanded his knowledge and abilities as a musician,

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34. Ernst, Field Notes.

35. Knerr, 802.

36. Oberlin College, *Hi-O-Hi Yearbook, Class of 1959*, (Oberlin, OH: Oberlin College, 1959). <http://www.e-yearbook.com> (accessed December 28, 2010).

37. Ernst, Field Notes.

providing him with a time of concentrated study and numerous performing opportunities.

Janet Russell Owens, faculty member at Oberlin College, taught Blickenstaff's singular formal piano pedagogy course (ca. 1958), a degree requirement for all piano performance majors at Oberlin. Blickenstaff did not have intentions of becoming a piano teacher:

I didn't know what I would be doing, but it didn't really occur to me that I would be a piano teacher [laughing]. I often say, I'm sure that Janet Russell Owens is up in heaven just laughing and laughing because here I am getting these awards for being a piano teacher, and that was the last thing I was going to do!<sup>38</sup>

Blickenstaff, in retrospect, described the merits of her pedagogy course, although the course content did not engage him during his student years:

I didn't like her assignments; she made us look through old repertoire and do file cards, so we would get acquainted with the materials. . . . And then she had us do readings in music education, and I thought that was ridiculous—I'm still quoting some of the people that I read [laughing]. . . . She really tried to do a good course. She did what most of the rest do in a piano pedagogy course. You examine materials and you do some outside readings and you teach students; and in a way, that was a very good course. I don't know why, what about it was that I didn't like. . . . That was such a long time ago, but the Frances Clark books were just new, and she was very excited about that. We learned about Raymond Burrows. . . [and] historical pedagogy.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to the academic component, the course also included supervised teaching, for which Blickenstaff taught a young beginner; he recalled that the

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38. Blickenstaff, Interview 2 of 6.

39. Ibid. Raymond Burrows was the author of the piano method *Young America at the Piano* (1945–48) and was the teacher of Robert Pace at the Teachers College of Columbia University.

student was a “bright kid” who was the son of an Oberlin music professor and that “they had a lot of fun.”<sup>40</sup> This course constitutes Blickenstaff’s formal pedagogy study throughout the entirety of his education.

Following graduation from Oberlin in 1959, Blickenstaff desired to return to Europe and study abroad. He applied for and received a *Dankstipendium* (German Government Grant) to study piano for one academic year, in 1959 to 1960, at the Frankfurt Hochschule für Musik in Germany. Unfortunately, his studies in Germany disheartened him due to discontent with the instructors. Blickenstaff lost interest in studying with his assigned teacher upon hearing this pianist’s solo recital and disliking the musicianship; he requested a change of instructor, and the second did not maintain a regular schedule of lessons.<sup>41</sup> In a discussion of his training, Blickenstaff reflected on how his independence burgeoned during this time period:

It’s another one of those points where God said, “Well now Marvin, it’s time for you to stop being a good little boy and you have to think a little bit.” In a way, that’s what every graduate student should have to do, go through a period where you don’t trust, and you have to come back to yourself and say, “What do I really think about this?” And that happened to me that whole year. Cause I didn’t like the things that the first professor was telling me, and then I got so little help from the second teacher because the lessons were very irregular.<sup>42</sup>

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40. Ibid.

41. Ernst, Field Notes.

42. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by author, Interview 4 of 6 (Collegeville, PA, November 19, 2009).

Matured and primed, Blickenstaff returned from Germany to pursue graduate studies at Indiana University.

#### Indiana University

Blickenstaff completed his master of music degree in 1961 (see fig. 3.3), under the tutelage of pianist Béla Böszormenyi-Nagy (d. 1990) in three semesters, one academic year and one summer term. It was an intense year of study; Blickenstaff concisely stated, “I worked my butt off,”<sup>43</sup> determined to attend every lesson with his literature fully memorized. His degree recital repertoire consisted of Schubert’s Sonata in B-flat Major (Op. Posth., D. 960), Beethoven’s *Variations and Fugue on a Theme from “Prometheus”* (Op. 35), Ravel’s *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, and Bartok’s *Out of Doors*.<sup>44</sup> The faculty committee who attended his master’s recital nominated him for the coveted Performer’s Certificate, and after a special hearing by another faculty committee, he was awarded that special honor.

Upon the completion of his Master’s degree, Blickenstaff applied for and received entrance into the doctoral program at Indiana. During this same period, his primary professor Nagy accepted a teaching position in Boston. Because Blickenstaff had already been offered a full-time teaching position elsewhere, he decided to forgo the additional degree. He stated, “I never got around to doing a

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43. Ernst, Field Notes.

44. Ibid.



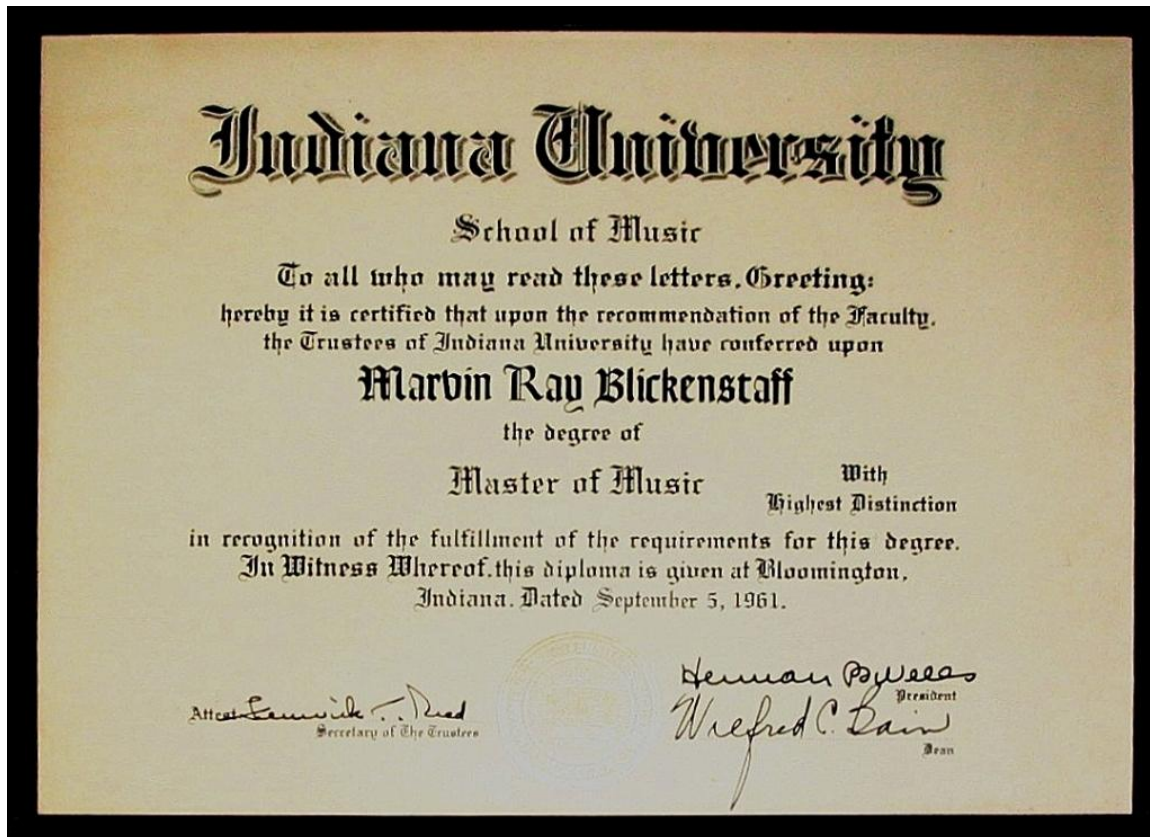


Figure 3.3. Blickenstaff's diploma, Master of Music, from Indiana University, dated 1961. Photograph taken by the author.

doctoral degree. And so I've gone through my life and had the right doors open at the right time even without a doctorate."<sup>45</sup>

### **The Inception of Blickenstaff's Career**

Blickenstaff taught at numerous schools for brief terms and lived in New York City before settling at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1969. He began his collegiate teaching career at McPherson College in Kansas, a small school affiliated with the Church of the Brethren. He taught at McPherson from 1961 to 1963, followed by a faculty appointment at Fort Hays Kansas State College (currently named Fort Hays State University), from 1963 to 1965. During his two years at Fort Hays, Blickenstaff became interested in studying in New York City, stating that "[I took a] leave of absence and went to New York, because I had never studied in New York. And I felt that that would be the finishing touch."<sup>46</sup>

From 1965 to 1969, Blickenstaff lived and worked in New York City, where he initiated his long relationship with publisher Carl Fischer Music, taught piano, and continued his piano training and performing. He remained in the city, save a semester in 1968, when he served on the piano faculty at Oberlin for a member on a sabbatical.<sup>47</sup> Blickenstaff recalled his New York piano teacher Wolfgang Rosé (d. 1977):

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45. Knerr, 803.

46. Ibid.

47. Marvin Blickenstaff, Resume, Personal Files.

By the time I got there I knew who I was going to study with—he was a private teacher in New York—but a number of Julliard kids were coming to him for extra coaching. His name was Wolfgang Rosé, and he had studied with Schnabel, and had worked some with Geiseking in Europe, and he was a nephew of Gustav Mahler. He toured a lot as an accompanist to a violinist; Mischa Elmen was an old violinist, and Wolfgang Rosé was the accompanist for him on tour for years and years. He was a wonderful musician and very sensitive guy. . .<sup>48</sup>

Rosé was an inspiring teacher, and Blickenstaff's excitement grew when he was offered new performance opportunities.

Weeks after arriving in New York City in 1965, a friend referred Blickenstaff to a concert manager who needed a pianist to play several concerts in Europe. After negotiations, Blickenstaff agreed to the recitals and provided the concert manager seed funds for the concert hall rentals. Unfortunately, the concert manager was disreputable, and “he left under the cover of darkness with all of our money,” having also stolen from other musicians promised European concerts.<sup>49</sup> The authorities from the United States and Canada were unable to neither locate the manager nor retrieve the stolen money. Blickenstaff, robbed of the funds he had saved for his New York City years, had to find work. He followed a newspaper advertisement for a piano teacher, which led to the Stecher and Horowitz School of Music on Long Island hiring him to teach piano to pre-college students.

Blickenstaff's work with Carl Fischer began at this time (ca. 1965), resulting from his need to find work. Blickenstaff contacted Merle Montgomery, a president

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48. Blickenstaff, Interview 2 of 6.

49. Ibid.

of the National Federation of Music Clubs, who worked at Carl Fischer. Work was not available at the time of their initial interview, but shortly thereafter, Montgomery offered Blickenstaff a newly vacated position as an assistant in the orchestral library rental department. Even though outside of Blickenstaff's area of expertise, this original job at Carl Fischer led Blickenstaff to many professional opportunities.

His activities at Carl Fischer mushroomed, and he soon traveled throughout the United States presenting workshops featuring the publisher's materials.

Blickenstaff clarified:

I was working for Merle [Montgomery] for a while and the job got a little bit bigger, and the people at Carl Fischer began to hear that I could play the piano and the director of promotions said, "How would [you] like to go out and do some workshops for Carl Fischer on our piano catalogue?" He said, "You could select anything [Carl Fischer piano music] you want and just do workshops." And that was a beginning of a very long career of workshops. They sent me all over the country. By that time I was preparing to play a Town Hall debut recital. So my colleague who was arranging these workshops would contact the sponsoring music stores and ask if they would like for me to play a recital. Frequently I would give a morning workshop, play an evening recital, and go on the next day to do another workshop.<sup>50</sup>

During a workshop in 1968 at the Schmitt Music Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Blickenstaff met the pianist and composer Lynn Freeman Olson and subsequently encouraged Carl Fischer Music to publish Olson's compositions.<sup>51</sup> The professional

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50. Ibid.

51. Steven Lee Betts, "Lynn Freeman Olson's Contributions to Music Education" (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 1995), 37. Samuel Holland, "Louise

relationship between Blickenstaff, Olson, and Carl Fischer would expand in future years.

At the conclusion of his New York City adventure, Blickenstaff gave a debut recital at Town Hall on April 9, 1969. Rosé coached him on the following repertoire for the debut: Brahms's *Intermezzi* (Op. 116), Chopin's *Sonata in B Minor*, Karl Kohn's *Rhapsody* and *Five Bagatelles*, Debussy's *Prelude "Feuilles mortes"* and *L'isle joyeuse*, and Ginastera's *First Sonata*.<sup>52</sup> The *New York Times* listed his recital in the day's entertainment events and posted a review the following day. The reviewer stated:

Last night at Town Hall Marvin Blickenstaff announced himself an expert with his very first note, . . . and sustained the first impression throughout a sizeable and difficult program. . . . Mr. Blickenstaff's technical equipment is so complete he doesn't have to worry about it. . . . everything is executed with the skill that comes only from hard work and natural gifts.<sup>53</sup>

This recital, increasing Blickenstaff's prominence and confidence as a performer, concluded his New York City experience. Prepared to advance his career, Blickenstaff applied for a tenure-track faculty position in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

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Wadley Bianchi's *Contributions to Piano Pedagogy*" (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 1996), 300–01.

52. RTJ, "Blickenstaff Gives Piano Recital Here," *New York Times*, April 10, 1969.

53. *Ibid.*

### **The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) appointed Blickenstaff to their faculty in 1969, and he remained on the UNC-CH piano faculty until 1978. His primary piano colleagues included Frances Whang, Barbara Rowan, and Michael Zenge. Zenge had been a student colleague of Blickenstaff at Oberlin College, and they developed a collegial relationship at UNC-CH. Cathy Albergo, a student of Blickenstaff, commented that he and Zenge “worked so well with students. I remember Marvin helping some of Michael’s students and Michael helping some of us. It was not a competitive atmosphere. It was a friendly, nurturing atmosphere in both piano studios.”<sup>54</sup> Whang, joining Zenge and Blickenstaff on the faculty in 1971, fondly recalled the mutual respect that existed between the faculty members:

The performance area, we were all junior faculty at the time, but we were very compatible in the piano area. . . . I think it’s [the collegial atmosphere] because of the faculty. We all got along! And at one time, the three males had offices across from the practice rooms and we would actually pop into practice rooms when we heard a wrong note, whoever’s student that was, and say, “Hey, you need to watch that!” It was an extraordinary working relationship.<sup>55</sup>

In addition to teaching both undergraduate and graduate students in piano, Blickenstaff taught courses in piano pedagogy, piano literature, and class piano, and he managed the summer Piano Clinic. While at UNC-CH, Blickenstaff received

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54. Cathy Albergo, interviewed by author (Music Teachers National Association Conference in Albuquerque, NM, March 30, 2010).

55. Francis Whang, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, April 15, 2010).

tenure, being promoted to Associate Professor, and acted as Chairman of the piano area from 1970 to 1974.

Blickenstaff taught a balanced studio of both graduate and undergraduate piano students in weekly lessons and studio classes. Faculty colleague Whang clarified how they utilized a rotational selection of students among the faculty:

Well, we had a lot of students, and Marvin was a great part of that. He was the one that was out doing his pedagogy bit and running into a lot of people, and brought a lot of people. . . . But, when we did auditions, we had a rotating system of picking students, and there was no chairman who took all the best. . .<sup>56</sup>

The studio classes held on Fridays at four o'clock in the afternoon, charmingly referred to as "Fridays at Four," provided more cohesion within the piano area.

Tom Lohr, undergraduate student, recalled the Friday studio class and

Blickenstaff's helpful commentary:

We used to have what we called Fridays at Four every week. . . . Those group sessions were not just, we're going to sit down and play. . . . [E]ven if it was just very little that he had to say, it was a wonderful nugget of information about something that someone was doing, or ways we could question that performance, or help them question something to find solutions to problems, or to compliment successes. . . . That was always very instructive and full of insight.<sup>57</sup>

Albergo recollected the significance of these classes:

You better be there at Fridays at Four. When everybody [laughing] else was driving home [for the weekend], we were there. . . . It was very special, we watched everybody play. Some of us were successful sometimes and not

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56. Ibid.

57. Tom Lohr, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, March 11, 2010).

others, but Marvin would nurture right along. He showed us lots of tricks of the trade.<sup>58</sup>

In addition to the classes, Blickenstaff guided students through degree recitals and competitions. Joel Harrison, an undergraduate piano major, extolled upon the value of his junior and senior recital, his winning the UNC-CH concerto competition, and participating in MTNA competitions, under Blickenstaff's tutelage.<sup>59</sup> Blickenstaff, during his years at UNC-CH, mentored piano students through the studio classes and individual lessons.

The courses Blickenstaff taught included a piano pedagogy class sequence, which consisted of lectures, teaching demonstrations, and supervised teaching. Three undergraduate students, Cathy Albergo, Peggy Lupton, and Joel Harrison described their experiences in Blickenstaff's pedagogy courses in the 1970s. Albergo explained Blickenstaff's pedagogy course and the resulting, pivotal decision she made about her future career:

I hung on every word. He was showing us *Music Tree*. He went through the *Music Tree* with us, page by page. . . . He did the standard pedagogy course, and then he would teach children in the group. We would be his assistant, and we were assigned the private students to teach. It was a fantastic pedagogy section, and experience, and that was really what turned me on. I knew that I wanted to do pedagogy. . . .<sup>60</sup>

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58. Albergo, Interview.

59. Joel Harrison, interviewed by author (Music Teachers National Association Conference in Albuquerque, NM, March 28, 2010).

60. Albergo, Interview.



Lupton recalled the “lengthy, time-intensive projects” and the memorable event in Blickenstaff’s demonstration class, when Blickenstaff would “[step] out ‘Ebenezer Sneezer’ with [the students] on a floor keyboard or staff.”<sup>61</sup> Joel Harrison further explained the content of the course:

We studied various kinds of teaching methods, middle C and of course *The Music Tree* and his ideas about [*Music*] *Pathways*. Boy, that opened my eyes. I thought you just learned to play the piano. . . . That was really fascinating to me. . . . [and] it was exposure to all the literature in a graded way.<sup>62</sup>

Albergo and Blickenstaff both recalled a field trip that the class took to the New School for Music Study (where Blickenstaff would begin working in 1999), in Princeton, New Jersey, to observe the teaching and lectures of Frances Clark and Louise Goss. Blickenstaff remembered:

So we had three car loads of students, and Michael Zenge and Sherrill Martin drove their own cars. . . . We stayed overnight in a motel and then met with Frances and Louise . . . They showed us video tapes of some of their classes and they gave us pedagogy lectures and demonstrations. They took us out to lunch at a tea room, and we had an afternoon session . . .<sup>63</sup>

During his tenure at UNC-CH, the pedagogy course recurred in Blickenstaff’s teaching load, and his simultaneous work on *Music Pathways* (see sub-section *Music Pathways*) augmented the course curriculum.

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61. Sara M. Ernst, “Survey for Students of Marvin Blickenstaff,” (Online survey conducted via SurveyMonkey™, <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Blickenstaff2>, 2010–2011).

62. Harrison, Interview.

63. Blickenstaff, Interview 4 of 6.

Blickenstaff performed frequently at the University during his ten years as a faculty member. His recital schedule included solo recitals and numerous collaborative recitals with faculty instrumentalists, such that he performed more than one recital per year. His solo repertoire included a wide variety of composers and styles, including many concert works such as Chopin's Sonata in B Minor, and performing large collections such as Scriabin's 24 Preludes. Blickenstaff's solo recital programs in the mid-1970s included:

October 15, 1972

Copland, *Passacaglia*  
 Beethoven, *Bagatelles*, Op. 33  
 Debussy, "Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest"  
 Chopin, Sonata in B Minor, Op. 58

March 3, 1974

Mozart, Adagio in B Minor, K. 540  
 Mozart, Minuetto in D Major, K. 355  
 Mozart, Gigue in G Major, K. 574  
 Brahms, Sonata in F Minor, Op. 5  
 Ravel, *Miroirs*  
 Ginastera, Sonata para Piano

February 25, 1975

Schubert, Impromptu in G-flat Major, Op. 90, No. 3, and Impromptu  
 in A-flat Major, Op. 90, No. 4  
 Beethoven, Sonata in D Major, Op. 10, No. 3  
 Bartok, *Out of Doors*  
 Scriabin, 24 Preludes, Op. 11

April 24, 1977

Haydn, Sonata in C Major, Hob. XVI:50  
 Arthur Shepherd, Second Sonata

Liszt, *Après un lecture de Dante*  
 Barber, Sonata for Piano, Op. 26<sup>64</sup>

Blickenstaff's collaborative performances included several performances with violist and fellow faculty member, Ann Woodward, and other members of the instrumental faculty:

February 23, 1971  
 Ann Woodward, viola; Marvin Blickenstaff, piano; Donald Oehler, clarinet  
 J.S. Bach, Sonata in G Major, BWV 1027  
 Brahms, Sonata in E-flat Major, Op. 120, No. 2  
 Mozart, Trio in E-flat Major, K. 498  
 Hindemith, Sonata, Op. 11, No. 4<sup>65</sup>

The faculty and student body admired Blickenstaff's skill as a performer. Faculty member Whang stated, "I think he was an innovative programmer. I remember all the Rachmaninoff 23 Preludes. . . . I admired his playing greatly; he had a wonderful flair. He always was extremely well-prepared."<sup>66</sup> Cathy Albergo, who began studies at UNC-CH in the same year as Blickenstaff's appointment, recalled:

That first semester, I can remember being there and Marvin came on stage to play to his very first concert. This was early in the semester, and he was the new guy on campus, and if you look at Marvin, he's tall and dark and very handsome. . . . And I remember he walked on stage, and just in the

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64. University of North Carolina Libraries, Collection Number 40235, "Department of Music of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Records, 1950–1983," <http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/uars/ead/40235.html> (accessed December 28, 2010).

65. Ibid.

66. Whang, Interview.

audience, you heard this, ahh [she makes a gasping noise]. . . . Everybody was in awe of him.<sup>67</sup>

Blickenstaff's active performance schedule contributed to the success of his career at UNC-CH.

The UNC-CH Piano Clinic boosted his reputation and that of the piano department. As a yearly summer event, the Piano Clinic drew local teachers to the university to interact with the faculty in workshops and masterclasses. In later years, the piano faculty incorporated a daylong event for high school students. The Piano Day acted as an important recruitment tool; Lohr, who enrolled as an undergraduate student, mentioned Piano Day when reflecting on his studies at UNC-CH. Lohr mentioned that he first met Blickenstaff during Piano Day:

I went to one of those [UNC-CH Piano Day] my junior or senior year. . . . I had my sample lesson with [Blickenstaff] that day too, and really found that to be very invigorating. It was just 30 minutes, a short time, but we covered a whole lot in that amount of time. . . . His energy was already very much apparent to me in that very first meeting, and his interest. He seemed to take immediate interest in people too, so I found that worked very positively for me. . . .<sup>68</sup>

The entire piano faculty executed the events, but Blickenstaff devised and organized them. During his years at UNC-CH, Blickenstaff became a prominent teacher throughout the state through this outreach as a presenter and a teacher.

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67. Albergo, Interview.

68. Lohr, Interview.

*Music Pathways*

During Blickenstaff's years at UNC-CH, Blickenstaff and Lynn Freeman Olson (1938–87) began to collaborate on a larger project for Carl Fischer in 1969. This project grew into the 37-volume piano method *Music Pathways*, written by Blickenstaff, Olson, and Louise Bianchi (1914–98). Olson met Bianchi, a faculty member at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. Impressed with Bianchi's teaching style and curriculum for young students, Olson invited her to collaborate on the publishing project with him and Blickenstaff.<sup>69</sup> Sam Holland summarized the strengths of each author in his dissertation on Louise Bianchi:

Blickenstaff was a gifted pianist and teacher at the advanced level. He knew the literature and the process of advanced musical and technical development. . . . Olson was a brilliant and insightful composer of music for children. He knew how to make average students feel excited and successful through his music and his personality. . . . To effectively create a realistic curriculum for developing comprehensive musicianship, Blickenstaff and Olson needed Bianchi's judgment. They needed her insight gathered over decades of experience with hundreds of piano students. Her knowledge of sequencing and pacing of materials would be invaluable.<sup>70</sup>

Blickenstaff spoke of this collaboration favorably: "I feel that *Music Pathways* was my pedagogy doctorate, because I learned so much from Lynn and Louise. It was just wonderful."<sup>71</sup> Blickenstaff elucidated what he learned:

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69. Betts, 37–38.; Holland, 64. For a detailed account of the team's formation and the creation of the method, see Holland's dissertation, Chapter 6, pages 300–10.

70. Holland, 304.

71. Knerr, 804.

There was a lot of talk about pacing and timing, and Louise frequently would say, “No we can’t do that piece right now because they’ve not had enough experience and preparation for that.” And it was during those years that I really had hammered in my head about preparation-presentation-reinforcement. It’s a [Frances] Clark concept that we all give lip service to, but they really believed in that and we really tried to work that in as much as possible. . . . I think one of the things I learned, was that to be an effective teacher, you really have to work and you have to plan.<sup>72</sup>

The authors began writing the method in 1969, pilot-tested the original draft, and published the first edition in 1974.

The three authors widely promoted *Music Pathways* during the mid-1970s and Blickenstaff used it at UNC-CH. As Holland indicated:

The three co-authors gave at least 70 one-day workshops coast-to-coast between March and October 1975. The first workshop was given by all three authors at the Carl Fischer store in Chicago. . . . By the middle of September, Olson presented thirty workshops throughout the West and Texas, Blickenstaff presented seventeen workshops in the Midwest and East, and Bianchi presented eight workshops in the Southeast.<sup>73</sup>

As part of these promotions, a guidebook for teachers *Piano Lessons that Last* was printed, in which the philosophy behind the method was discussed, and Blickenstaff was presented as a key contributor and teacher of children. The college students at UNC-CH were aware of Blickenstaff’s landmark work with *Music Pathways*. Cathy Albergo remembered that “They were also writing *Music Pathways* at that time, and so we got to see and meet Louise Bianchi and Lynn

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72. Blickenstaff, Interview 4 of 6.

73. Holland, 342.

Freeman Olson and work with them, and see how a piano method is being written.”<sup>74</sup> Joel Harrison remarked:

So we benefited from that [*Music Pathways*], just hearing them [Blickenstaff, Olson, and Bianchi] talk about the concepts behind *Music Pathways*. It really had a profound effect on me. At some points, he would—in pedagogy class—bring some of the stuff that was happening in their own work and use it with us. I knew it at the time; it was really cool.<sup>75</sup>

Upon the first publication of the method, Blickenstaff discontinued his use of *The Music Tree* by Frances Clark and Louise Goss, and his pedagogy classes at UNC-CH adopted *Music Pathways* as the demonstration class text.

After the method found an initial audience of music teachers in the United States, the authors revised *Music Pathways* in 1983 and gave another round of workshops. To the disappointment of the authors, Carl Fischer did not continue to promote the method; sales remained low despite the profuse marketing through workshops. As quoted in Holland’s dissertation, Warren MacKenzie at Carl Fischer wrote to the authors:

In short, because of the inherently [sic] difficult nature of the course in relation to the current piano teaching market, I think there would be diminishing returns from more promotion money spent. Looked at in another way, the Pathways course resembles a very difficult piece of good music which find an enthusiastic but small market. . . . In my opinion, what we have is the musical equivalent of a Cadillac when the market is buying Fords, many of them Model T’s.<sup>76</sup>

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74. Albergo, Interview.

75. Harrison, Interview.

76. Warren MacKenzie, New York City, to Marvin Blickenstaff, Louise Bianchi, and Lynn Freeman Olson, 14 February 1980, quoted in Holland, 346.

Unfortunately the method continued to decline in sales in the years following, and the promotions ceased by 1987, the year of Bianchi's retirement and Olson's sudden death.<sup>77</sup>

#### Resignation from UNC-CH

To the surprise of many, Blickenstaff ended his career at UNC-CH in 1978, moving to Goshen College in Indiana. Personal rather than professional aims strongly influenced Blickenstaff's decision to move. From 1977 to 1978, Blickenstaff took a sabbatical and taught at Oberlin, living in Ohio with his wife Sara Faye during that year. They decided that living further north suited their family needs and Blickenstaff began looking for a new position.<sup>78</sup> Blickenstaff had recently traveled to Goshen College as a clinician for their annual summer workshop in 1976 and had numerous personal connections at the school.<sup>79</sup> John O'Brien had resigned from his position at Goshen, and Blickenstaff accepted a part-time faculty position.

Many of Blickenstaff's students from his years at UNC-CH have become prominent professionals in piano and piano pedagogy. Jane Magrath at the University of Oklahoma and Cathy Albergo at Florida Gulf Coast University have

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77. Betts, 90–92.

78. Ernst, Field Notes.

79. Goshen College Music Department, "A History of the Goshen College Piano Workshop and Academy," <http://www.goshen.edu/music/piano-workshop/piano-workshop-history/> (accessed July 19, 2012).



become distinguished piano pedagogues with university positions and prominent publications. Magrath received a Master of Music and Albergo received a Bachelor's of Music with Blickenstaff as their primary piano professor. Joel Harrison is president/CEO of the American Pianists Association and received a Bachelor's of Music under the guidance of Blickenstaff. Other students in Blickenstaff's studio at UNC-CH who later become music faculty include Carol Lei Breckenridge, LeAnn House, Tom Lohr, and Reginald Rogers.

### **Goshen College**

From 1978 to 1999, Blickenstaff served as a member of the faculty at Goshen College, a small liberal arts college in Indiana founded by the Mennonite Church. During his professorship, he accepted a part-time faculty appointment, spending Monday through Thursday on campus. This schedule accommodated Blickenstaff's ever increasing travel schedule for engagements as a presenter and clinician. Kathryn Sherer was the only additional faculty member working directly with piano majors, and Beverly Lapp was Sherer's replacement upon her retirement in 1995. His two decades dedicated to the student body at Goshen included teaching piano pedagogy, piano literature, music history, and piano lessons to college students and young children in the preparatory program. In addition, he established an independent teaching schedule which included numerous pre-college students, some of whom would travel long distances to

receive lessons with him. He continued to perform frequently and administered the Goshen College Piano Workshop (a summer event for teachers and students).

Blickenstaff's teaching load included several academic courses, each part of the four-year degree plan for piano majors. Goshen is a liberal arts college where all students receive a Bachelor of Arts degree; nonetheless, the full sequence of piano pedagogy and literature courses are comprehensive, similar in scope to the focused curriculum within a Bachelor of Music degree. At Goshen, students who elected piano as their primary instrument took a four-semester sequence beginning in their sophomore year: three courses in piano pedagogy (with the topics of elementary, private, and group teaching) and a course in advanced piano literature. Beyond the course for piano majors, Blickenstaff occasionally instructed students enrolled in music history and group piano for music majors (those lacking a piano background).

In typical years, Blickenstaff taught the first semester of pedagogy and the literature course, whereas Sherer taught the second semester of pedagogy.<sup>80</sup> Blickenstaff, Sherer, and Lapp taught the pedagogy course on class teaching during different years. The piano pedagogy courses coordinated with the Piano Preparatory Program, which provided music lessons taught by faculty and pedagogy students to community children. Blickenstaff taught young pianists in groups as a demonstration class for his pedagogy students (see fig. 3.4).

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80. Kathryn Sherer and Lon Sherer, interviewed by author (Goshen, IN, January 14, 2010).



Figure 3.4. Blickenstaff and two piano students from his beginning group class at Goshen College (ca. 1988). Photograph from the personal collection of Marvin Blickenstaff.

Blickenstaff stated, “At Goshen College, we had wonderful success with beginning groups, and that was what my pedagogy students saw as the way to begin students. Our whole curriculum at Goshen was based on this model [of the Columbia Teachers College and Frances Clark’s books].”<sup>81</sup> Blickenstaff’s pedagogy students would then teach individual lessons to the same children enrolled in his group class. Karen Zorn, a piano major at Goshen in the early 1980s, described this process:

He taught a class of beginners; we observed that class. . . . Before we went into the class, he would tell us what he was going to do, and then after the class, we would meet, and he would talk about what went well and what surprised him. We would be assigned one of those kids in his group lesson to be our private student. Back in that day. . . , we did a cassette recording of every lesson, and he would give you feedback, typed up. . . . He had listened to every week [of] the lesson. . .<sup>82</sup>

Sherer and John O’Brien founded this program in the 1960s; O’Brien was a student of Frances Clark at the New School for Music Study.<sup>83</sup> Upon the arrival of Blickenstaff, Sherer and Blickenstaff continued the program, although the curriculum of the Preparatory Program was changed from *The Music Tree* to *Music Pathways*. The final course of the sequence was a piano literature course titled Survey of Upper Level Materials. During this semester, Blickenstaff’s students

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81. Hallquist, 11.

82. Karen Zorn, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, March 16, 2010).

83. Sherer and Sherer, Interview.

studied repertoire and composers from the Baroque through Modern eras, historical context, performance practices, and pedagogical considerations.

Every year, Blickenstaff mentored college students in private piano lessons (see fig. 3.5) and students from the surrounding community. At Goshen, his studio consisted of many types of students, including piano-focused majors, music majors who learned piano as a secondary instrument, and occasionally, majors from other academic areas who enrolled in lessons as an elective. His roster of college students included between fifteen to twenty students each semester. His independent students, those not enrolled at Goshen College, ranged from beginners who continued with him beyond the Preparatory Program, junior high and high school students, and often, piano teachers from the local community interested in further training. In a video interview with Jane Magrath in the early 1980s, Blickenstaff compared his work with piano students at Goshen and UNC-CH:

I've had an unusual thing happen in my whole teaching experience and that is that virtually every college position that I've ever had has had some combination of teaching piano pedagogy along with responsibilities in teaching college majors. It's actually turned out to be one the greatest blessings of my life because I have enjoyed working on the different levels. My schedule at Goshen is a lot similar to what we did at the University of North Carolina. I teach some lecture courses in piano pedagogy, do some demonstration classes with youngsters, and have a few private students that represent different age levels, and then I have the major responsibilities at Goshen now for the performance majors. We're an undergraduate school, so one of the differences I have noticed in the present situation is that I no longer am teaching applied music on a graduate level, but I would say that probably more than in any other time in my life, I find myself hitting now more of a spectrum of all levels of piano

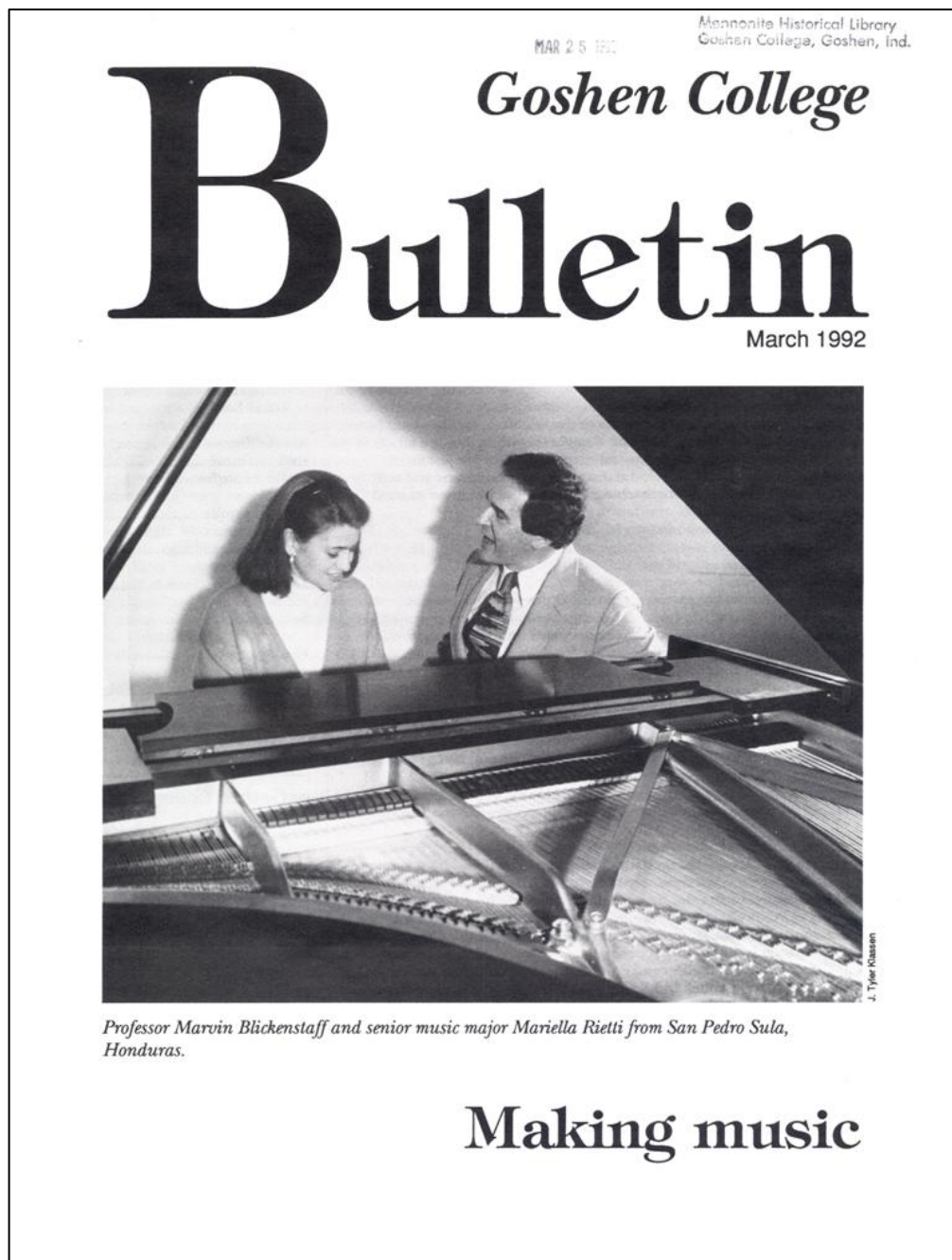


Figure 3.5. A cover page (March 1992) from the *Goshen College Bulletin*, featuring Blickenstaff at the piano with a piano major, Mariella Rietti. Used by permission of Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana.

study now than ever have at any other time in my life . . . because I do have some older students coming back who are established teachers in the area . . .<sup>84</sup>

Despite his position as a part-time faculty member, Blickenstaff's Monday to Thursday schedule was substantial and demanding, filled with an assortment of lessons and courses.

Blickenstaff's reputation continued to grow during his time at Goshen College, both nationally and internationally with articles in *Keyboard Companion*, presentations for teachers around the country, and through a varied performance schedule. During his first year alone at Goshen (1978–79), Blickenstaff was professionally engaged with the following:

Presentations at state conferences:

Wisconsin Music Teachers Association  
 Indiana Music Teachers Association Conference  
 workshop and masterclass at the California Music Teachers Association in San Francisco

Presentations for local teachers:

Kalamazoo, Michigan  
 South Bend, Indiana  
 Roanoke, Virginia  
 Shenandoah Conservatory in Winchester, Virginia  
 Seattle, Washington

Presentation at the National Association for Music Education National Convention in Atlantic City

Committee service for curriculum planning for Florida Music Teachers Association in Jacksonville<sup>85</sup>

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84. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by Jane Magrath, VHS (The University of Oklahoma, ca. 1983). Jane Magrath is a former student of Blickenstaff at UNC-CH and conducted this interview near the beginning of her career at the University of Oklahoma in Norman.

Blickenstaff traveled frequently, with the momentum of the recently published *Music Pathways* and with his engagements to present workshops. In his second year, Goshen College arranged for Blickenstaff to tour four South American countries, each connected to Goshen through study abroad, student-service programs. In May of 1980, Blickenstaff performed recitals and taught in Belize, Costa Rica, Haiti, and Honduras.<sup>86</sup> Throughout his time at Goshen, Blickenstaff maintained a fast pace, with frequent off-campus engagements all around the country.

Blickenstaff scheduled an astounding number of professional activities throughout his Goshen years, adding more prominent national engagements and international travel to his agenda. In 1997, Blickenstaff submitted the following activities as part of his year-end faculty report to Goshen College. During this academic year, Blickenstaff's professional development external to Goshen College included:

Featured lecturer at 6 state conventions:  
Oregon Music Teachers Association  
Tennessee Music Teachers Association  
Indiana Music Teachers Association  
South Dakota Music Teachers Association  
Alabama Music Teachers Association  
Iowa Music Teachers Association

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85. Goshen College, Goshen College Weekly Newsletter, Vol. 23, No. 30, through Vol. 24, No. 37, Good Library Archives, Goshen, IN.

86. "Music Prof to Perform in SST Nations," *Goshen College Bulletin*, May 1980, 14.



Featured masterclass artist:

MTNA Conference in Dallas  
 Indiana Music Teachers Convention  
 Indiana University Summer Piano Academy

International engagements:

Auckland, Tauranga, and Hamilton, New Zealand  
 Calgary Arts Summer School Association, Canada  
 International Workshops in Stavanger, Norway

All-day workshops:

Madison area piano teachers in Wisconsin  
 Green Bay area piano teachers in Wisconsin  
 Weber State University in Ogden, Utah

Two-day workshops:

Southwest Suburban Piano Teachers in Chicago, Illinois  
 Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee, Oklahoma<sup>87</sup>

In comparison to the activities during his first year at Goshen, Blickenstaff had reached a new prominence nearly twenty years later, with numerous top billings as a featured conference presenter and with several national/international engagements.

Blickenstaff performed frequently as a soloist and collaborator on the Goshen College Faculty Recital Series.<sup>88</sup> His solo performances included full faculty recitals and performances as part of the departmental recitals held on weekday mornings. His recital programs (see fig. 3.6 for sample programs) contain a large and varied list of repertoire, including Sonata by Griffes (performed by Blickenstaff

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87. Marvin Blickenstaff, 1994–2000, Personal Correspondence during Goshen College Years.

88. Goshen College Department of Music, 1978–1999, Recital Programs, Good Library Archives, Goshen, IN.

FACULTY RECITAL	Umble Center
MARVIN BLICKENSTAFF, piano	June 14, 1982 Monday, 8:00 p.m.
PROGRAM	
Phantasie, Op. 28 Con moto agitato - Andante Allegro con moto Presto	Mendelssohn
Sonata in F Minor, Op. 57 Allegro assai Andante con moto Allegro ma non troppo	Beethoven
Intermission	
Miroirs Noctuelles Oiseaux tristes Une Barque sur l'océan Alborada del gracioso La Vallée des cloches	Ravel
Preludes, Op. 23 F-sharp Minor D Major C Minor E-flat Major B-flat Major	Rachmaninoff
GOSHEN COLLEGE MUSIC DEPARTMENT	
Coming Events:	
8:00 p.m. Tuesday - Sr. Marjorie Delaplane, harpsichord	
8:00 p.m. Wednesday - Nelita True, piano	

Figure 3.6. Sample Programs from Goshen College, continued on page 78. Used by permission of Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana.

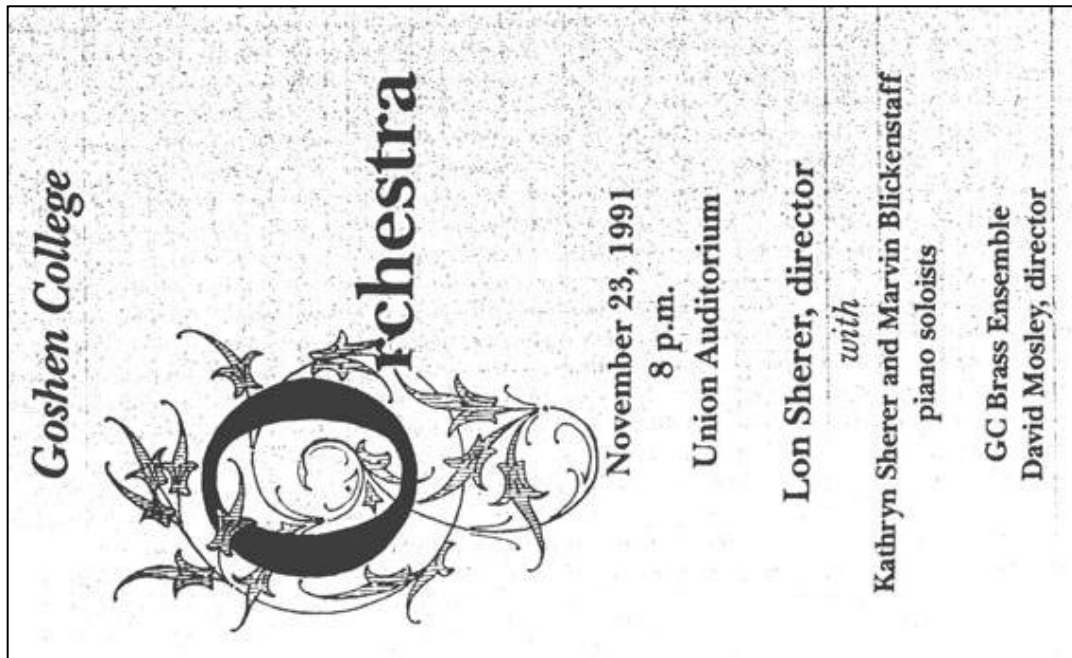
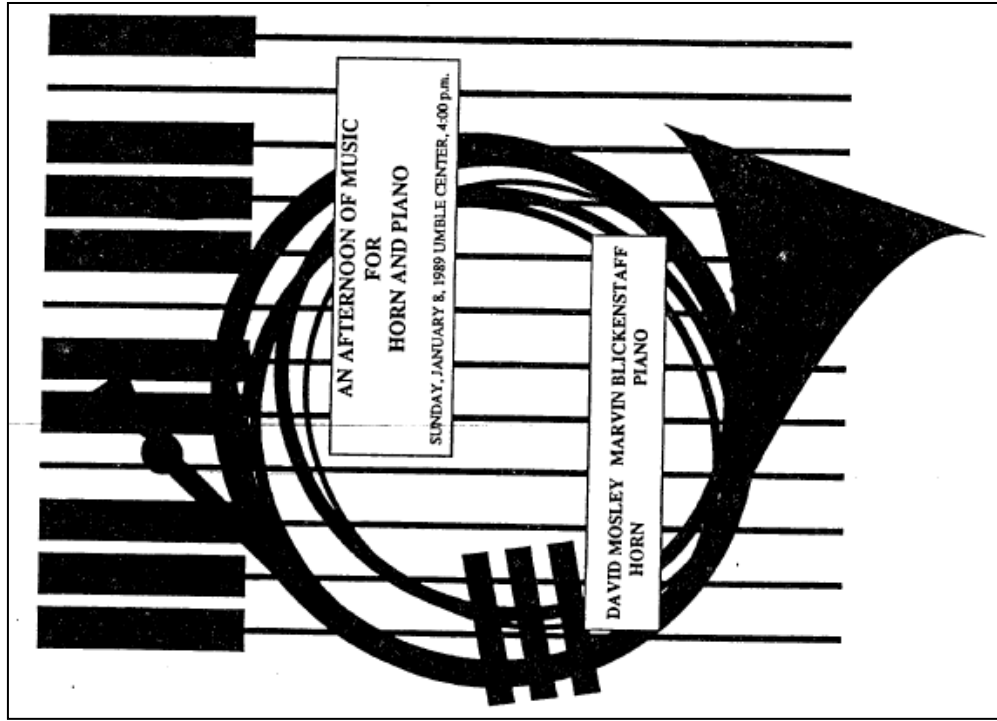


Figure 3.6. Sample Programs from Goshen College. Used by permission of Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana.

in 1980); *Miroirs* by Ravel (1982); *Fantasy in C Minor* by Mozart (1989); *Improvisations* by Bartok (1990); 24 Preludes by Chopin (1991); and Sonata in F Minor, Op. 57, by Beethoven (1997). He performed several concerti with the Goshen College Orchestra, including Beethoven's Third Concerto (1979), Mozart's Concerto in E-flat Major for two pianos with faculty member Kathryn Sherer (1991), and Beethoven's Fifth Concerto (1997). The collaborative recitals with other faculty members included, but are not limited to David Mosley, horn (1989), Timothy Stalter, tenor (1991); Martin and Kathy Blocki, clarinet and flute (1997); and Jennifer Parker, flute (1999). Blickenstaff regularly performed on Goshen's campus, despite his full teaching schedule and his numerous off-campus engagements.

To support his frequent performances, class load, teaching schedule, and other engagements, Blickenstaff established a regular routine of arriving early and working late at Goshen College. Arlene Steffen, a piano student of Blickenstaff in the early 1980s, recalled how "The walls were not sound-proofed, and he was practicing, and you could sit in the hallway and just listen to him practice if you wanted, and see that he was doing exactly what he was having us do for ourselves. So of course that was tremendously motivating."<sup>89</sup> Blickenstaff, aware of the importance of being a good model, wanted his students to know how frequently he practiced. He stated:

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89. Arlene Steffen, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, January 18, 2010).

At Goshen I would make a very concerted effort to do all of my practicing at school, so that the students would hear me practicing. And I arrived early and left late. . . . The students knew that I worked. At Goshen and North Carolina, I played a recital every year, and that was part of that whole thing, that the students hear you working and hear you performing. I think that a teacher is a model for a student in sort of every [way]. . . . I hope I was a good model for my students; I think that's what you're there for.<sup>90</sup>

Colleagues Kathryn and Lon Sherer recalled how Blickenstaff's car was always there first thing in the morning, such that he had his own parking spot;<sup>91</sup> Steffen echoed this sentiment. She stated, "My dorm room window looked out on the parking lot behind the music building, and every morning when I would get up and look out the window, his car was there. He was the first, often the only one there until at least eight o'clock, and he was the last one leaving the evening."<sup>92</sup> Kathryn Sherer felt that Blickenstaff's "energy and continuous personal development" encouraged professional development among the faculty.<sup>93</sup> Blickenstaff's robust work ethic is at the core of his personal character and his career as a performer, pedagogue, and national figure.

### Goshen College Piano Workshop

The Goshen College Piano Workshop, a summer program for piano teachers and students, continued under Blickenstaff's guidance. Led by John O'Brien and

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90. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by author, Interview 6 of 6 (Music Teachers National Association Conference in Albuquerque, NM, March 27, 2010).

91. Sherer and Sherer, Interview.

92. Steffen, Interview.

93. Sherer and Sherer, Interview.

Kathryn Sherer, the Workshop began during the 1960s and originally included fifteen to twenty local teachers.<sup>94</sup> By the 1970s, the program included guest lecturers brought to Goshen for the Workshop. The first visiting pedagogues, (1973–78) included Frances Clark, Louise Goss, Elvina Truman Pearce, and Blickenstaff (1976).<sup>95</sup> Sherer professed that because both teachers and their students attended the workshops, often alongside one another, the workshops were unique.<sup>96</sup> During Blickenstaff's tenure, Sherer focused on the student program and Blickenstaff generated the teacher program, although they collaboratively formed all ideas and decisions. The student participants, generally aged thirteen or older, played late-intermediate and early-advanced piano literature. Sherer enjoyed how she and Blickenstaff “integrated ideas” for this workshop and combined both the students and teachers together; the workshop occurred during mid-June and lasted four days. The Goshen College Piano Workshop continued every summer throughout Blickenstaff's tenure and following his resignation.

Under Blickenstaff's oversight in the 1980s and 1990s, the Goshen College Piano Workshop grew in attendance and presented the work of many renowned pedagogues, musicians, and performers. Sherer recalled that an average year

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94. Ibid.

95. Goshen College Music Department, “A History.”

96. Sherer and Sherer, Interview.

would have 45 to 60 teachers in attendance.<sup>97</sup> A summary budget statement revealed that the 1998 Workshop had grown to 73 teachers and 30 students attending,<sup>98</sup> and in 1999, more than 85 teachers and 40 students attended.<sup>99</sup> The four-day Workshop included a schedule of presentations, concerts, small-group discussions, and masterclasses; for the students, the schedule contained additional small-group lessons (called mini-masterclasses) and practice hours. Sherer maintained that Blickenstaff's national stature and reputation allowed Goshen to invite high-caliber piano professionals.<sup>100</sup> Prominent pianists, pedagogues, and educators invited to the Workshop included Nelita True (1982, 1992), Maurice Hinson (1985), Seymour Bernstein (1988), Fernando Laires (1990), Malcolm Bilson (1991), Marilyn Neeley (1994, 1998), Jane Magrath (1996), Robert Duke (1999), and Nancy and Randall Faber (2000).<sup>101</sup> Beginning in 1998 with the

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97. Ibid.

98. Marvin Blickenstaff, 1994–2000, Class and Lecture Files from Goshen College.

99. "Campus News" *Goshen College Bulletin*, September 1999, 30.

100. Sherer and Sherer, Interview.

101. Ibid. Nelita True and Fernando Laires are long-time faculty members at Eastman University. True is viewed as one of the top performer pedagogues of the current time. Maurice Hinson is the author of numerous books on piano repertoire that form the standard resource library for professional pianists. Seymour Bernstein is a pianist, teacher, and composer who wrote creative music for young pianists. Malcolm Bilson is a leading scholar and performer on the fortepiano, a historical keyboard instrument. Marilyn Neeley was a concert pianist who performed internationally and taught at Catholic University of America.

renowned educational composer Robert Vandall, Blickenstaff commissioned a duet that was premiered at the Workshop and published. Blickenstaff recalled:

People [clinicians] were eager to come. . . . We really had quite a roster. Our teachers, oh they were devoted! Still, when I go to the Midwest, and I do a workshop, people come up and say, “Oh, we were at the Goshen Workshop.” They came from all over. We had a huge contingent from Michigan and Illinois.<sup>102</sup>

Teachers traveled from Indiana, Michigan, and Illinois to attend the workshops, often bringing their students along with them. Susan See, an independent teacher in Iowa, frequently traveled to the workshops and said:

I think it’s this hidden treasure—I just think it’s one of the best around. I like that it’s for teachers and students. . . . And you get your money’s worth. . . . We work hard, and at the end of the time, you’re exhausted because in the evening, after dinner, you’re not done. You go back for concerts.<sup>103</sup>

In 2000, the year following his resignation, Blickenstaff planned the Workshop in collaboration with Beverly Lapp (piano faculty at Goshen following Sherer’s retirement),<sup>104</sup> and he also returned as a featured clinician in 2003.

### *Keyboard Companion*

In 1990, the editorial team for *Keyboard Companion* (currently named *Clavier Companion*) formed under the guidance of then Editor-in-Chief, Richard Chronister (see fig. 3.7). According to Elvina Truman Pearce, Editor-in-Chief from

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102. Blickenstaff, Interview 3 of 6.

103. Susan See, interviewed by author (Telephone interview, January 8, 2010).

104. Beverly Lapp, interviewed by author (Goshen, IN, January 15, 2010).



2000 to 2006, the purpose of *Keyboard Companion* during its first decade was to “provide a practical journal for piano teachers which was devoted primarily to the teaching of early level students.”<sup>105</sup> Blickenstaff served as an Associate Editor for the section of the magazine regarding rhythm. His responsibilities included selecting several authors for each issue, creating a theme, writing an introductory statement, and revising the drafts in consultation with the Editor-in-Chief. Furthermore, other Associate Editors solicited Blickenstaff as an author for other sections, such as his response to “How do you involve parents in their children’s piano study?” and “How do you find the musical messages in a piece of music?”<sup>106</sup> Occasionally, rather than invite additional authors, Blickenstaff would address the rhythm topic with his sole article, such as with “When does rhythmic training become training for interpretation?”<sup>107</sup> In a unique change of format, Blickenstaff

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105. Elvina Truman Pearce, interviewed by author (Email Interview, December 31, 2009). The pedagogical focus of the magazine has shifted, broadening the purview to include the training of all levels and ages of piano students.

106. Marvin Blickenstaff, “How Do You Find the Musical Messages in a Piece of Music? Part II,” *Keyboard Companion* 3, no. 4 (1992). Marvin Blickenstaff, “How Do You Involve Parents in Their Children’s Piano Study?,” *Keyboard Companion* 4, no. 1 (1993). Other responses include: Marvin Blickenstaff, “For What Purposes Do You Play for Your Students?,” *Keyboard Companion* 8, no. 3 (1997). Marvin Blickenstaff, “Describe Your Own Home Practice. Why Do You Do It?,” *Keyboard Companion* 3, no. 1 (1992).

107. Marvin Blickenstaff, “When Does Rhythmic Training Become Training for Interpretation?,” *Keyboard Companion* 4, no. 2 (1993).



Figure 3.7. First editorial staff of *Keyboard Companion*. From bottom left to top right, Richard Chronister, Brenda Dillon, husband Frank of Cathy Albergo, Martha Appleby Marguerite Miller, Marjore Chronister, Madeleine Crouch, Steve Roberson, Cathy Albergo, Marvin Blickenstaff, Elvina Truman Pearce, and Joyce Cameron. Photograph from the personal collection of Marvin Blickenstaff.

polled students from around the country for the article, “How Do You Practice Rhythm? A Student Survey.”<sup>108</sup> Blickenstaff continued as Associate Editor of the rhythm section until 1997 (Issue 8, Number 1), switching to Associate Editor of the repertoire section (see Appendix B for a complete listing of topics). In this final issue as editor for rhythmic topics, Blickenstaff wrote:

Since the inception of KEYBOARD COMPANION, it has been my pleasure to serve as Associate Editor for the department on rhythm. Scores of experienced teachers have written thoughtful responses to the questions posed. The wealth of information that has been contributed and accumulated over these seven years is impressive, perhaps even staggering. To each of those willing contributors, I extend my heartfelt gratitude. In the next issue of Keyboard Companion, my role as Associate Editor shifts to the department devoted to repertoire, a topic that holds great interest for me as a teacher of students at all levels and as a teacher of piano pedagogy. The repertoire we teach guides the musical development of our students, has a major role in developing the student’s musical taste, and is the true motivational element in our studios. What could be more important?<sup>109</sup>

Blickenstaff continued to contribute to *Keyboard Companion* for seven more years, as editor of the repertoire section until 2004 (for more information on his contributions to *Keyboard Companion*, see the subsection under the Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy).

#### Professional Engagements with Frederick Harris Music

In 1996, Blickenstaff co-authored the extensive *Handbook for Teachers* with pedagogues Cathy Albergo and Reid Alexander for the Canadian publisher

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108. Marvin Blickenstaff, “How Do You Practice Rhythm? A Student Survey,” *Keyboard Companion* 4, no. 4 (1993).

109. Marvin Blickenstaff, “How Do You Teach Two-against-Three?,” *Keyboard Companion* 8, no. 1 (1997): 32.

Frederick Harris Music. This 230-page *Handbook* is a companion guide to the 2nd edition of the *Celebration Series*. The *Celebration Series* contains eleven levels of graded repertoire and etudes for the developing pianist, and the levels are geared for use in the Royal Conservatory of Music Examinations and Certificate Programs. Alexander and Albergo had already worked with Frederick Harris on other projects, and Trish Sauerbrei, Publishing Manager, approached them to develop the *Handbook*. Frederick Harris keenly knew of Blickenstaff's stature and reputation as a pedagogue and asked him to join the project. The goal of the project was to educate primarily Americans, but also Canadians. As Albergo's explained:

Americans didn't understand how this graded series worked; they just didn't understand the whole thing, and that it was revised over seven years, and that it was used for the examination system in Canada. So Americans kept wanting more structure and more structure and more structure. At the same time, the Canadians were wanting teaching [guidance] and pedagogy.<sup>110</sup>

Blickenstaff echoed:

They put the three of us together and said, we would like for you folks to write a teacher's guide to help American teachers understand the *Celebration Series*. . . . It was basically an attempt to get the American teachers on board. And, so we thought that was kind of interesting because we all loved the books. It was great literature. . . . I think this is the finest set of repertoire that's available to any teacher today.<sup>111</sup>

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110. Albergo, Interview.

111. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by author, Interview 5 of 6 (Collegeville, PA, November 20, 2009).

The trio of pedagogues reassembled to create two additional *Handbooks* for the two subsequent editions, *Celebration Series: The Piano Odyssey* (2001) and *Celebration Series: Perspectives* (2008).

When beginning the *Handbook* in 1995, the three authors had a daunting task ahead of them: to write a teacher's guide to cover over 450 pieces for intermediate pianists, and to recreate it for a second and third edition. Albergo recalled the change in their creative process due to changes in technology from the 1996 edition to the 2008 edition:

I remember, we met in hotels rooms, at conferences, we got together in Chicago, we got together in Canada. We would have to fly to meet each other and work together. And by the last one [2008 edition], we met very few times, only once or twice. We did it all by conference call, and emails that you could send. In the beginning, we would have to send entire manuscripts back and forth . . . all through the mail.<sup>112</sup>

Each of the three handbooks is organized by level and contains entries for each piece, informing readers about historical context and style, how to introduce the piece to students, how to help students practice, and what to listen for in a stylistic performance. In addition, each level begins with a broad description of the goals for that level.

The authors improved each edition of the *Handbook* and divided up the pieces equally, so that each author wrote the detailed notes for different pieces. In the first and second edition, they each covered a level in entirety, whereas in the third edition, they divided up pieces within each level. Nonetheless, the three

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112. Albergo, Interview.

authors passed their writing around the team, each adding to and modifying each other's work. Albergo sequenced the repertoire within each level; they created a module-based approach to grouping pieces in the first and second *Handbook*. In the third *Handbook*, a five-star difficulty rating replaced the modules. Blickenstaff was the lead editor, revising and making final decisions to the entries, bringing it all to a uniform standard. Both Blickenstaff and Albergo felt that the third edition represented their best work. Albergo stated:

I think the first one was the very hardest; the second we thought we revised it and it got a little bit better. We weren't satisfied with the first one really. We weren't satisfied with the second; we thought we didn't do enough. In some of the cases it wasn't thorough enough, it wasn't deep enough. Our commitment on the third one was we're gonna fix it, we're gonna make this better. So we were actually after our own selves. But, it was also easier to do because we would do two hour conference calls, once a week, three hour conference calls. We know each other well enough now, to write well together, we know what our strengths and weaknesses are.<sup>113</sup>

Albergo, Alexander, and Blickenstaff worked in a collaborative team on all three editions of the *Handbook*, which represents a unique pedagogical resource due to its vast scope and detailed nature.

The *Handbook for Teachers* has been positively reviewed, beginning with its first edition. Frances Larimer, then prominent pedagogue at Northwestern University, reviewed the 1996 edition as "a benchmark of high-quality study materials for teachers, students, and pianists . . . [and] an important general reference not only for pedagogy students but also for more experienced

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113. Ibid.

teachers.”<sup>114</sup> The *Handbook* (1996 edition) is included in the pedagogy textbook *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher* by Marianne Uzler, Stewart Gordon, and Scott McBride Smith. The authors describe the *Celebration Series*, writing “used in tandem with the *Handbook for Teachers*, it presents an unusually comprehensive intermediate method for serious-minded teachers and students.”<sup>115</sup> In a subsection of Resources for Piano Teachers, the authors describe that the *Handbook* “is extremely complete, well organized, and full of useful teaching tips.”<sup>116</sup> This vast collaborative publishing project is an incomparable resource for teachers of intermediate students.

Following the creation of the initial *Handbook* in 1996, Blickenstaff has been engaged in a variety of other projects for Frederick Harris.<sup>117</sup> Blickenstaff presented a series of workshops on the newly published first edition of the *Handbook* at universities and music stores around the Midwest and South. He has frequently appeared at MTNA conferences as a clinician in the showcases of Frederick Harris Music. He has reviewed and evaluated the music in collections by composers and the repertoire books within the *Celebration Series*. He also served

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114. Frances Larimer, review of *Celebration Series Handbook for Teachers*, by Cathy Albergo, Reid Alexander, and Marvin Blickenstaff, *Clavier* 35, No. 7 (September 1996): 30.

115. Marianne Uzler, Stewart Gordon, and Scott McBride Smith, *The Well-Tempered Keyboard Teacher*, 2nd ed. (New York: Schirmer, 2000), 97.

116. *Ibid.*, 123.

117. Blickenstaff, Personal Correspondence.

as a reviewing reader for Alexander and Albergo's fourth edition of *Intermediate Piano Repertoire* and Albergo's piano method, *Celebrate Piano* (authored with J. Mitzi Kolar and Mark Mrozinski). Blickenstaff has made numerous contributions to the offerings of Frederick Harris music, both as an author and reviewer.

### International Workshops

In 1988, Blickenstaff began presenting lectures and performing recitals as part of the International Workshops, a two-week event for music teachers held in various European countries. Gerald Fischbach, a violinist and faculty member at the University of Maryland in College Park, organized the event. The program included a wide variety of professional, artistic, and pedagogical topics, growing over the years to include workshop areas for string players, pianists, instrumental and vocal conductors, and general music.<sup>118</sup> Nelita True coordinated the piano area of the Workshops, and upon her recommendation, Fischbach invited Blickenstaff as a contributor beginning in 1988. Fischbach stated, "He was just such a big success that he became a permanent fixture. . . . Everybody loved him . . . and his evaluations were always among the highest in the batch."<sup>119</sup> He was a regular presenter for these workshops until 2004 when they were discontinued.

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118. Gerald Fischbach, "ASTA Fiftieth Anniversary: International Workshops: ASTA's Presence Abroad.," *American String Teacher* 46, no. 3 (1996).

119. Gerald Fischbach, interviewed by author (Phone Interview, February 5, 2010).



Blickenstaff visited numerous European countries during the summers of 1988 through 2004 where he presented workshops and masterclasses and also performed. Most years, Blickenstaff contributed approximately four workshops on various pedagogical topics, but in some years, he presented a masterclass in lieu of a fourth workshop. Blickenstaff attributed his long list of workshop topics partially to his long engagement with the International Workshops:

I was hired on for a week of lectures, and year after year I would go, but year after year the same teachers would also go. And so I knew that every year I had to think of different topics. And Nelita would always ask us around November or December what our topics were for the next summer. . . . But I would attribute the pressure of the International Workshops for having developed my workshop topic list enormously because I couldn't repeat myself.<sup>120</sup>

For example, during the summer of 1999 in Glasgow, Scotland, Blickenstaff presented three workshops and a masterclass:

*Building on a Firm Foundation: Preparation, Presentation, Reinforcement*  
*Beethoven's Sonatinas: Teaching Strategies to Maximize Success*  
*In the Footsteps of Bartok: The Teaching Pieces of Pal Kadosa*  
 Masterclass to Scottish Children<sup>121</sup>

In comparison, Blickenstaff presented four workshops the following summer of 2000 in Graz, Austria:

*Nature's Clues to Interpretation*  
*The Piano Legacy of Anton Diabelli*  
*Anatomy of a Masterpiece: Chopin's Nocturne in F#, Op. 15, No. 2*  
*(Nearly) Forgotten Treasures: Intermediate Repertoire for Past Decades*<sup>122</sup>

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120. Blickenstaff, Interview 5 of 6.

121. International Workshops, Programs and Pamphlets of Rita May.

122. Ibid.

Both Nelita True and Gerald Fischbach recalled Blickenstaff's ability to teach a bilingual masterclass to students in German, translating to English for the audience. True recollected:

I must tell you about an extraordinary masterclass that he gave in Graz. This was with young children, and none of them spoke English. And of course it was an English speaking audience. Well, as you may know, Marvin lived in Germany for a while; he's fluent in German. So, he did a bilingual masterclass. He spoke to the children in German and then translated everything for the audience. It was just a huge success, and the children loved it. Afterwards, Marvin said he would never do that again! [laughing] It was tough, but we certainly didn't see that it was tough for him at all. It was just an extraordinary performance; I've never seen anything like that before, and probably never will again. Well, it was really impressive.<sup>123</sup>

In addition to the workshops and masterclasses, Blickenstaff also performed solo works during the evening concerts. Often faculty linked workshops and performances with the location; in summer 2000 in Biarritz, France, Blickenstaff contributed four French pieces from Francis Poulenc's *15 Improvisations* on a Faculty Potpourri Recital.<sup>124</sup> In 1990 in Graz, Austria, Blickenstaff performed a full afternoon recital, in addition to giving three workshops.<sup>125</sup> With the International Workshops, Blickenstaff visited Austria, Canada, Switzerland, France, Scotland, and Norway.

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123. Nelita True, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, April 9, 2010).

124. International Workshops, Programs.

125. Blickenstaff, Interview at Shenandoah College Conservatory of Music in Winchester, MA.

### Other Notable Professional Engagements

During his Goshen tenure, Blickenstaff taught pedagogy at other institutions. In a unique arrangement, Blickenstaff flew weekly to Wisconsin in the winter of 1986 to teach an eight-week pedagogy course to undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and local teachers.<sup>126</sup> He applied for and received a sabbatical in 1987 to 1988 wherein he taught pedagogy at Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore during the fall semester.<sup>127</sup> He left during an additional sabbatical in 1992 to 1993 and taught at The Catholic University of America in Washington DC; his teaching included graduate-level pedagogy courses and advising research and theses.<sup>128</sup> These offshoot teaching engagements are demonstrative of Blickenstaff's stature within the field of piano pedagogy.

Blickenstaff continued his own education by traveling to Europe to attend the Ernen Musikdorf beginning in 1986 (see fig. 3.8). The renowned György Sebök (1922-91) taught these three-week summer courses in piano and chamber

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126. Blickenstaff, Resume. Sanna Yoder, "The Two Hands of Marvin Blickenstaff," *Goshen College Bulletin*, January 1986.

127. "Sabbaticals, Resignations alter 1987-88 Faculty Roster," *Goshen College Bulletin*, May 1987, 15.

128. Susan Hochstedler, "Music Professors Expand Experience," *Goshen College Bulletin*, September 1992, 31.



Figure 3.8. From left to right: Sara Faye Blickenstaff, György Sebök, and Marvin Blickenstaff. Photo dated July 17, 1998. Photograph from the personal collection of Marvin Blickenstaff.

music, located in the mountainous Ernen, Switzerland.<sup>129</sup> Blickenstaff received a recommendation to attend these workshops by Jane Magrath, and upon Blickenstaff attending first in 1986, he re-enrolled for three more years. He attended twice as a performer and twice as an auditor. Blickenstaff also recommended the experience to Kathryn and Lon Sherer, who attended the following year in 1987.

Blickenstaff experienced a profound attraction to Sebök's teaching style. He recalled the intensity of the masterclasses:

He had in a way, an almost an x-ray vision into you as a human being and you as a musician, and into your body. He had an incredible analytical skill about how the body functions at the keyboard. And that even proliferated into his ability to help string players, and he would work with flutists and he would help harpists. . . . And he could transform octaves, and he could make passagework scintillate. It was quite amazing. He had fabulous ears. . . . He was a very insightful person and sensitive. . . . And I saw him work with people who were not very well prepared; he was extremely kind and worked very intensely with them. And the only thing I ever saw him become upset or angry about was if he felt that you were using music for your own self-aggrandizement and [to] show-off, and then he would just cut you to shreds. Because, he was so devoted to music. Music meant life to him; music was as sacred as life itself.<sup>130</sup>

Lon and Kathryn Sherer echoed Blickenstaff's sentiments of the awe-inspiring nature of these experiences, and Lon observed that Blickenstaff's teaching changed

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129. György Sebök was a Hungarian pianist who was trained at the Liszt Academy, concertized throughout Europe, and taught in Hungary before immigrating to the United States. He was a faculty member at Indiana University for nearly thirty years and was the founder of the Ernen Musikdorf in 1973.

130. Blickenstaff, Interview 6 of 6.

from this experience.<sup>131</sup> Blickenstaff enjoyed working with Sebök and enlisted several colleagues on the Goshen College faculty to travel to Indiana University to work with Sebök for a day of coaching. Blickenstaff sought out multiple opportunities to work with Sebök out of a genuine admiration of his teaching.

Blickenstaff's frequent engagements as a pedagogue, editor, and presenter occurred at the state, national, and international level.<sup>132</sup> Blickenstaff became increasingly selected to give presentations at the Music Teachers National Association Conference (see Appendix F for a complete listing of his national conference participation). His MTNA presentations during his Goshen years included:

- 1981 Phoenix, Arizona: *Rules of Thumb for Interpretation*
- 1989 Wichita, Kansas: *Are We Really Teaching Music?*
- 1993 Spokane, Washington: *My First Sonatina: An Introduction to Classical Performance Practice*
- 1996 Kansas City: *A Perspective on Student Preparation and Progress Assessed through Videotaped Student Performance* with Jane Magrath, John O'Brien, and Lisa Zdechlik
- 1997 Dallas, Texas: Masterclass and Member of the Pedagogy Saturday Panel

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131. Sherer and Sherer, Interview.

132. Blickenstaff gave countless presentations at the local and state levels during his years at Goshen. Due to the scant resources and sheer number, these are not documented here. Blickenstaff has professed being the featured presenter at a conference for the following states: Alabama, Alaska, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

Frederick Harris publishing company and Carl Fischer presented Blickenstaff in their publisher showcases at numerous MTNA conferences. From 1991 to 1993, he served as a member of the editorial committee of *American Music Teacher*, the bimonthly journal of MTNA. In a unique experience, Blickenstaff presented in New Zealand to the Institute of Registered Music Teachers, giving a series of fifteen workshops in 1995. During that engagement, he traveled to four different locations on the North Island and performed a recital at the University of Auckland. Upon a second invitation in 2004, he presented workshops on both the North and South Island. Blickenstaff's visibility as a master pedagogue grew through his frequent contributions in prominent venues.

His professional association continued with publisher Carl Fischer in the late 1990s with a new project of repertoire books for intermediate pianists. The overall series title began as *Basic Piano Literature* and started as a collaboration between Blickenstaff and Paul Sheftel; Blickenstaff stated, "That was a project that Paul Sheftel and I started, and we thought it would proliferate into lots of lots of books. . . . And then it came to a halt."<sup>133</sup> Blickenstaff completed three editions of repertoire: *Beethoven Short Pieces* (1997), *Grieg Short Pieces* (1999), and *Bach Dances* (1997). Other editions reached publication as part of the series by authors Paul Sheftel, Phyllis Lehrer, David Goldberger, and LeAnn House. Under Blickenstaff's editorial guidance as General Editor of the series, LeAnn House, a

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133. Blickenstaff, Interview 5 of 6.

former student of Blickenstaff's from UNC-CH, compiled the volume *Handel: An Album*. Reflecting upon their collaboration, House stated: "We worked together quite a bit. I put it together, sent it to him, and he went through it with a fine tooth comb. We discussed fingering and lots of other things, and that was a terrific experience."<sup>134</sup> Unfortunately, the project did not continue with numerous volumes as Blickenstaff had originally hoped. Nonetheless, Blickenstaff's career grew through countless achievements and contributions to the field of piano pedagogy, during his twenty-one years at Goshen College.

#### Resignation from Goshen College

For personal reasons, Blickenstaff resigned from his position at Goshen College in 1999, and he and his wife Sara Faye relocated from Indiana to Pennsylvania. In the Winter 1999 issue of *Keyboard Companion*, Blickenstaff reflected on his career at Goshen in his opening remarks:

In the course of these twenty years I have been blessed with sterling colleagues and fine students. In fact, several of my former students have become my colleagues over the years. The respondents to the question for this issue have added beautiful and significant threads to the fabric of my life here at Goshen, and it is in celebration of our friendship and collegiality that I have asked them to contribute to this final question to emanate from my years at Goshen.<sup>135</sup>

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134. LeAnn House, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, January 28, 2010).

135. Marvin Blickenstaff, "Do You Ever Assign Arrangements of Traditional Repertoire?," *Keyboard Companion* 10, no. 4 (1999): 36.



Beverly Lapp, in that same issue, prepared an unsolicited tribute to Blickenstaff and wrote: “For twenty years, Marvin has been a dynamic, inspiring presence on the music floor of this small liberal arts campus. . . . Effects of the ‘Blickenstaff Years’ will be felt here at Goshen College for a long, long time.”<sup>136</sup> In a letter written to his students at the conclusion of 1999, Blickenstaff wrote:

There is a unique, almost sacred chemistry which develops between a teacher and student making music together. It has been my privilege to be part of that chemistry for twenty years at GC [Goshen College], and my life is inexpressibly rich because of the hundreds of students I have taught here. . . . I often think of my life as a wondrously varied tapestry. The warp and woof intertwine as we come in contact with one another. The investment in relationships and the sincerity of communication add richness to that fabric. You are all threads which have been woven into the tapestry of my life: bright, colorful, warm, some delicate and sensitive, others hardy and strong, all with beautiful textures and tones. Each of you has added to my experience in life. I thank you for that gift.<sup>137</sup>

In Blickenstaff’s search for a new professional position in Pennsylvania, he could not secure any full-time teaching positions. Nonetheless, his search revealed a new world of possibilities on the east coast with several teaching positions and a newfound connection with the Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy.

Despite Goshen’s small size, many notable students passed through Goshen College and the studio and classroom of Blickenstaff. He commented, “Some of my life’s best friends . . . were my students there. . . . I just thought it is incredible what—Goshen College is a little Mennonite school—and we had no right to

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136. Beverly Lapp, Untitled editorial box, printed in “Do You Ever Assign Arrangements of Tradition Repertoire?” *Keyboard Companion* 10, no. 4 (1999): 36.

137. Blickenstaff, Personal Correspondence.

produce such outstanding students.”<sup>138</sup> These former students include: Melissa Falb, piano faculty and the Director of Group Instruction at MacPhail Center for Music in Minneapolis; Beverly Lapp, piano faculty at Goshen College; Rebecca Martin, mezzo-soprano; Michael Ruhling, president of the Haydn Society of North America; Timothy Stalter, choral faculty at University of Iowa; Cathy Smetana, piano faculty at MacPhail; Ed Sprunger, teacher trainer of Suzuki violin; Arlene Steffen, an independent teacher in Fresno, California, and the former director of the Goshen Preparatory Program; Karen Zorn, president of the Longy School of Music near Boston. In addition, many of Blickenstaff’s students at Goshen and in his home studio have pursued advanced degrees and held faculty positions at other institutions.

### **Subsequent Professional Positions**

After completing twenty-one years of faculty service at Goshen, Blickenstaff relocated to Collegeville, Pennsylvania, in 1999. Blickenstaff and his wife Sara Faye purchased a home with ample room for a home studio. The house was perfect for their needs, as it had private entrances that could accommodate both a private practice for Sara Faye, who worked as a clinical social worker, and a private studio for Blickenstaff to teach piano lessons. This area of the country appealed to them

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138. Blickenstaff, Interview 5 of 6.

for retirement because Sara Faye had grown up in this region and would be surrounded by family and friends.<sup>139</sup>

Upon relocating to Pennsylvania, Blickenstaff held part-time faculty and teaching positions. He taught piano and piano pedagogy at the Westminster Choir College of Rider University and the Westminster Conservatory of Music (1999–2001) in Princeton, New Jersey. He served as an artist faculty member at the College of New Jersey (1999–2007) in Ewing. Since 1999, he has taught at the New School for Music Study in Kingston, New Jersey, and in his private piano studio in his home.

Blickenstaff, with his national reputation, teaches children from the local community to support himself financially and to pursue his life's mission:

The requests for lessons keep coming, and so I'm teaching about as much as my daily schedule will allow. . . . I'm still teaching because it's an easy way for me to finance my lifestyle. It's not particularly easy, but it's the thing I do and the thing I'm good at. It is fulfilling what is . . . my life's mission, and that is to be a music teacher, and . . . I am doing my students good by giving them the gift of music. . . . That's why I still teach.<sup>140</sup>

He mentors a wide age range of students in his studio, from beginners through advanced high school students and adults of all ability levels. Students do not have to audition. Blickenstaff extolled: "The door is wide open. . . . You don't have to pass

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139. Ernst, Field Notes.

140. Blickenstaff, Interview 4 of 6.

any kind of test to get in to my studio. You come and we'll make music together."<sup>141</sup>

Blickenstaff explained his goals with his students:

I don't expect any of my students to become professional musicians. I teach my students with the thought in mind that I want them to enjoy playing the piano for the rest of their lives, and basically avocationally. I want to give them skill that will equip them so that they can sit down and pick up hymnals and leaf through and play, go to the store and buy pop music if they want, and pick up and play, and leaf through their Mozart sonatas and play that. And *enjoy* [emphasis his] that.<sup>142</sup>

In 2010, his home studio schedule included three days of lessons to twenty-three students. Originally, Blickenstaff kept Saturdays free of teaching duties, but due to the demand for lessons, he now teaches on Saturday. He keeps a full schedule of teaching, continues to present at workshops and at conferences, and works for the Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy.

### **The Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy**

The Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy began to form in 1999 and grew into an institution that incorporated three divisions: the New School for Music Study, the National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy (NCKP), and *Clavier Companion* (previously entitled *Keyboard Companion*).<sup>143</sup> Frances Clark (1905–98) was a widely respected pedagogue whose unique and inspiring techniques for

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141. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by author, Interview 1 of 6 (Collegeville, PA, November 16, 2009).

142. Ibid.

143. Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy, "Mission," <http://www.francesclarkcenter.org/homePages/Mission.html> (accessed May 20, 2009).

teaching young students have made a significant impact on piano pedagogy. She established the New School in 1960 with Louise Goss. In 1990, Richard Chronister, a prominent piano pedagogue, was the founder and chief editor of *Keyboard Companion*. Chronister also co-founded the biennial conference (1980–94, then titled the National Conference on Piano Pedagogy) and was the enthusiastic president of the Frances Clark Center, the position to which Blickenstaff would be appointed.

In 1999, the Frances Clark Center faced a period of uncertainty and change. Frances Clark had passed away (1998), and the Center had begun to emerge under the leadership of Richard Chronister (president) and Louise Goss (chair). In September of 1999, Chronister organized a planning meeting in Chicago with the purpose of reinstating the national conference in 2000. Shortly after this meeting, Chronister died unexpectedly on New Year's Eve. Louise Goss summarized the events of 1999:

She [Frances Clark] grew older, and eventually had to give up, and eventually died. And following her death, a group of her former colleagues met with me to discuss, is there life after Frances Clark, and what do we do with the New School without her? And we decided that what we should do is reincorporate the New School as a [part of a] parent organization called in her honor, the Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy . . . and, Richard Chronister . . . was directed to the first Board of Trustees as the first president. Within six months, he was dead of this virulent form of blood cancer. So then we had to go through the same questions, is there life after Richard Chronister! . . . And, that's where Marvin comes into the picture.<sup>144</sup>

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144. Louise Goss, interviewed by author (Kingston, NJ, November 18, 2009).

As the Center began to define its mission, the death of Chronister left a gaping hole in the organizational structure that would be filled by Blickenstaff.

After Chronister's death, Sam Holland assumed the role of interim president and began the search for a new president in 2000. By an astounding turn of events, Blickenstaff recently moved in the summer of 1999 to an area within commuting distance to the New School and began teaching there in the fall of that year.

Holland aptly described the surprising circumstance of Blickenstaff's relocation:

We knew that Marvin had recently moved; the presidency of the Frances Clark Center is not a full time job. It doesn't pay a living wage. It had to be combined with teaching at another institution as well. So there was a little bit of a convenience factor there. We didn't look at it like convenience. We looked at it as, the stars had aligned, or God must have put Marvin in eastern Pennsylvania where he'd be available to work at the New School, that there may have been something providential in his arrival there as well.<sup>145</sup>

During the MTNA conference in Minneapolis in March of 2000, Holland met with members of the board to discuss the future of the presidency. Holland stated:

The remainder of the board—Louise [Goss], Elvina [Truman Pearce], and me [sic]—met to sort of process this information. OK, our leader is gone, we have all these plans that people won't let us drop [plans for reinstating the national conference], what are we going to do? We've got to find somebody that can be president. . . . We kept looking at each other and said Marvin Blickenstaff, why not ask Marvin Blickenstaff?. . . And so right there, we went and asked him, Marvin would you be president of the Frances Clark Center?<sup>146</sup>

Blickenstaff recalled this same event:

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145. Sam Holland, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, April 9, 2010).

146. *Ibid.*

Louise and Sam came to me at an MTNA in Minneapolis and said, "Well Richard is no longer with us, and we want you to join the board of the Frances Clark Center." And I thought that was so cool. I've never studied with Frances Clark, but . . . Louise said that Frances always said that I was one of their gang . . . having been so influenced by Lynn [Freeman Olson] and Louise [Bianchi]. . . . So I was kind of a natural first cousin to come onto the board. . . . And then, they finished their sentence and said, "We want you to come on to the board as president," and I said, "You've got to be kidding." . . . I went back to our hotel room and I said, "Sara Faye, you will never, never [laughing] imagine what Sam and Louise have just proposed!"<sup>147</sup>

Goss's powers of persuasion ultimately led to Blickenstaff accepting the offer. Goss explained how Blickenstaff met with her later in New Jersey to decline the offer:

He gave me all the reasons about his life that would make it impossible, and I kept finding out at each point why it really was possible and why it would really be a good thing, not only for the Board and the Center but for *Marvin* [her emphasis]. And, he apparently, in that hour, came to believe that it would be better for him to do it than not to do it. And, I don't think he's ever regretted the decision.<sup>148</sup>

Blickenstaff assumed the presidency of the Board of Trustees and became a member of the executive planning committee for NCKP in 2000. The addition of Blickenstaff in 2000 completed the board of the Frances Clark Center. The revival of the biennial national conference, renamed the National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy, occurred in 2001, a year later than originally planned by Chronister.

For numerous pedagogical, philosophical, and professional reasons, Blickenstaff was a practicable member of the planning committee, the board, and the school. Clark and Goss recognized Blickenstaff's stellar pedagogy and ability to train young teachers through his work at Goshen; Goss explained how several

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147. Blickenstaff, Interview 5 of 6.

148. Goss, Interview.

Goshen students came to study with Clark and Goss at Westminster Choir College and the New School:

But, the interesting thing is, that the very best students we had in that program, came from Marvin's undergraduate program. He taught a bunch of wonderful pedagogy majors and sent them on to us for the Master's, and they were quite far our best-prepared students.<sup>149</sup>

His pedagogical approach (as seen through *Music Pathways*), although different in methodology of Clark and Goss's *The Music Tree*, developed from the same pedagogical roots and underlying philosophy. As Holland said, "he was cut from the same cloth,"<sup>150</sup> and as Goss said, "What we [teachers at the New School] all share, and what I think is remarkable in Marvin, is the conviction that there's music in every child."<sup>151</sup> His national reputation as a master teacher maintained the high professional status achieved by Clark and Goss, and his leadership capability was unparalleled with the vast professional network Blickenstaff had developed with his frequent national and international presentations. As Goss said, "he has a solid as gold, national, international really, reputation, as a major teacher of students and teacher of teachers."<sup>152</sup> Less than a year after moving to Pennsylvania, Blickenstaff was entrenched in all arms of the Frances Clark Center; in 1999, he started teaching at the New School; he served as an editor for *Keyboard*

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149. Ibid.

150. Holland, Interview.

151. Goss, Interview.

152. Ibid.



*Companion* (1990–2004); and in 2000, he became president of the Board and started planning NCKP with Goss and Holland.

### The New School for Music Study

Blickenstaff began teaching at the New School in the fall of 1999 as the director of the Program for Excellence in Piano Study (PEPS) and has continued for more than ten years (see fig 3.11). Prior to his arrival, Phyllis Alpert Lehrer, faculty at Westminster Choir College of Rider University, was the director of PEPS. Upon her resignation, Ted Cooper, then Administrative Director of the New School, solicited Blickenstaff as its new PEPS director. PEPS is described on the New School's website:

The PEPS program identifies and nurtures students whose musical and artistic gifts warrant an accelerated study plan. The program includes a 60-minute private lesson each week, plus a 60-minute repertoire class every other week. Students also participate in partner lessons that occur on a rotating basis with Marvin Blickenstaff, Director of the PEPS program.<sup>153</sup>

PEPS not only serves as an intensive program for piano students, but also as a method of teacher training and ongoing education for the faculty of the New School. As Goss explained:

It really gives the school centering in a way because every faculty member, or in some cases, almost every faculty member has a student who is in the PEPS program, and they give the primary lesson. Then Marvin does a rotation with them, like every month, and then he has class, every two weeks. So his influence on the students is very great. But, his influence on the teachers of those students is greater because they observe the lesson that he gives, when he does the rotation, and they often are in groups in the

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153. The New School for Music Study, "Programs," <http://www.nsmspiano.org/Programs/> (accessed April 20, 2011).



Figure 3.9. The New School for Music Study Faculty (ca. 2009). From front left to back right: Fiona Christano, Louise Goss, Aline Schmidt, Scott Donald, Margie Nelson, Tracy Grandy, Amy Glennon, Angela Leising, Todd Van Kekerix, Natalie Gibson, Marvin Blickenstaff, Lauren Thompson, and Rebecca Pennington.

class, so they're learning right along with the PEPS students. They're learning more and more about teaching.<sup>154</sup>

PEPS began in the 1990s prior to Blickenstaff's arrival and has grown and changed under his leadership. During Lehrer's time as director, Lehrer taught one class of PEPS students, and the student's customary teacher observed the individual lessons of those students taught by Lehrer. Goss summarized Blickenstaff's contributions to PEPS, stating that he added a small-group rotation and expanded the program to include three sections of classes (PEPS A, B, and C):

But the rotation I think is probably the most exciting addition because he takes an hour of time and takes three of the PEPS kids and gives them each about twenty minutes. And they are playing and learning and at a great rate, and their teachers, who are right there watching, are learning at a great rate too. And, that has been gradual growth of the program. It's, instead of being one class, now it's at three different levels, and instead of being just a class, it's a class and a rotation. So it's become much more intense.

Furthermore, Blickenstaff submits comments and suggestions to each teacher based upon his or her student's performance in the class and rotation.

The faculty of the New School stated how much they have learned and how the school has evolved through Blickenstaff's leadership. Scott Donald, former Administrative Director and a faculty member at the New School, commented on how much he learned as a teacher of PEPS students:

If you have a student in the PEPS program, they meet for rotation. . . . So, we get to sit in on lessons with him, once every five weeks, and you know it's wonderful to have that opportunity because we get to see how he works. Also in particular repertoire, [there] are things that we can learn as teachers in teaching that repertoire. . . . stylistic, musical, technical, the

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154. Goss, Interview.

whole bit. We also are influenced if we have students in the PEPS, [by] the technical work that they do: the exercises and the little things they're working on . . . that are technical warm-ups and things that I didn't know and I have not used before, and now we all use. And I use several of his things with my other students, not just my PEPS students, but across the board; we all do some of those to some extent.<sup>155</sup>

Amy Glennon, Educational Director at the New School and a faculty member since 1996, has seen the transformation amongst the school since Blickenstaff's arrival:

In the group classes he creates a really exciting environment for the students. . . . It almost brings back another era where kids are really excited about learning, and he's very dignified in a way, but he's very approachable. . . . So I think just being in the program really enhances, sort of ups their game. . . . The level of playing school wide—because I can tell you, I've gone to all the recitals of course for the fifteen years—the PEPS program has grown tremendously. There's never been this level of playing at the school before; it's markedly different. I think the school's attracted good students because of him and more than that, he has been able to bring people to the next level, through his coaching.<sup>156</sup>

Under Blickenstaff's leadership, PEPS enrollment has grown, the playing caliber has increased, and the New School's faculty have observed his masterful group teaching and have learned more about teaching students with advanced abilities.

In addition to his duties as director of PEPS, Blickenstaff teaches additional students, gives presentations on pedagogical topics to the faculty, performs, and serves on the administration. His teaching load includes two days of teaching, working with PEPS students in the evenings, adult students during the daytime, and a few additional intermediate students. He has presented to the faculty during

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155. Scott Donald, interviewed by author (The New School for Music Study, Kingston, NJ, November 18, 2009).

156. Amy Glennon, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, March 18, 2010).

their bimonthly meetings on topics such as pieces with problematic pedaling, the literature of Debussy, ornamentation in the music of Chopin, and a lecture titled “Maintaining Standards in a Positive Learning Environment.”<sup>157</sup> The New School programs a yearly faculty concert series, and Blickenstaff has been active in both collaborative recitals with the whole faculty and solo recitals. As part of the administration, Blickenstaff meets regularly with the directors to guide the educational and business goals of the school. Glennon described Blickenstaff as “a practical visionary” who has a desire to hear his colleagues’ opinions.<sup>158</sup> According to Donald, Blickenstaff is often looked to for guidance when the New School needs to address difficult situations such as student dismissals, tuition payment issues, and other parent-student-teacher relationship issues; Blickenstaff has also aided the New School in hiring decisions.<sup>159</sup> Even though Blickenstaff’s role is part-time at the New School, he contributes to numerous aspects of the school, from PEPS, to teacher training, and to administrative decisions.

#### *Keyboard Companion*

Blickenstaff’s position on the editorial committee of *Keyboard Companion* began in 1990 (see Goshen College Years), and after he relocated to Pennsylvania, he continued as Associate Editor until 2004. From 1997 to 2004, Blickenstaff was

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157. Donald, Interview; Amy Glennon, “Pedagogy Notes,” Private Collection.

158. Glennon, Interview.

159. Donald, Interview.

the Associate Editor for the repertoire section. During this busy period, he worked with the Frances Clark Center Board, planned NCKP, and taught at his home studio, the College of New Jersey, Westminster Choir College, and the New School; nonetheless, he continued to solicit different authors and provide various questions to pose to his authors. Occasionally, Blickenstaff altered the format and solicited input from numerous teachers, creating lengthy lists of repertoire,<sup>160</sup> and he wrote articles for other sections of the magazine, such as “How does the student’s reading level influence your repertoire assignments”<sup>161</sup> (see Appendix B for a complete listing of topics). In his final issue as the associate editor for the magazine, Blickenstaff wrote:

One of the favorite photos I have hanging in my study is a shot of the original staff of *Keyboard Companion* [see fig. 3.7]. . . . We all looked much younger (and leaner) back in 1990! We were “believers”. We believed that *Keyboard Companion* had a crucial function in the world of piano pedagogy, and that our journal could impact the teaching of our readership in a profound way. . . . As I turn over my responsibilities with *Keyboard Companion* to Nancy Bachus, I am filled with mixed emotions. There is some relief in being freed of soliciting and editing responses and meeting deadlines. The flip side is a sense of accomplishment in having been a part of this major force in piano pedagogy. *Keyboard Companion* is a forum for the sharing of ideas unlike anything we have known. We are indebted to

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160. Sixteen surveyed teachers, “What Repertoire Do You Pull out of the Hat When a Student Falls into a Slump?,” *Keyboard Companion* 9, no. 4 (1998); Teachers in North Carolina and Colorado, “What Is Your Favorite Repertoire for the Teaching of Alberti Bass, Trills, Different Articulations between the Hands, and Balance of Melody and Accompaniment?,” *Keyboard Companion* 10, no. 3 (1999).

161. Marvin Blickenstaff, “How Does the Student’s Reading Level Influence Your Repertoire Assignments?,” *Keyboard Companion* 11, no. 1 (2000). Marvin Blickenstaff, “When and How Do You Introduce Rubato?,” *Keyboard Companion* 11, no. 2 (2000).

Richard Chronister for this innovative, creative publishing venture, and to Elvina Pearce for continuing the tradition with the highest standards. . . . I feel, as a direct result of this journal, that I am a more effective teacher today than I was fourteen years ago. . . . To my colleagues at *Keyboard Companion* and to the readership, I bid a fond farewell, and urge your continued support of this superb publication. May we continue to grow as musicians and as teachers.<sup>162</sup>

In response, Editor-in-Chief Pearce wrote: “Words are inadequate when it comes to expressing our appreciation to Marvin for all of his years as an associate editor of *Keyboard Companion*. His many editorial contributions as well as his selection of writers for his department have given it a level of unparalleled distinction.”<sup>163</sup> Following his resignation as associate editor, Blickenstaff has contributed a response to “How has keyboard pedagogy changed over the last 20-30 years?”<sup>164</sup> and a cover-featured article on “Teaching Artistic Phrasing.”<sup>165</sup> Even though Blickenstaff concluded his editorial work with *Keyboard Companion*, he has continued as an active participant in the Frances Clark Center through the New School, the National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy, and the Board of Trustees.

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162. Marvin Blickenstaff, “A Fond Farewell...,” *Keyboard Companion* 15, no. 4 (2004): 38.

163. Elvina Truman Pearce, Editor’s Note in “A Fond Farewell...,” *Keyboard Companion* 15, No. 4 (2004): 38.

164. Marvin Blickenstaff, “How Has Keyboard Pedagogy Changed over the Last 20–30 Years? – Part II,” *Keyboard Companion* 16, no. 3 (2005).

165. Marvin Blickenstaff, “Teaching Artistic Phrasing,” *Keyboard Companion* 19, no. 1 (2008).

### The National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy

The Frances Clark Center has continued to present the National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy (NCKP) biennially in August since 2001. The conference is largely planned and coordinated under the organizational efforts of the executive committee, comprised of Blickenstaff, Louise Goss, and Sam Holland (see fig. 3.10). The trio has worked closely together planning each conference (beginning in 2011, Goss has taken a lesser role due to health concerns). When asked to describe how such an event is organized, Goss replied it is possible due to the “symbiotic relationship” of the committee, and it takes two years of Friday morning conference calls and begins as soon as the prior conference is complete.<sup>166</sup> Holland said that they start conceptually, often bringing in others to brainstorm, and then they quickly move to implementation:

Marvin has mostly taken the responsibility for the program side, for the communications, for working with the speakers, and artists, and presenters, to communicate with them, to confirm with them, to clarify what they’re doing, to get the verbiage and images that we’re going to use promoting the conference and presenting it. Whereas, again I work more on the operational and technological side—what to do with the website or actually working with the designers to publish the brochure or to publish the conference program. The sort of voluminous and complex things at a site. . .  
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The three-day conference, with a single day for preconference seminars, is organized across the two-year time span between conferences.

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166. Goss, Interview.

167. Holland, Interview.



# YESTERDAY Piano Pedagogy TODAY TOMORROW

We are delighted to welcome you to the 2009 National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy. The Planning Committee has been working since September 2007 to prepare for these days together and we are delighted that you are here.

2009 is truly an auspicious year for our community. It is the 30th anniversary of the first meeting of the National Conference on Piano Pedagogy. We will honor that occasion with sessions devoted to the history of piano pedagogy in the modern era and a Lifetime Achievement Award to one of the original founders of the conference. But just as we celebrate our heritage, we continue to prepare for the challenges of the present and future in 90 sessions that are aptly grouped under the title Piano Pedagogy: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow.

The 2009 gathering of artists, educators, students, and industry reads like a "Who's Who" in keyboard music education. Even more, it is a gathering of people who care deeply about the transformative power of music in life and culture.

At NCKP 2009, you will find an uncommon blend of great artistry and practical pedagogy. There are topics of interest to both new and experienced teachers, to those who teach independently and to those who work in institutions. NCKP 2009 features six pre-conference seminars:

- for independent teachers
- for collegiate pedagogy teachers
- for pedagogy students and young professionals
- two tracks on technology
- a new track on wellness.

We are especially pleased to welcome the students and young professionals into our midst for they represent the future of our profession.

We could not present NCKP without the extraordinary support of the music industry in many ways and many forms including the use of instruments, advertisements, exhibits, showcases, and more. Please be sure to show your support by visiting the exhibits and attending the showcases of your choice.

Thank you for joining us. We look forward to sharing the thrill, enrichment, and joy that will follow in the days to come.

*Board President,  
Marvin Blickenstaff*



*Board Chair,  
Louise Goss*



*Executive Director,  
Sam Holland*



## WELCOME!

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*Extraordinary Results  
with Every Student!*

 National Conference  
on Keyboard Pedagogy

Figure 3.10. Welcome letter in the 2009 NCKP Booklet, featuring the executive planning committee, Marvin Blickenstaff, Louise Goss, and Sam Holland. Used by permission of the Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy.

The program for NCKP features preconference seminars for specific focus groups, workshops, teaching demonstrations, concerts, exhibits, and research presentations. Holland explained that initially, they did not anticipate Blickenstaff being involved as a presenter at the conference:

We pulled away from putting him on the program at NCKP because it sort of looks like feathering your own nest. But, there was just too great a demand. When people said, "We want Marvin Blickenstaff, we want to hear him teach, we want to see him give workshops." That's why we did that *Piano Pedagogy 101* last summer. We'll probably do it again. Back by popular demand!

Blickenstaff has been featured in the following years of NCKP:

- 2001 Teaching Demonstration: Lesson with an Intermediate Student
- 2005 Workshop: *Nature's Clues to Interpretation*
- 2009 Workshop: *Pedagogy 101: Reviewing the Basics*  
Pre-Conference Session for Collegiate Pedagogy Teachers: *Effective Teaching: A View from the Other Side of the Coin*
- 2011 Teaching Demonstration: Repertoire Class for Elementary and Intermediate Students

Beyond his role on the executive committee, Blickenstaff has enriched the program offerings of NCKP through his workshops and teaching demonstrations.

Not long after their arrival in Pennsylvania and Blickenstaff's involvement in the Frances Clark Center, Blickenstaff's wife Sara Faye, in a turn of unfortunate circumstance, began exhibiting signs of Alzheimer's disease. In 2007, Blickenstaff resigned from the College of New Jersey and considerably reduced his workshop and travel engagements to provide Sara Faye the home care she needed. She remained at home with Blickenstaff until 2009, and at this point, moved to a long-term care facility. Blickenstaff has continued his home studio and work with the

Frances Clark Center and the New School despite his challenging personal circumstances.

### Summary

Blickenstaff's career has been filled with numerous achievements as a pianist, teacher, and prominent figure within the field of piano pedagogy. His renown and his excellence in service have been recognized through his receipt of several awards. In 1990, Blickenstaff was awarded Teacher of the Year by the Indiana Music Teachers Association, and the Music Teachers National Association named Blickenstaff as a Foundation Fellow in 2001.<sup>168</sup> In 2007, Blickenstaff was chosen as the sole honoree, a "remarkable member of [the piano pedagogy] profession," to commemorate the tenth edition of the *Piano Pedagogy Forum*, by editor-in-chief Scott Price.<sup>169</sup> The Royal Conservatory of Music conferred an honorary diploma to Blickenstaff in 2007, during a ceremony at the Collaborative Conference of MTNA, the Canadian Federation of Music Teachers' Associations, and the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto, Ontario.<sup>170</sup> In 2009, MTNA bestowed a Lifetime Achievement Award to Blickenstaff, and during the formal ceremony, MTNA president Gail Berenson pronounced:

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168. Blickenstaff, Diplomas and Awards.

169. Scott Price, "Welcome to the Tenth Anniversary Issue of Piano Pedagogy Forum!," *Piano Pedagogy Forum* 10, no. 1 (January 2007), <http://www.music.sc.edu/ea/keyboard/ppf/10.1/10.1.PPFPrice.html> (accessed August 17, 2011).

170. Blickenstaff, Diplomas and Awards.

No matter how many times I have heard him speak or observed him teach, I always walk away with new and useful information. I am in awe of this man as is everyone else who attends his presentations. Seeing him teach is watching a master at work, not only demonstrating his enormous skill as a teacher, but clearly displaying his passion for music and his incredible ability to excite students to the joy of music making.<sup>171</sup>

Marvin Blickenstaff (see fig. 3.11) has contributed to the musical knowledge and lives of hundreds of piano students and an incalculable number of piano teachers through his numerous faculty and teaching positions, publications, performances, leadership positions, and presentations at local, national, and international venues.

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171. Marvin Blickenstaff, Gail Berenson's Introduction at the MTNA Achievement Award, Personal Files.

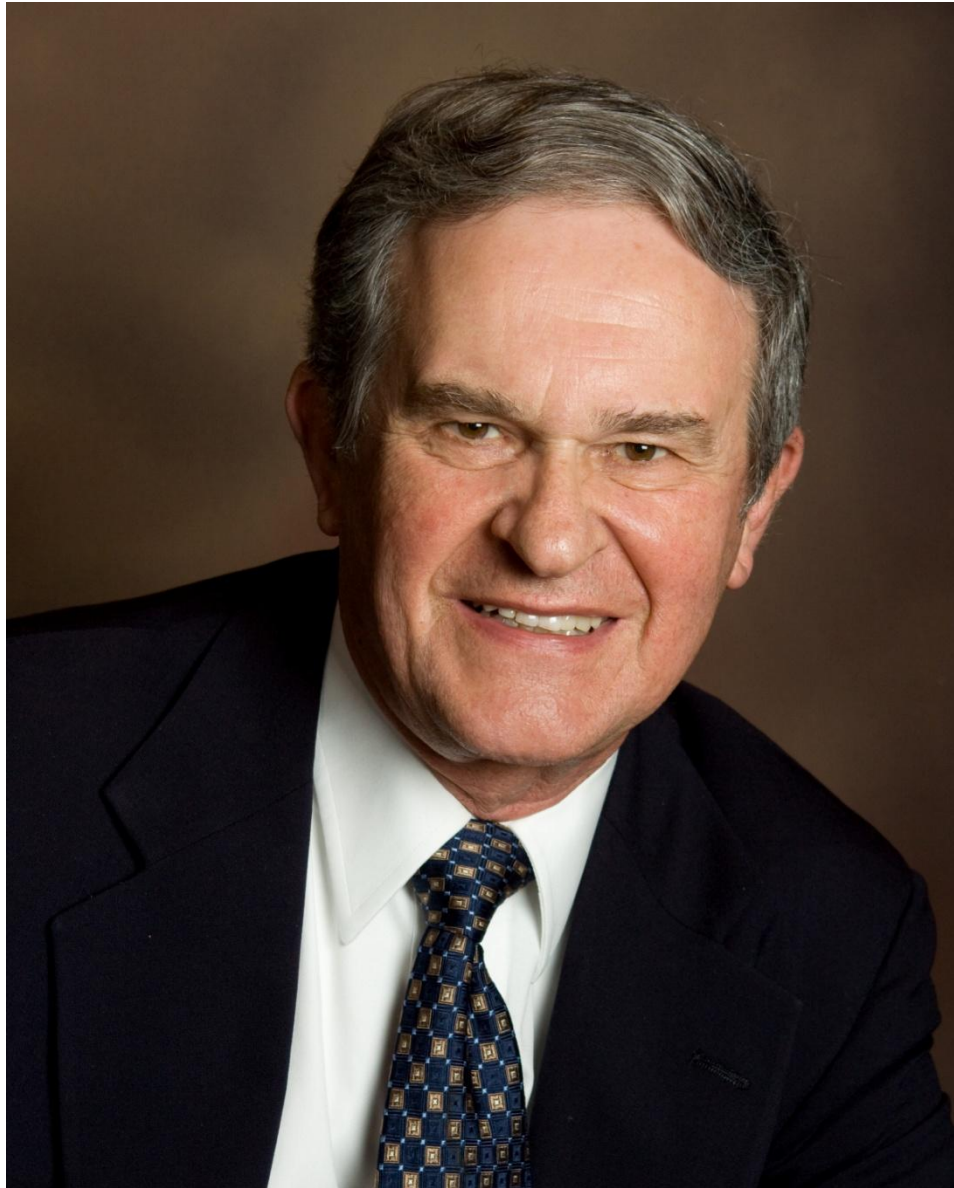


Figure 3.11. Marvin Blickenstaff, 2010. Photo taken from the private collection of Blickenstaff.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **MUSIC, STUDENT, AND TEACHER DEFINED**

Marvin Blickenstaff, esteemed pedagogue, has developed a personal philosophy throughout his more than fifty years of teaching piano to students of all ages and pedagogy to college students and teachers around the country. Widely respected for his teaching, he is considered a master teacher for beginning students through graduate students, making his philosophy widely applicable. This chapter contains a description of the fundamental tenets of his teaching philosophy, extracting Blickenstaff's ideas from his interviews and writings, utilizing the viewpoints of his students and other teachers, and analyzing his piano lessons and classes. The point of departure is how Blickenstaff defines music, the student, and the teacher. The following questions will be answered: What is music? What music should be taught? Who can take piano lessons? What should the goals be for piano study? Who should teach piano? What traits do successful teachers have? What priorities do effective teachers have?

#### **Music Defined**

In his own personal journey as a musician, teacher, and music enthusiast, Blickenstaff has been touched and captivated by music. Blickenstaff makes apparent in his writings and interviews that he is ultimately drawn to music and its spiritual element, and this motivates his piano playing and teaching. One of his

piano students at Goshen College aptly described that Blickenstaff is “a true believer in music.”<sup>1</sup>

Blickenstaff has been inspired and challenged by thinking deeply about musical meaning and explained that he was drawn to György Sebök’s teaching because of this spiritual depth. When reflecting upon why he returned to Ernen for Sebök’s summer program for four years, Blickenstaff said:

Well, it was those kinds of experiences, where there was so much depth to the teaching, you just know that you cannot absorb that in one summer. . . . It’s a little bit like listening or reading Barenboim, when they talked about music. There is such depth to their understanding of the art and the philosophy and the role that this plays in the psyche and the soul of the human being. . . . Sebök was that kind of person. He saw music from such a deep, deep standpoint.<sup>2</sup>

Seeking profound musical experiences and having a refined appreciation for stellar performances, Blickenstaff is inspired by the great pianists. When asked to comment upon what distinguishes a good from an amazing performance, Blickenstaff expounded after a long pause:

Well, a kind of a glib answer is how much I as a listener am impacted, as a human being am impacted by that music making. Am I attracted just to the facility, or is there something about that? You know, Murray Perahia can play a Mozart concerto or a Beethoven sonata or a Beethoven concerto, and there’s something about the shaping of the sound and the timing of his playing that makes you think that you’ve never really heard the piece, certainly never heard it like *that* [emphasis his] before. . . . [H]e does

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1. Sara M. Ernst, “Survey for Students of Marvin Blickenstaff,” (Online survey conducted via SurveyMonkey™, <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Blickenstaff2>, 2010–2011), 12.

2. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by author, Interview 6 of 6 (Music Teachers National Association Conference in Albuquerque, NM, March 27, 2010).

something that really reaches out, that makes you listen, makes me want to go with the sound. . . and there's something about a great performance that that person becomes kind of a bigger person in your life. But the first thing is just right here [he touches his heart and pauses], and I guess that's why I really try to talk with my students [about] . . . what you want the listener to pick up and to understand about the music.<sup>3</sup>

Not only does Blickenstaff delight in the performances of masters like Perahia and Barenboim, but he additionally delights in those of his students.

As observed in his studio and at the New School for Music Study, many of Blickenstaff's lessons with his students included performances given by the student in which Blickenstaff exclusively listened, giving no critique. He would occasionally exclaim that he was touched or moved by the student's playing. After an extensive coaching session with a high-school student Vicki on Chopin's Nocturne in C-sharp Minor, Blickenstaff and Vicki commented on the piece. Blickenstaff's heartfelt response was, "Everybody would be a more sensitive soul if they heard that piece. It is just so beautiful. . . . Thank you so much, it was just a beautiful experience," and Vicki echoed, "It was great."<sup>4</sup> Blickenstaff has a strong personal connection to music and is stirred by what it contributes to life. This desire to delve deeply into music through what it expresses forms the foundation of his teaching philosophy.

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3. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by author, Interview 4 of 6 (Collegeville, PA, November 19, 2009).

4. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Vicki, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff's Home Studio, November 19, 2009).



Blickenstaff's definition of music has the following constituent themes.

Music is the art of sound creation, and it is expressive of the wide range of human emotion. An appreciation of music of the Western European classical music is the goal of music education at the piano. At all levels of study music needs to be innately expressive, and a pianist's skills and knowledge are in service of performing sensitively and meaningfully.

#### Music as Sound and Expression

When discussing music and its importance, Blickenstaff frequently describes how music and playing the piano is fundamentally about sound. In an interview in 2002, Blickenstaff concisely summarized that regardless of the myriad of skills and knowledge “the bottom line” in music education “is still the sound.”<sup>5</sup> He further emphasized this viewpoint in a presentation at the National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy in 2009: “We teach many things—reading, technique, music theory, etc. But it seems to me that the **only really important thing we teach [is] musical expression.** [emphasis from original]”<sup>6</sup> All other elements, such as the technique necessary to play the piano, are secondary to the end result: playing the piano creates musical sound. Students are often asked to imitate the exact inflection and timing of a performance by their instructor; when Blickenstaff

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5. Rob Hallquist, “Learning Music Together: An Interview with Marvin Blickenstaff,” *Early Childhood Connections* 8 (Winter 2002): 9.

6. Marvin Blickenstaff, Pedagogy 101: Reviewing the Basics, Workshop Lecture Notes.

discussed this process of refining a student's performance to be more expressive, he stated that all he "basically [tries] to do is open up the student's mind, imagination, and heart to the impact of sound."<sup>7</sup>

Many teachers who have attended Blickenstaff's presentations have heard his anecdote about a teacher he met at a festival in Spokane, Washington, who reminded him of how sound is the fundamental motivator to playing piano. He relayed this story to a group of teachers in Montana in 1994 during his presentation *What to Do When the Magic Stops*:

Almost from the very outset, I realized that there was a lady wearing a red dress, and when she came into the room, before I heard a particular class or group of students, that there were a few students in the group that played just spectacularly. It didn't matter what level. . . And I said to one of the monitors, "Who is the lady in the red dress?" [the monitor replied] "Oh, she comes from way down in Oregon and brings up a whole bunch of students. She's Emma Lou." . . . The last class, after I'd signed the certificates, I saw the red dress in the back row, and I said, "I've got to talk to you, who are you?" And she said, "Well I'm Emma Lou," and I said, "I've heard, [laughter from audience] all week long! How do you do it? I've heard your little kids and your big kids and your high school students, and it's just wonderful work." She said, "Oh, I don't know." And then she summarized how she did it with the most insightful pedagogical statement that I've ever heard in my life; I hope I will never forget it. She could have quoted who her teachers were and how much she made her students practice, and she said something disarmingly simple. She said, "Oh, I don't know, I just *love* the sound of the piano." [pause] Her kids *just loved* the sound of the piano. [emphasis his] She instilled in her students a passion for the love of the sound of the piano, and they played every piece they played as if it was the most wonderful thing they have ever done. That's how to keep the magic burning bright.<sup>8</sup>

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7. Blickenstaff, Interview 6 of 6.

8. Marvin Blickenstaff, *What to Do When the Magic Stops?*, VHS (Montana State Music Teachers Association Convention, 1994).

This teacher Emma Lou became emblematic for this tenet of Blickenstaff's philosophy behind piano study. Blickenstaff feels strongly that at its core, music is sound; the sound is what motivates and inspires humans to learn piano, and he furthers this belief by connecting musical sound to the expression of human emotion.

Beyond believing in the depth of music and its rootedness in sound, Blickenstaff posits music as inherently expressive and useful as a means to explore one's emotional existence. He stated, "I feel that music truly is created to give people insight into their life's experience and into their emotions."<sup>9</sup> He reflected on improving his student's ability to imitate his sound model, and in this article in *Keyboard Companion*, expanded his viewpoint:

I find that most of my young students are wonderful imitators. They delight in following my example, producing an expressive delay on a high note, a stretching at the end of a section, and the feeling of fade-away at the end of a piece. To them, these nuances mean that they are truly 'making music.' Indeed, that is literally the case: through those nuances, the music becomes effective and meaningful, and a 'message' is communicated. Sound becomes a truly human, personal expression.<sup>10</sup>

This instructional process of refining musical touch taps into the deep, emotional existence and personal interpretations of even his youngest students. In his notes for a presentation to the Oregon Music Teachers Association at the State

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9. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by author, Interview 1 of 6 (Collegeville, PA, November 16, 2009).

10. Marvin Blickenstaff, "When and How Do You Introduce Rubato?," *Keyboard Companion* 11, no. 2 (2000): 28.

Convention in 2006, Blickenstaff wrote that a variety of musical affects need to be taught, not just the loud and fast music often favored by students:

The value of music in our lives is that music informs us of the human experience. Music leads us to the sensitive, to the refined, to the spiritual. Our younger students need a rich diet of repertoire which will foster those responses. “Loud-fast” may be the icing on the cake, but it is certainly not the whole wheat flour which builds strong musical bones!<sup>11</sup>

For Blickenstaff, music is sound that expresses emotional meaning, providing profound experiences and enriching the whole scope of our emotional existence.

Blickenstaff’s definition of music deepens with the sincere premise that music is essential for educating our ability to feel deeply and for developing our souls. Blickenstaff does not avert this topic but rather embraces it and speaks firmly and passionately:

This is my philosophy; I think a meaningful musical performance nourishes our souls, and I say that in all sincerity. I feel very strongly about that. . . . I believe that there are lots of things that we do in our human journey that nourishes our souls and other things that we do that sort of shrivels our souls—it deteriorates the soul. And it is our job as teachers and friends and parents, you know, to nourish the souls of those around us, and I think that’s one of the things that music does. It really makes you a bigger human being.<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, when Blickenstaff discussed the relationship between successful performing and teaching in an article for the *American Music Teacher*, he wrote, “Teachers of performance and of pedagogy continually need to help students

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11. Marvin Blickenstaff, The Intermediate Student, Workshop Lecture Notes.

12. Blickenstaff, Interview 1 of 6.

develop sensitive ears and to correlate that with sensitive souls.”<sup>13</sup> For Blickenstaff, the power of music lies in its ability to enrich our lives, by freeing our souls and expanding our emotional existence through sound creation.

After hearing a student perform during a piano lesson, Blickenstaff explored the composition’s mood and emotive affect instantly with the student, regardless of where the student was in the learning process. In a lesson with Phoebe, who was studying out of *Music Pathways, Piano Discoveries C*, Blickenstaff immediately focused her attention on the title of her piece, “The Famous Haunted House.”<sup>14</sup> She became motivated to play with large dynamic contrasts and crisp staccato notes, and thus Blickenstaff made her performance emotive; while interpretation remained the pivotal focus, Blickenstaff was able to correct all inaccuracies in her note reading and rhythms. He used the following verbal cues during his coaching of the piece: “You are responsible for frightening us. . . It’s spooky. . . Climbing up some creaky stairs in the haunted house. . . You gotta play this slowly for it to be creepy.” The researcher observed that Phoebe’s sound was honed through Blickenstaff’s excitement and modeling and became depictive of the haunted-house theme.

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13. Barbara English Maris, “What Is the Relationship between Piano Performance and Piano Teaching?,” *The Piano Quarterly* 37, no. 146 (1989): 27.

14. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Phoebe, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff’s Home Studio, November 19, 2009).

Blickenstaff continually shifts the attention of his intermediate and advanced students from the routine of mechanics, directs them toward pure musical expression, and connects them with the spiritual depth of the music. An example of this occurred in his lesson with Alex, an adult student who was learning Robert Schumann's "First Loss" from *Album for the Young*, Op. 68. In this lesson, Blickenstaff focused the student's attention on the flexible, non-rigid pacing needed:

MB: Without playing the first note too loud, I wish you'd hold that note, and go. . . [MB demonstrates the sound of the musical gesture, while singing along.]

Alex: I see.

[Alex and MB play together. MB sets the pacing and timing of the phrases by singing and playing with Alex.]

MB: You play it that way and people's, their eyes well up a little bit. It's really beautiful because you're really expressing, I think, the content of that piece. It sobs and it sighs and it's so personal that you could never put this piece on a metronome because a metronome is a machine, and this is human expression.

Regardless of level, Blickenstaff is able to initiate a student's exploration of the composition's dramatic content. Because he defines music as sound *and* expression, Blickenstaff does not allow a note-accurate performance devoid of interpretation to qualify as a finished performance.

Blickenstaff does not eschew the profundity and poignancy of music in human life, and he encourages his students to connect with music in novel ways. Blickenstaff, when educating his college students in the art of teaching, began his

pedagogy courses by framing the importance of music within the piano lesson.

Blickenstaff explained:

At Goshen I used to start my piano pedagogy classes out, the first semester of piano pedagogy, asking my students, “What is music?” We’re [in] a piano pedagogy course; it’s a music education course. What is music? And we would define that, and usually the definition would come out something like, music is the expression of the total human experience through organized sound. And it’s that *total* [emphasis his] business that I would really like to try to get across to my students. It’s not just the happy and sad times, it’s everything, it’s the extension of that, it’s everything in between.<sup>15</sup>

In the fall of 2009, Blickenstaff’s students in the Program for Excellence in Piano Study (PEPS) at the New School were given an assignment to write an essay on

“What Music Means to Me.” Blickenstaff explained the project:

My dad used to use the phrase sometimes of ennobling one another. I think that’s what music does, if you can really grab on. Those kids yesterday in the PEPS class, I think music is ennobling their lives. Maybe before you leave [to the researcher] we’ll have a little chance for you to read over some of these statements of what music means to me; it just breaks your heart because they are so heartfelt. I purposefully told them that they could not sign their statements, but they had to make copies for everybody in class. So everybody in class has a little sheaf of statements from the rest of the classmates of what music means to me. And, doing them anonymously obviously meant that they could be more freely expressive. It was very touching.<sup>16</sup>

He believes that because music is sound and expression it has the potential to be profoundly meaningful to humans’ emotional and spiritual existence. Blickenstaff does not allow this belief to remain unspoken but rather makes it readily apparent in his own life and the lives of his students.

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15. Blickenstaff, Interview 1 of 6.

16. Blickenstaff, Interview 4 of 6.

### Music of the Western Fine Art Tradition

Blickenstaff's philosophy of music education at the piano includes the unabashed belief that Western art music, as opposed to popular music, provides the most intense aesthetic response. Classical music forms the heart of the repertory that he teaches, and he cultivates the ability of his students to perform in a style aligned with this genre. Blickenstaff iterated that "Western European classical music . . . [is] the music that has enriched my life, that's the music that gives me joy and makes me cry. . . . I would just hope to pass the baton onto my students, as I have experienced it in my life."<sup>17</sup> Blickenstaff even stated, "my goal is a music appreciation teacher, that [my students] learn to love this [Western art] music and that it means something to them."<sup>18</sup> In his parent's meeting at Goshen College, Blickenstaff would educate the parents of beginning piano students in the goals of his program. He relayed this important topic from his parent's meetings in two different presentations to teachers:

And I tell my parents [of beginning piano students] flat out, we are here to educate the children for an appreciation and involvement in Classical music, and I say unabashedly that I am proud that I am a musician and I think that Classical music has real nobility and spiritual value to add to the lives of these children who are starting out with us. I just say that plain. It's not extracurricular, it's vital. It's absolutely essential to the lives of the children.<sup>19</sup>

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17. Blickenstaff, Interview 1 of 6.

18. Ibid.

19. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Integrating What We Teach*, VHS (Goshen, IN, Goshen College, 1992).



I tell them that in my mind there is a basic difference between popular rock sound and Classical music sound. . . and that is that pop and rock basically has its attractiveness through a tangible rhythmic element and the lyrics. Classical music communicates to us and touches us as human beings because of inflected sound, nuanced sound. When music crescendos and diminuendos, or when you reach a chord that has a certain amount of dissonance and it resolves, that's a nuance that communicates a meaning to us.<sup>20</sup>

Classical repertoire forms the core of Blickenstaff's teaching literature. Blickenstaff guides his students through their first years of study into an appreciation of this repertory with the goal that after several years of study, they will gain enough ability to perform it.

In Blickenstaff's methodology, novices do not begin piano study with Classical masterworks. Music written by modern educators, while not of the Classical ilk, is created for young pianists, and Blickenstaff uses this genre of music during key instructional periods. "Hook the student with sound," Blickenstaff declared in a presentation on the transfer student and concluded, "then you can teach him Bach."<sup>21</sup> He maintains that teachers must aim for students to play even this supplemental music expressively; he takes care in selecting repertoire that meets these goals. At Goshen College, his pedagogy students were given an assignment to survey and study educational music. He wrote on their assignment sheet:

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20. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Piano Study's Magic Triangle: Parents, Teachers, Students*, VHS (Elizabethtown, PA, Elizabethtown College, 1992).

21. Marvin Blickenstaff, *The Transfer Student*, Workshop Lecture Notes.

No one -- repeat, **no one** -- can stay abreast of all of the new materials which stream steadily from publishers. . . . Quality is a major consideration, however. In our country (as opposed to Canada and Europe), publishers publish what will sell -- what the public wants -- and instead of educating the taste of the consumer, publishers have a tendency to acquiesce to the public's taste (this means the student's taste: teachers will teach what students seem to enjoy). Therefore, it is necessary for the teacher to look carefully at supplementary material for its musical quality and value as well as for the role it plays in the curriculum.<sup>22</sup>

In a question and answer session with Blickenstaff at Interlochen Arts Camp in 2010, a teacher asked him for guidance on how to help a newly-acquired, intermediate transfer student acclimate to her teaching. Blickenstaff suggested the use of supplementary music because it can captivate students with its ease and accessible sound: "And in the beginning, . . . I'd select Catherine Rollin, and I'd teach Dennis Alexander, and I'd do all kinds of things before I'd get into Mozart minuets. Because that's hard, and that's kind of boring. . . . And in this kind of situation, you hook the student with easy beautiful music. And then you go from there."<sup>23</sup> Ultimately, educational music is taught to bridge the gap into the Classical genre. Because music is quintessentially expressive, captivating musical sound is the cornerstone of his repertoire decisions, and he uses supplementary music as a pathway to the Classical genre.

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22. Marvin Blickenstaff, 1994, *Piano Pedagogy, Assignment #12, Class and Lecture Files from Goshen College.*

23. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Questions and Answers*, MP3 created by author (Interlochen, MI, Interlochen Center for the Arts, 2010).

Blickenstaff has voiced concern that the musical taste of students is declining and that teachers must educate the musical taste of their students through the use of standard repertoire (compositions of the Western art tradition). Blickenstaff encouraged readers of *American Music Teacher* to consider repertoire carefully, especially given the proliferation of supplementary materials available in numerous styles: "Just how that [supplemental music] leads to an enjoyment and familiarity with the 'classics' is a question for teachers to answer for themselves. Do we acquiesce to the musical taste of the student or do we educate the student in musical literacy ... or both?"<sup>24</sup> He boldly stated in an interview in 1989 with Robert Dumm that there is a tangible decline of taste in the arts in the United States:

The thing that gives me pause and the thing that I really worry about is the general tenor of the society and the general lowering of tastes in America, as far as our music is concerned, to a point that it almost becomes a moral problem. I think that what's going on in pop music and what is of general musical appeal to our people is appalling, and that we tolerate this, that MTV proliferates. . . . The thing that concerns me a little bit—in fact concerns me a lot—is what is being taught in music education in the schools. I have nothing against folk music and certainly have nothing against ethnic musics, but it seems to me like the pendulum in music education has swung so much that they are emphasizing these things that they no longer can be counted on as a resource for arts education as far as Classical music is concerned, either.<sup>25</sup>

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24. Marvin Blickenstaff, "How Has Keyboard Pedagogy Changed over the Last 20–30 Years? Part Two," *American Music Teacher* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 2005).

25. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by Robert Dumm, Interview at Shenandoah College Conservatory of Music in Winchester, MA (Audio Cassette held at Stetson University's duPont-Ball Library, 1989).

He has taken this dictum seriously, with great import, throughout his entire career, and reiterated in his 2002 interview with Nancy Bachus: "Part of my responsibility as a music teacher is to develop musical taste, which is impossible without a substantial amount of traditional repertoire."<sup>26</sup> Blickenstaff's students at mid-intermediate through advanced levels were assigned literature of the Classical genre, with a heavy emphasis on music of the Baroque through 1900. Yet, some of his beginning and intermediate students' repertoire included singular pieces in blues or jazz styles (those by Martha Mier and William Gillock) and arrangements of Christmas carols.<sup>27</sup> Blickenstaff's overarching objective is to educate the musical taste of his students, yet he assigns other music if the student is not prepared either technically or conceptually for literature of the master composers.

Blickenstaff, although aiming to teach all of his students works of the great composers, does not assign students difficult concert repertoire before they are sufficiently prepared. Because he exhorts that even easy educational music can be expressive and beautiful, he avoids assigning overly challenging repertoire and does not desire to accelerate learning beyond what is appropriate for the child. In his presentation on the intermediate student, he identifies with other teachers

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26. Nancy Bachus, "With a Passion for Teaching and Music Played Beautifully: An Interview with Marvin Blickenstaff," *Clavier* 41, no. 7 (September 2002).

27. Marvin Blickenstaff, Various Student Assignment Sheets (November 16–19, 2009), Personal Files.

without a judgmental attitude by explaining the temptation of assigning complex music too soon:

It is always the temptation: Can this bright girl who practices so diligently play Chopin etudes earlier than any of my other students? What about a Beethoven sonata, or the Mendelssohn concerto? . . . You may have been successful with the Mendelssohn concerto. But think of the repertoire that could have been learned while you were working all year long on the Mendelssohn. . . . It is a constant juggling act – what is good for the student vs. what bolsters our teaching egos. Each contest and audition we hear, there are astounding performances of advanced repertoire played by young children. Our heads are turned and we are being lured to think that accomplishment lies primarily in the loud and fast, Liszt and Prokofiev.<sup>28</sup>

The result is that these young students study few pieces per year, do not learn fundamental skills, cannot learn autonomously, and do not become self-motivated. Blickenstaff, in a stirring article in *Keyboard Companion*, expressed compassion for two students who transferred to his studio and had been taught in this fashion. Blickenstaff told the story of Keith and Bradley, both of whom were given special recognition for impressive repertoire they had learned. Yet, these two students did not have the fundamental skills to read music independently. Blickenstaff passionately acknowledged, “A life without Beethoven-how tragic!,” yet forces readers to consider the likely result; students hastily assigned advanced literature will quit lessons due to the frustration caused by not being able to learn independently. He challenges readers: “I sometimes wonder if we piano teachers are not guilty of exploiting our students for our ‘commercial’ goal. Is our goal in

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28. Blickenstaff, *The Intermediate Student*.

assigning difficult repertoire the public recognition of our pedagogical prowess?”<sup>29</sup> Amy Glennon, his colleague at the New School, commented that Blickenstaff’s teaching exemplifies this principle: “The thing about Marvin also, it doesn’t seem like he is interested in building up his own ego. With some teachers, they measure their success by how many students win competitions, he’s not like that. He really wants them to learn the art of playing the piano, and that’s really what it’s about for him.”<sup>30</sup> For Blickenstaff, any music that has expressive potential can have pedagogical worth, and well-selected beginning and intermediate compositions can lead a student successfully into the classical masterworks of Western Europe.

#### Musical Expression at All Levels

According to Blickenstaff, musical expression is the essence of piano study and music can be performed with emotional meaning regardless of the age of the pianist. “Beauty can exist in the playing of a six-year old or a college student,” Blickenstaff extolled, “and I have been touched by both.”<sup>31</sup> He is captivated by sound and enjoys in sharing these compositions with a student, even when the literature is basic enough that the youngest, inexperienced child can learn to play it. Musical expression is the focus of the lessons Blickenstaff teaches. In a written

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29. Marvin Blickenstaff, “How Does the Student’s Reading Level Influence Your Repertoire Assignments?,” *Keyboard Companion* 11, no. 1 (2000): 42–43.

30. Amy Glennon, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, March 18, 2010).

31. Bachus, “With a Passion,” 7.

summary of a teaching demonstration at the National Conference for Keyboard Pedagogy in 2001, Nancy Bachus wrote, “The focus of the lesson was always on the music, its expressive qualities and on listening.”<sup>32</sup> Blickenstaff’s stated goal in teaching is not to develop prodigies but rather is to develop human beings who have an ardent, personal connection to musical sound:

My goal is . . . that they learn to love this music and that it means something to them. And I think that’s why I’m so hell bent, if I dare say, on not tolerating just playing notes because I know that that doesn’t ring true in your heart and your soul. It’s when you make a meaningful, emotional statement—meaningful to me, other people would have to judge that—that’s what comes through. And so I really try to spur my students on to more intense expression, and what I would say, more projected in expression. Because I think that will then impact them too, and that experience will be a good experience.<sup>33</sup>

In Blickenstaff’s opinion, learning to create expressive musical sound is an essential component of successful piano study.

Blickenstaff is eternally captivated by the dramatic interpretation of music, regardless of its level of difficulty. He has an ability to project the essence of any piece of music and show an intense enjoyment and engagement with the music. During an interview with Blickenstaff the principal investigator shared, “One of things that’s struck me when watching your teaching is how even with the simplest piece you seem to be captivated by the musical qualities.” Blickenstaff replied:

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32. Nancy Bachus, “Teaching Demonstration by Marvin Blickenstaff,” National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy, (Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy, 2001) (<http://www.francesclarkcenter.org/NationalConferencePages/2001/blickdemo.pdf> accessed March 4, 2009).

33. Blickenstaff, Interview 1 of 6.

Oh. [pause] Yeah, [pause] it's music! [laughter] That's something that really, I have a really serious bone to pick with teachers who only want to teach advanced students because it's like they overlook the fact that Lynn Olson wrote a student's Chopin Nocturne or a student's Debussy Prelude with the sounds that he uses. . . . The little pieces are wonderful music, and I just think we're just doing such a terrible disservice to our students when we say, "Well, learn this piece and we'll go on for a few more years, and then I'll show you what *real* music is." . . . I *cannot* buy that.<sup>34</sup> [emphasis his]

For example, Blickenstaff wrote about the message of the intermediate piece "Novelette" by Russian composer Dmitri Kabalevsky in an article in *Keyboard Companion*. This piece is in a collection written for young piano students and would likely be studied by students in their fourth year of piano study.

Nonetheless, Blickenstaff spent time and energy analyzing its expressive content and exploring it with students. Blickenstaff wrote:

When I teach this piece and similar ones by Kabalevsky (e.g. Winter Song, Op. 27, No. 2) my students and I discuss what we know about life in Russia, and we speculate about the subject as well. We talk about the long, bleak, winters (despair), about the desperate longing for spring (hope), about the vast areas of tundra (loneliness), and about the volatile temperament that can rise to peaks of excitement and intensity and can plunge into the depths of depression. We then make some associations with the sounds in this piece. What is the feeling, or meaning, of the constant, inescapable left-hand rhythm and the slow, regular alternation of register from low-to-high and back again? Some students associate these things with a trudging movement, others with a heavy heartbeat. But we all agree that the slow tempo combined with the rhythmic motive sets the tone for great sadness and despair—a certain hopelessness.<sup>35</sup>

In a later feature article on teaching phrasing, Blickenstaff utilized repertoire from the easiest music (examples taken from *Music Pathways, Discovery A*) that students

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34. Ibid.

35. Marvin Blickenstaff, "How Do You Find the Musical Messages in a Piece of Music? Part II," *Keyboard Companion* 3, no. 4 (1992): 32.



would encounter in the first months of study, to advanced repertoire of Mozart, Schubert, and Chopin.<sup>36</sup> The subtext of this article is that repertoire of all levels can be inherently expressive through phrasing, which is a key to artistry at the piano.

It is typical for Blickenstaff's presentations on teaching and musical topics to integrate examples from repertoire at all levels of study to demonstrate sophisticated musical concepts. In *Interpretation through Analysis, Nature's Clues to Interpretation*, and *My First Sonatina*, Blickenstaff references musical examples from all levels of literature. In *Interpretation*, he incorporates examples from the beginning compositions of Lynn Freeman Olson through the advanced music of Johannes Brahms to support his thesis on how a thorough musical analysis informs meaningful performances.<sup>37</sup> In *Sonatina*, he includes easy sonatinas by Olson and Jane Bastien, giving detailed analyses of how artistry can be taught through these pieces for novices.<sup>38</sup> In *Nature's Clues*, Blickenstaff performs early intermediate through advanced repertoire, including suggestions for the interpretation for easy works such as dances from the Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach and advanced

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36. Marvin Blickenstaff, "Teaching Artistic Phrasing," *Keyboard Companion* 19, no. 1 (2008).

37. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Interpretation through Analysis, Part I-III*, Audio Cassette, (Goshen, IN, Goshen College, 1996).

38. Marvin Blickenstaff, *My First Sonatina: Performance Practices for Elementary Students*, VHS (Goshen, IN, Goshen College, 1994).

works such as the Chopin Nocturnes.<sup>39</sup> This amalgamation of piano music is a hallmark of Blickenstaff's educational approach, especially how he highlights the profundity of simple pieces alongside masterworks.

Blickenstaff's performances of repertoire convey the enthusiasm he has for music of any difficulty. During lessons and presentations, Blickenstaff frequently plays excerpts and portions of pieces to demonstrate features of the work. In response to the question "What was most memorable about Blickenstaff's playing?," an independent teacher with over 20 years of teaching experience submitted: "I have heard Marvin perform Mendelssohn and Grieg. The tone and the love that went into learning and sharing these small pieces was outstanding."<sup>40</sup> Lara Hall, a student of Blickenstaff's at Goshen College in 1989, recalled how Blickenstaff's performance of her repertoire assignment inspired her:

My favorite memory is sitting in the office watching him play La Rage [sic, likely "L'orage" by Frederich Burgmüller] (which was probably a very simple piece for him) and seeing him put his whole being into it and hearing how amazing it could sound. And deciding at that moment I wanted to play it as closely to that as I could.<sup>41</sup>

In a lesson with Tim, a high school student, Blickenstaff demonstrated the opening themes of Kuhlau's Sonatina in C Major, Op. 55, No. 3. Blickenstaff played the

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39. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Doing What Comes Naturally: Natures Clues to Interpretation*, CD, (Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Music Library, 2004).

40. Sara M. Ernst, "Survey for Teachers on Marvin Blickenstaff's Workshops and Masterclasses," (Online survey conducted via SurveyMonkey™, <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Blickenstaff1>, 2010–2011).

41. Ernst, "Survey for Students."

excerpt with a brilliant tone and a brisk allegro tempo. Following the performance, Tim smiled and laughed when Blickenstaff said, “with great spirit and fast!” Blickenstaff proceeded to demonstrate the practice tempo he expected to hear Tim perform with at the following lesson. Blickenstaff’s lessons are filled with moments where expression and sound are interlinked, regardless of the level of the music.

Blickenstaff is vocal in his fear that too many teachers neglect interpretation and music meaning in their students’ lessons, and hence, too many students abandon the piano. He is adamant that students who are not engaged in this “magic of music” will not be inclined to continue musical training. In his 1994 presentation *What to Do When the Magic Stops* to teachers in Montana, Blickenstaff explained what intrigues children:

Because I think the magic lies in the exciting sound of the music, and when we don’t capitalize on that and focus on it and build every lesson around that, we are indeed cultivating a potential dropout. So wherein lies this magic? In the sound. What it can express, how we manipulate it, how we feel about it and respond to it, and the excitement of learning about it, what sound can do, and how different composers combine those sounds. Children are innately curious; children are innately learners. If we help them explore and learn about how music is put together and how sound is created and the different affects, and that through sound that we experience a much greater human experience. A much greater look at life than what we would if we were just living in our little home town and playing a few little pieces. Music takes us far beyond our own personal existence.<sup>42</sup>

Through his various professional positions, Blickenstaff has developed an understanding of how many piano teachers neglect musical meaning. For instance, yearly job searches occur at the New School, and Blickenstaff watches the teaching

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42. Blickenstaff, *What to Do?*

videos of numerous applicants who seek employment. At an NCKP pre-conference seminar for collegiate pedagogy instructors, Blickenstaff summarized his thoughts on these teaching videos. He commented on how infrequently these young teachers trained students to delve into the meaning of the music:

In many of the private lesson videos I hear, the teacher talks about dynamics. But it is rare to find a lesson in which dynamics are related to the title of the piece or in which there is any discussion of the emotional **need** [emphasis from original] for those dynamic contrasts. It is as if dynamics exist in the abstract, disassociated from mood, feeling, and emotion. . . . But do not allow a descriptive title to remain unfulfilled by the sound we create. Otherwise we train our students only to be concerned about notes and rhythm—not the musical picture and emotion.

Music, for Blickenstaff, is a magical experience when it is performed expressively, because it brings both the listener and performer to a greater understanding of human emotion and existence. The message of Blickenstaff is that forgoing the artistic and emotive elements in favor of basic precision is an abomination and contributes to the rise of piano dropouts.

Demonstrated through their words, Blickenstaff's students imbibed the message that musical expression is the goal of piano study. Carol Lei Breckenridge, a student of Blickenstaff's at UNC-CH beginning in 1970, was profoundly affected by Blickenstaff's focus on musical expression. She wrote:

What I found unique about Blickenstaff's teaching was his emphasis on what is paramount in music: communication of the meaning of each passage. By this, it became clear that he considered expression the most important goal of playing the piano. To this day, I subscribe to this same

philosophy, and have tried to teach it myself at all levels—beginning, intermediate, and advanced.<sup>43</sup>

When his former students were asked to list three elements of piano playing that were frequently stressed, the answers included (number of duplications in parentheses): musical phrasing (6), feeling (3), understanding the piece (2), effect on audience (2), expression, energy, listening, singing tone, musicality, mood, putting feeling into the notes, emotional effect, emphasizing interpretation, engagement, emotion, and passion. The words of Blickenstaff summarize his goal: “We are teachers of sound, . . . we lead the way to musical expression. One could paraphrase a verse of scripture and say: *Teach musical response, and all these things will be added unto you.*” [punctuation and emphasis from original]<sup>44</sup>

In his lessons, Blickenstaff quickly engaged students in playing with a refined touch, teaching them how to perform with meaning through frequently modeling artistic sound for them to imitate. In *Keyboard Companion*, Blickenstaff wrote that his goal is to teach sound production, passing on to students the vocabulary of musical nuance:

A student comes to you in the studio and has a very limited repertoire of what that [expressive sound] means, and so it’s our job as teachers to constantly be opening that up and guiding that and refining it. So I think most of our lesson time is really spent on coming to grips with what is the

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43. Ernst, “Survey for Students.”

44. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Effective Teaching: A View from the Other Side of the Coin*, Workshop Lecture Notes.

proper sound to yield the desired expression. I think that's basically what our lessons are about.<sup>45</sup>

Faye, a late elementary student in Blickenstaff's home studio, played Sonatina No. 4 from *Beginning Sonatinas* by Lynn Freeman Olson, and she had learned the opening section during the prior week.<sup>46</sup> The opening section of this lyrical sonatina movement is comprised of many ascending scale figures; she playing them flatly, without nuance or shape. Blickenstaff used the word "swirling" with her and modeled the expressive sound. He worked with her step-by-step until the sound was achieved, having her first play only the right-hand swirling scales and then adding the left hand chords in a later repetition. Faye's posture and focus changed throughout the sequence; at first, she was rigid, staring intently at the music and playing somewhat robotically. Upon Blickenstaff's engagement with the descriptive content, Faye's posture loosened and she began to move with the sound and shape the ascending scales. Faye progressed from the mechanics of reading into exploring the delicate qualities of this piece. Blickenstaff wrote the word "swirling" on her assignment sheet and assigned for her to learn the middle section after he performed it for her.

This type of student engagement through coaching musicality was consistent throughout Blickenstaff's teaching with young students like Faye and

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45. Blickenstaff, Interview 6 of 6.

46. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Faye, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff's Home Studio, November 16, 2009).

more advanced students. With high-school student Beth, a similar scenario occurred. Beth had been studying Mozart's Sonata in B-flat, K. 570, long enough for it to be considered a "back-burner" piece on her assignment sheet.<sup>47</sup> Back-burner pieces are those that a student had completed but were to be reviewed regularly. She performed the second movement (omitting the final A section) with fluency and ease; although her playing had dynamic contrast, it lacked spiritual depth and emotional involvement. After discussing her favorite part in the music (which was the cadence that ends the opening section), Blickenstaff turned immediately to the emotive content, emphasizing the middle section where the tone suddenly changes from sweet and delicate to dark and dramatic. He lectured Beth extensively on the change of temper:

I just love the way he [the composer Mozart] ends so beautifully in the major [MB plays the final major cadence] and then it's almost like life changes, and you have this tragedy [MB plays the minor section]. And, it's not that I love tragedy, but I think the contrast is really stunning. And, if there's something true about life is that it's not all pretty. He was a mature man and had experienced that. And, what is this? [MB plays and sings the resolving major theme.] It's almost like angels singing, it's so beautiful! It's consolation to the tragedy that you experience here. If I would write one word up there, it would be to play this sweetly. [MB plays again.] In a Mozart opera, sometimes there would be a woman's duet that soars like that, and they're singing so beautifully. [MB plays again.]

Following this lecture, Blickenstaff coached Beth on musical touches and expression. The principal investigator noted how, just as in Faye's lesson, Beth's

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47. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Beth, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff's Home Studio, November 16, 2009).

sound production matured and her physical posture changed, becoming relaxed and engaged in the shaping of the sound.

Blickenstaff's tendency to focus on musicality is evident in his teaching as a masterclass artist. In a dynamic interchange with a young boy Morgan at the Montana State Music Teachers Convention in 1994, Blickenstaff was able to transform Morgan's performance of Clementi's Sonatina in G Major, Op. 36, No. 2, through a discussion of mood.<sup>48</sup> To explain the range of moods possible, Blickenstaff described a "happy scale," which he meant as a graduated measurement of mood from sad to very happy. After the student's complete performance of the first movement, the masterclass continued:

MB: Thank you very much Morgan. I might just put you in my suitcase and take you back home with me because I love it when students play so accurately. And there were just really not a single missed note, and that's really, really fine. So your memory's fine and notes are clean and clear and all that's really, really great. I want you to answer a really, really simple question. Is this piece a happy piece or a sad piece?

Morgan: Happy.

MB: Yeah exactly. Right [laughing]. Now I would like you to play the opening couple measures as if it were a sad piece.

[Morgan plays slower and softer.]

MB: Terrific. I would say that's maybe a very tuneful, songlike piece. Could you play it *really* sad? [emphasis his]

[Morgan plays much slower.]

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48. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Masterclass I*, VHS (Montana State Music Teachers Association Convention, 1994).



MB: That's very good. Now let's say on the happy scale, we've got this much distance [MB holds up his hands to show a vertical scale], and we say sort of happy, and medium happy, and very happy, and I would like for you to play this piece about the same tempo that you took it, but let's say that on the happy scale you were about here [MB mimes to the middle of the happy scale], and I want you to go up three notches on the happy scale, please.

[Morgan plays slightly faster than the original tempo, with a louder sound, and more lilt in the slurs. Morgan is now moving physically as he plays, no longer rigid as in his first performance.]

MB: [MB leans on music rack, looking at Morgan.] You may go home. [Morgan smiles and laughs, and the audience laughs, too.] No, that's wonderful.

Audience member: Yeah! [yelling, without solicitation]

MB: Now isn't that interesting that all you needed to do was think mood and your piece changed wonderfully?

Through an appeal to the "happy scale," Blickenstaff revealed Morgan's interpretative abilities and transformed the sound of this intermediate sonatina. Musical expression is the guidepost by which Blickenstaff makes many of his decisions as a music educator, whether that is what repertoire to teach, what goals to give a student in a lesson, or what message to give fellow piano teachers.

### In Service of Musical Sound

The principles that music is meaningful sound and music feeds the human soul are the founding tenets of Blickenstaff's philosophy, and coalescing from these beliefs is the precept that all other skills are subservient. Blickenstaff's goal in piano study is to integrate all aspects of playing into an ability to project a musical message. Blickenstaff eloquently stated, "We're making head, and heart, and hand

come together,"<sup>49</sup> and more concretely defined, "A good teacher educates a student intellectually, physically, and emotionally to become a well-rounded musician, and remains inspired by the music regardless of the student's accomplishment."<sup>50</sup>

Integration of these three areas of human life are unique to the arts, as Blickenstaff wrote in his notes to his lecture *Integrating What We Teach*:

Music lessons help integrate in the child's life the three most important characteristics that make us human:

we are physical beings -- a musician is a highly sensitized and developed athlete

we are thinking beings -- music study involves thinking, pondering, conceptualizing

we are feeling beings-- music is nothing without the emotional component

But the interesting thing about music study is that it does not treat these chief human characteristics in isolation, but it integrates them in a manner unavailable to us in school studies, athletics, and other extra-curricular work. One could make the point that we are most human when we are involved in the arts.<sup>51</sup>

Blickenstaff does not confine integration to advanced skills; congruent to his belief that expression can occur at any level, integration must occur at all levels:

Now the teacher's job as we integrate here is to try to bring all this together at all levels. You don't wait until the high school years to start teaching the two note phrase with the stress and the release, et cetera, et cetera. What

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49. Blickenstaff, *Integrating*.

50. Bachus, "With a Passion," 10.

51. Marvin Blickenstaff, Workshop Lecture Notes, *Integrating*.

we're trying to do is bring these aspects of understanding about how we learn, how we manipulate the gesture, and how we express at all levels.<sup>52</sup>

Integration combines an individual's technical, theoretical, and emotional understanding of the music being learned.

Blickenstaff's former students echoed several of these sentiments in their interviews and surveys. His students mentioned technique, style, form, and knowledge in connection with communication of the desired sound:

"He would, by asking questions, show you how to see how the music is marked, in terms of the slurring, staccatos, and to think about how the fingering is going to help achieve that, or to think about the tone quality that you want, more or less tone quality, and to think about how you'll have to use weight of the arm or less to achieve that, or what sorts of motions of the arm or the wrist, and all of those factors toward achieving the sound. Because it was really always the sound and the style that he was really most interested in." Tom Lohr, 1970s, UNC-CH<sup>53</sup>

"You would not ever consider playing something because you could technically without thinking first and foremost what you wanted to communicate and how it fit into the structure of the piece." Karen Zorn, 1980–84, Goshen College<sup>54</sup>

"The way he talked about everything was always in terms of making it musical. It was never technique for technique's sake." Mary Rose Jordan, 1988–99, private student in Goshen, IN<sup>55</sup>

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52. Blickenstaff, *Integrating*.

53. Tom Lohr, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, March 11, 2010).

54. Karen Zorn, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, March 16, 2010).

55. Mary Rose Jordan, interviewed by author (Skype Interview, February 1, 2010).

“While all of my teachers have emphasized that technical mastery leads to the best playing, Marvin was really strict on that point. There was no room for emotional mush. He had lots of ways of developing technical mastery, and I’ve never known anyone who put such a consistent emphasis on it at every age. This mastery, though, was a way of playing the music not only more accurately but better: it was just one step, often fudged by students, to loving the piece more and playing it in the best way possible.” Anonymous student, 1998–99, Goshen College<sup>56</sup>

According to these students, playing music was taught by Blickenstaff as a means for communicating musical expression with clarity and intention. While technique was emphasized and consistently developed, it was for the greater purpose of performing with a specific musical style in performance.

Blickenstaff posits that the integration of theory, technique, and musicality leads to pianists who are well-rounded musicians. “Technique is not an end in itself, it is a means to making music,” and Blickenstaff continued, “where theory exercises are not just putting answers onto pages, but they become creative exercises, using our theoretical knowledge for creative means. And all this leads to the end of becoming good music makers.”<sup>57</sup> For Blickenstaff, “good music makers” are musicians who are able to play with nuance and expression, where the theoretical knowledge and technical skill are used creatively for sound production.

### **Student Defined**

Blickenstaff holds unceasing convictions regarding who should study music and the piano and how a student’s study should progress. First and foremost,

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56. Ernst, “Survey for Students.”

57. Blickenstaff, *Integrating*.

Blickenstaff believes and lives by the motto that piano lessons must not just be offered to those students deemed “talented;” rather, music education is for all students. Secondly, Blickenstaff’s stance is that all students can be successful if the teacher upholds high standards for all regardless of the teacher’s perception of the student’s innate ability. Lastly, Blickenstaff maintains that a solid foundation in all aspects of piano playing enables universal success; a solid foundation must be taught from the initial years of study and even in the very first lesson.

#### Music Education for All Students

Blickenstaff’s integral premise regarding students is that music education is for all. There is no discussion of talent or ability, age or level; Blickenstaff simply believes and profoundly lives by this credo even though he is a nationally recognized figure who could easily limit his roster to the finest student musicians. Kathryn Sherer, Blickenstaff’s longtime colleague at Goshen College, witnessed in his teaching that there is “music in every child” and that every child “deserves the best teaching.”<sup>58</sup> When asked “Who should study music?,” Blickenstaff quickly replied: “The door is wide open. Because I really feel—Frances Clark says, ‘There’s music in every child.’ . . . And you don’t have to pass any kind of test to get in to my studio. You come and we’ll make music together. . . . If there’s room on my schedule

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58. Kathryn Sherer and Lon Sherer, interviewed by author (Goshen, IN, January 14, 2010).

and the telephone rings, I'll say, 'Well yeah, you come.'"<sup>59</sup> In informal discussions with the principal investigator, Blickenstaff shared stories and thoughts about his current students. He was honest about his students, characterizing some as fast-moving and talented and some as progressing slowly, needing much reinforcement; yet, Blickenstaff was equally dedicated to each student's success. Sam Holland, executive director of the Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy, aptly framed the significance of Blickenstaff's philosophy:

For somebody that is as high a level an artist and thinker about teaching as he is, there's an amazing humility about his character. In fact, one would think, Marvin Blickenstaff, nationally-known celebrity, recipient of all kinds of awards, big awards like the ARCT [honorary diploma from the Royal Conservatory of Music in 2007] . . . he said though he feels it is his responsibility to teach any child that comes to his house, as long as he's got room in his schedule, he'll take them. He's not going to screen them for talent or even commitment, that he will teach them.<sup>60</sup>

Scott Donald, his former colleague at the New School, felt that one of Blickenstaff's largest contributions to the field of piano pedagogy is that, after establishing such a reputation, Blickenstaff still teaches average students. Donald said:

It is *not just* [emphasis his] the cream of the crop, by audition select, student. He teaches anyone that will come through the door, which I think that speaks hugely, for what, he is still sharing with average students, his musical knowledge. It's not just those special students that get to work in his studio.<sup>61</sup>

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59. Blickenstaff, Interview 1 of 6.

60. Sam Holland, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, April 9, 2010).

61. Scott Donald, interviewed by author (The New School for Music Study, Kingston, NJ, November 18, 2009).

Elvina Truman Pearce, teacher and widely-respected pedagogue, framed the unique nature of Blickenstaff's position:

Unlike so many collegiate instructors who work primarily with older, more advanced and highly gifted 'piano-major-type' students, Marvin does not live in the rarified ivory tower of academia. He is always just as at home and as effective teaching traditional ('average') students as he is working with 'superstars.'<sup>62</sup>

Throughout his career of five decades, Blickenstaff has taught students of all ages and levels, without limiting his studio by any measure of talent or playing level.

An aspect of Blickenstaff's reputation is that he teaches young students and average students, despite that he has the expertise to teach college and graduate students. The significance of Blickenstaff's ability to teach young children was felt by his college students as they observed his demonstration classes of children. Cathy Albergo, an undergraduate student from UNC-CH who now is a widely-respected piano pedagogue, exclaimed, "Watching him do 'Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes' with six year olds, like, wow, he can take it down to that. . . . He can be as effective and wonderful with a six year old as he can with a doctoral level performance major."<sup>63</sup> Beverly Lapp, a student at Goshen College, reflected: "He just really was such a good teacher, and . . . I would be in *awe* [emphasis hers] as I watched those [the demonstration classes of children]. What I think blew me away

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62. Elvina Truman Pearce, interviewed by author (Email Interview, December 31, 2009).

63. Cathy Albergo, interviewed by author (Music Teachers National Association Conference in Albuquerque, NM, March 30, 2010).

is knowing how high-profile he was in advanced piano circles, and then to just see him interacting with these young children in such a beautiful way.”<sup>64</sup> Jenny L. Miller Hooley, also a student from Goshen wrote, “It was delightful to see such a sophisticated teacher have so much energy relating to children.”<sup>65</sup> Teachers echo this sentiment that Blickenstaff is an admired and credible presenter because of his continual teaching of children. Andrea Clinch, an independent piano teacher, indicated in her survey that “the fact that he teaches young students/beginner students gives him so much credibility—he is ‘in the trenches.’”<sup>66</sup> Even though throughout his career he has taught advanced students, undergraduates, and graduate students, Blickenstaff has also always served as a teacher of young beginners.

Blickenstaff holds the reputation of a master teacher who has an unprecedented ability to relate to and instruct students of *all ages* and *all levels*. During his positions at academic institutions, Blickenstaff worked with graduate students and undergraduate students (see Chapter III) and has always taught pre-college students. He enjoys teaching every level and acknowledges his ability interact with different age groups with ease. Blickenstaff commented:

I love teaching my upper level students, my college students, and we work really hard on aspects of technique and refinement of interpretation, and

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64. Beverly Lapp, interviewed by author (Goshen, IN, January 15, 2010).

65. Ernst, “Survey for Students.”

66. Ernst, “Survey for Teachers.”



it's very exciting. I love that literature. I would feel that something was definitely missing in my life if I only taught *Discovery 1A*. On the other hand, there is something about the excitement of working with those youngsters that I would feel tremendous deprivation if I did not have access to that. It's a wonderful thing.<sup>67</sup>

I guess there is a little button I push, now relate to a seven year old, and now you're relating to a middle school student. . . . I have received comments, very specific comments in masterclasses, that [teachers] thought it was kind of amazing, at the way I adjusted to the personality and the age of the student. . . . If I do it well, it's not calculated; I do it because of my respect for that person and where they are. . . . I think I adjust to their personality and their growth.<sup>68</sup>

Widely respected pedagogue and pianist Nelita True, faculty at Eastman University, commented that she is impressed by Blickenstaff's ability to teach all levels. As the piano area coordinator of the International Workshops, True had the opportunity to witness Blickenstaff's teaching during many summers, and she said: "Marvin [was] particularly valuable because frankly I don't know of anyone else in our profession who can handle all levels of piano teaching. He does advanced teaching, he does intermediate, he does beginners. . . . [that's] what most impresses me about him is that fact that he just handle *any* level."<sup>69</sup> Among the lessons observed by the researcher, there was a wide variety of abilities represented. The 21 students observed divide into these leveled categories: 4 elementary students, 7 intermediate, 4 early advanced, and 6 advanced. Throughout his career,

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67. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by Jane Magrath, VHS (The University of Oklahoma, ca. 1983).

68. Blickenstaff, Interview 4 of 6.

69. Nelita True, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, April 9, 2010).

Blickenstaff has taught students of all ages and gained acclaim for effective teaching across a vast range of levels.

### Success for All Students

An extension of Blickenstaff's conviction that piano study is for all students is that every pianist can excel if held to equilateral artistic standards by the teacher. Amy Glennon, Educational Director at the New School, expounded on Blickenstaff's criterion of excellence as it relates to raising the quality of any student's performance:

I call him the human laser beam. He can hear something, and he knows exactly what needs to be done, a hundred percent of the time. I find it truly amazing. . . . He just knows exactly what needs to happen, and then he goes at it until it happens, what he's looking for. . . . There's a tendency sometimes to decide in your mind which students are the really good students, and you're going to have the high standards for them, and then there are the other ones that are busy with their schoolwork, or this or that. And, he doesn't do that. He's got the standard; they all come up to it. He doesn't lower it. The fact that he doesn't do that lends a whole dignity to the whole process.<sup>70</sup>

Blickenstaff's ability to guide any student into projecting an artistic, musical sound has been witnessed also during his masterclasses. This recognition of teaching excellence has occurred at a national level, most recently in 2009 when Blickenstaff received MTNA's Lifetime Achievement Award. Gail Berenson, then president of MTNA, said during her introductory speech:

While maintaining the highest standards, he is able to entice and guide students into carefully listening and making the appropriate musical and technical decisions that will ultimately elevate their performance, all

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70. Glennon, Interview.

accomplished while having fun and ensuring that the students leave the stage feeling great about themselves and their performance.<sup>71</sup>

This process of raising a student's performance to a greater artistic level is achieved by Blickenstaff through internal listening to the ideal sound, setting clear goals for students, and being honest with his students. Blickenstaff described that it will impede the process if he's "dishonest by telling them that something is good when it wasn't."<sup>72</sup> Therefore, Blickenstaff "think[s] about the elements that make the piece special, . . . [tries] to imagine the sound of an ideal performance," and makes the lesson into "a process of raising the student's performance to that level."<sup>73</sup> Blickenstaff does not consider the talent of the student, nor the level of the student, but rather what needs to be accomplished to reach the ideal sound. This principle applies to all students, at all levels, without a mere mention of talent.

Teachers and students alike acknowledge Blickenstaff's ambition to strive for excellence from every student and appreciate this unilateral perseverance. The following statements are from students at Goshen College:

"Personally, I never thought I could do much at the piano. . . , [b]ut you made me believe I could do whatever you asked and you laid the groundwork that allowed me to achieve those goals from week to week,

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71. Marvin Blickenstaff, Gail Berenson's Introduction at the MTNA Achievement Award, Personal Files.

72. Blickenstaff, Interview 6 of 6.

73. Bachus, "With a Passion."

year to year. Success breeds success, or so you have said so many times.”  
Arlene Steffen, 1981–86<sup>74</sup>

“He was a gracious performer who took even me, a non music major OR minor and gave his best effort to teach and encourage me to be the best musician I could be, regardless of my musical status. I think that is a model teacher!” Lara Hall, 1989–90

“[He] took every student seriously, no matter what level.” Lara Troyer, 1990–92

“Uncompromising standards” and “demanded quality.” Anonymous student, 1994

“Not being a professional musician, I’d say that one of the big life-related take-aways [sic] I got from being his student was that I am indeed capable of performing at a high level and working hard to achieve goals.”  
Anonymous student, 1996–97

“He had high standards but seemed to operate with the idea that everyone else’s should be just as high.” Anonymous student, 1998–99<sup>75</sup>

Teachers who hear Blickenstaff present workshops and teach masterclasses also marvel at his conviction to artistry. An anonymous independent teacher of all levels of students wrote: “Marvin is speaking directly to the teachers who teach average students, always inspiring them to give as much attention and thought to them as they would to the supertalents [sic]. He believes and demonstrates that everyone can learn music and play expressively if guided this way.”<sup>76</sup> Teachers and students value how he does not tolerate mere correctness from any student, but

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74. Marvin Blickenstaff, Email from Arlene Steffen, Personal Files.

75. Ernst, “Survey for Students.”

76. Ernst, “Survey for Teachers.”

how he has inspired all towards superior musical expression and high standards regardless of the student.

Blickenstaff's lessons reveal a commitment to holding each student to the same educational standards. He has established a technical curriculum, titled *Technical Skills*, encompassing five levels of graded exercises and drills.<sup>77</sup> The levels begin with five finger patterns around the circle of fifths and expand into all major and minor scales in varied, complex patterns. Hanon and Czerny exercises, arpeggios, broken chords, and cadences are additional components. Every student, even adult hobbyists, worked with these activities and progressive curriculum. Blickenstaff adjusted the level to suite the student, modifying the number of keys given at a time and the number of drills assigned in each week. Each student began his or her lesson with a warm-up sequence comprised of Blickenstaff's studies.

Even with adult hobbyists who study the piano without professional aspirations, Blickenstaff remains committed to detail, precision, and musicality. For example, Henry was an adult hobbyist student of Blickenstaff's and was learning advanced literature for personal enjoyment.<sup>78</sup> Regardless of Henry's motivations for study, Blickenstaff focused Henry's attention on maintaining a proper hand shape. Henry had likely spent years playing with a curled fifth finger, yet instead of ignoring this, Blickenstaff insisted that Henry practice to correct this

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77. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Technical Skills: Level 1–5*, Teaching Files.

78. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Lesson of Henry*, DVD created by author (Kingston, NJ: The New School for Music Study, November 17, 2009).

problem. Henry's hand shape was addressed both in his Technical Skills and within Chopin's *Fantasia-Improptu*. During the Chopin segment, Blickenstaff worked with Henry at a slow tempo, helping him practice with the new hand shape; Blickenstaff stated the goal as, "You are going to play every note of the Chopin *Fantasia-Improptu* with your hand in that position. . . . I can assure you that you can play that a lot faster than [before]—the tension in your hand made my heart ache a little bit because it was so graphic!"

Blickenstaff has equally high standards for his students that are slower learners, although the pace of learning may be relaxed. His student Cathy, a student who Blickenstaff referred to as "educationally challenged," had recently begun studying "Für Elise" by Beethoven.<sup>79</sup> In agreement with his stated philosophy, Blickenstaff worked with Cathy on all the same skills and concepts as his other students; the only notable variation was that Blickenstaff required more frequent practice repetitions from her and often needed to reframe and demonstrate concepts repeatedly. For example, Blickenstaff worked with her diligently on the technical approach for the A minor arpeggio in the right hand from "Für Elise;" she had the correct notes and rhythms but was not playing with proper technique. He corrected her overactive arm/hand motion and addressed the movement of the thumb to ensure the desired sound and tempo. He elevated Cathy's performance to greater artistry by exploring nuance throughout the entire

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79. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Cathy, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff's Home Studio, November 16, 2009).

work. Blickenstaff's teaching reflects his philosophy that high expectations are needed for all students, regardless of age or talent.

The success of Blickenstaff's career as a masterclass artist is due to his ability to cause immediate and pronounced change in the playing of students. Holland spoke of Blickenstaff's skill in transforming a masterclass student's sound and attitude:

I've seen him get just incredibly beautiful, transformative changes in an average student's playing, just right on the spot. Take an intermediate student playing a Clementi Sonata in a very mundane pedestrian way. I've seen Marvin make a few changes that suddenly that Clementi was magic; it was sparkling, it had color and life and vitality, attention to detail. It was the same student . . . that just a minute ago would have bored you to tears, and would have been looking like they were bored themselves. . . . He's a really effective teacher, and it doesn't seem to matter whether a student is incredibly talented, because he'll take them and make them better, or less talented, he'll take them and make them better too. I think that's pretty rare.<sup>80</sup>

Students in masterclass situations are most often well-prepared, having memorized their repertoire for performance. Nonetheless, Blickenstaff can enhance recital-ready student performances to superior artistry.

For example, Blickenstaff instructed an adolescent girl who performed Chopin's Prelude in D-flat Major ("Raindrop") at the Goshen Workshops in 1999.<sup>81</sup> Her performance was accurate and expressive, containing much flexibility of tempo, yet Blickenstaff was able to pinpoint a major element that needed correction;

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80. Holland, Interview.

81. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Masterclass II*, VHS (Goshen, IN, Goshen College, 1999).

Blickenstaff lectured her on the importance of a steady pulse in the incessant repeated note that pervades the piece. He said, “I think, [student name], that one of the most important lessons for you in this piece, that would perhaps do the most to elevate this piece in your performance to a higher artistic level, would be for you to play this strictly with the metronome. . . . All you have to do is play a gorgeous right hand and a steady left hand.” Listening for melodic balance and steady pulse, Blickenstaff aided her in recasting her sound, persistently focusing her attention on listening during several guided repetitions; the audience applauded her freely upon this artistic transformation. Blickenstaff’s high standards, coupled with his ability to effect change in a student’s performance, allows each student to excel and heighten their abilities as a musician and pianist.

#### Knowledge and Skill as a Foundation

Blickenstaff believes the piano teacher is ultimately responsible for providing students a foundation of knowledge and skills that will facilitate their continued growth as a musician and pianist. Blickenstaff contends that developing a foundation is most crucial in the beginning years of study:

Any teacher, who takes a beginning student, is faced with the responsibility of building a foundation, and that regardless of what book that teacher is using, the foundation is absolutely laid by what we do in these first weeks. I think Frances Clark absolutely hit the nail on the head—she’s a genius—when she titled her book *Time to Begin*. She said there is only one chance to begin because after that initial impression has been made on the student,



you can't start over again. You repair, mend, try to redo, but there is only one beginning.<sup>82</sup>

This foundation begins with the first lesson, and teachers must thoroughly consider how all aspects of piano playing can be integrated into the first year of study, making continuous growth possible throughout all years of learning. In an article in *Keyboard Companion*, Blickenstaff answered the question “Does practice on a digital keyboard in the early years of study prevent a student from becoming a good pianist?” Blickenstaff writes that touch and tone are “the vehicles through which the music is expressed”<sup>83</sup> and need to be developed in the first year of study. Because touch and tone are addressed in every lesson, Blickenstaff argues that a digital instrument will not allow a child to explore these at home. Other teachers may consider touch and tone advanced concepts, not suitable for young children, but Blickenstaff postulates that because it is essential for artistic piano playing, touch and tone *must* be addressed during the initial years of music study. In addition to touch and tone, Blickenstaff asserts that teachers must have a well-rounded curriculum, one that incorporates all areas of pianism and musicianship.

*TERRAC: An Acronym for the Curriculum*

Providing students with a solid foundation in piano playing is of paramount importance to Blickenstaff, and he devised an elemental curriculum that addresses

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82. Blickenstaff, Interview, ca. 1983.

83. Marvin Blickenstaff, “Does Practice on a Digital Keyboard in the Early Years of Study Prevent a Student from Becoming a Good Pianist? Part I,” *Keyboard Companion* 6, no. 1 (1995).

all aspects of piano playing. This curriculum, given the acronym TERRAC, was taught to his pedagogy students and introduced to teachers in workshops. TERRAC consists of six requisite areas of learning: technique, expression, reading, rhythm, aural skills, and creativity. TERRAC, as Blickenstaff described, provides a curriculum through which teachers can give effective lessons by “sustaining this variety [of skills] in every lesson.”<sup>84</sup>

Blickenstaff instructed his piano pedagogy students to utilize TERRAC when planning lessons and demonstrated its importance in his first class of beginners. In this class Blickenstaff explored all elements of the curriculum through the following multi-faceted activities.<sup>85</sup> Students learned the basics of elementary **technique** through “fly-swatters,” which are arm movements from the elbow, “knocks,” which are hand movements from the wrist, and “clusters,” which is a name for a round hand shape with strong fingers. Students sang and tapped “Kum Bah Yah” for their initial experiences in **rhythmic relationships**, long and short, quarter and half notes. Blickenstaff taught “Engine, Engine Number Nine” by rote as preparation for **reading** notes that move either up or down. **Aural skills** were taught by listening for notes that move “upward to the right” or “downward to the left.” Finally, **creativity** and **expression** were dual objectives for the “You the Composer” assignment of this first class. In later classes, Blickenstaff also

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84. Blickenstaff, Pedagogy 101.

85. Ibid.

augmented these beginning students' ability to play expressively through coaching previously learned repertoire.

Additional activities of Blickenstaff's beginner courses were outlined in the class notes of Beverly Lapp, a student at Goshen College. During this pedagogy class period, Blickenstaff described each of the activities and his objectives as a teacher. Lapp noted the following activities beyond those listed above.<sup>86</sup> "Head, head, knee, knee" was a basic pulse game played where Blickenstaff kept a steady pulse saying "head, head, knee, knee, etc." while tapping that body part, and the children would echo and imitate. This taught coordination, rhythm, and feeling the pulse. The children all played "Engine, Engine Number Nine" together. Blickenstaff accompanied the class and used an introductory lead-in to set the tempo, starting at a variety of speeds, slow to fast. This taught ensemble work, listening to each other, and tempo. These additional activities in the first classes provided further instruction in **rhythm** (basic pulse activity) and into **expression** (playing music at different speeds). TERRAC, if addressed consistently throughout a student's development, will provide the groundwork necessary for student achievement.

During lessons and classes observed during the field research for this study, Blickenstaff continued to utilize the TERRAC curriculum. With all of his students, raw technical exercises began every lesson. The drills were also used as a vehicle to teach theoretical topics, such as key signatures and types of scales and chords.

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86. Beverly Lapp, 1988–1991, Group Teaching Notebook, Goshen College Preparatory Program.

In addition, theory (form and analysis) was often explored through the repertoire. Blickenstaff's students in the Program for Excellence in Piano Study (PEPS) were assigned theory activity pages from Keith Snell's *Fundamentals of Piano Theory* (published by Kjos). Expression was addressed recurrently, often by coaching a student through the piece at a slow, practice tempo. Stories, metaphors, and adjectives were used to engage the student in the expressive content. Rhythm was addressed with elementary and intermediate students when they tapped and counted the rhythm on the fallboard, whereas with advancing students, Blickenstaff asked them to count aloud while playing at a slow tempo. The principal investigator did not observe any young students learning to read. However in video tapes of classes and lessons, the investigator documented that reading games have been a perennial aspect of his curriculum; students create and dictate onto large, cardboard staff boards with oversized note heads.<sup>87</sup> For students beyond their second year of study, reading was addressed through the introduction of new repertoire. Aural skills, similar to reading, were introduced through games and activities with the elementary students. Composition and creative activities were regularly assigned to Blickenstaff's elementary students who were studying from *Music Pathways*; these activities are included within the

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87. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Avery, Ben, Cassie, Diana, DVDs created by Julie Knerr, (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff's Home Studio, June 21, 2006). Marvin Blickenstaff, *How Children Learn*, VHS (Goshen, IN, Goshen College, 2000). Marvin Blickenstaff, *My First Piano Class*, VHS (Goshen, IN, Goshen College, 1994). Marvin Blickenstaff, *Games Students Play*, VHS (Goshen, IN, Goshen College, 1992).

method book and named “You the Composer.” The students in his PEPS classes had composed lengthy pieces that were notated on the staff; PEPS B had composed pieces in the style of ragtime, and PEPS C had composed a piece for left hand only, featuring a melody and accompaniment. Composition activities with older students were extensive projects assigned with less frequency than the weekly studies of the elementary students. The researcher observed two additional aspects of Blickenstaff’s curriculum not indicated with the TERRAC acronym: music history and style (which could be considered an aspect of expression for advancing pianists), and music theory (which could be considered an aspect of reading for advancing pianists).

#### *Preparation for New Learning*

Beyond incorporating a well-rounded curriculum, Blickenstaff attests to the need to carefully prepare students for learning new concepts, techniques, and repertoire in order for a comprehensive skill set to develop. The teaching sequence preparation-presentation-reinforcement is a fundamental teaching process that ensures a student understands and retains new concepts, and teaching new repertoire is best achieved when teachers adequately motivate learning and guide students for their home practice. Blickenstaff summarized that “We are only as good in our teaching as our students are good at their home practice. The issue at

hand is how we train our students to become their own teachers at home.”<sup>88</sup> If teachers prescribe to careful preparation, students will become self-learners due to a thorough understanding of the concepts and processes needed to learn piano.

Blickenstaff’s piano pedagogy courses at the collegiate level contained ample instruction on the preparation of new concepts and new repertoire. In his piano pedagogy lecture notes, Blickenstaff wrote that preparation-presentation-reinforcement “is a most important concept, and one which facilitates the learning of beginning students. Without it, the teacher tells and names and instructs, and often the students do not grasp it because nothing has been filtered through their own experience.”<sup>89</sup> He further explained: “‘Discovery’ [of new concepts] for the younger child taking piano lessons is, to be effective, a highly guided activity. To become a profound learning-for-life experience, it involves a three-step chronological plan: Preparation-Presentation-Reinforcement.”<sup>90</sup> Similarly, introducing new repertoire to students is important at all levels of study. Blickenstaff prefaced a lengthy pedagogy lecture on preparation with these thoughts:

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88. Marvin Blickenstaff, 1994, *Piano Pedagogy, Lecture on Introducing Pieces, Class and Lecture Files from Goshen College.*

89. Marvin Blickenstaff, 2000, *Piano Pedagogy, Lecture 9-11, Class and Lecture Files from Westminster Choir College.*

90. Marvin Blickenstaff, 1996, *Piano Pedagogy, Session V, Class and Lecture Files from Goshen College.*

“Mistakes are a lack of understanding,” says Frances Clark. If accurate work is founded on thorough understanding, then it is our responsibility to prepare our students thoroughly for their new assignments. “Preparation” means the elimination of questions and foggy notions, the establishing of control and confidence over and about all elements of the new piece.<sup>91</sup>

Blickenstaff infers that teachers can foster independent learners only if students are carefully prepared for new concepts and new repertoire during the lesson.

Preparation-presentation-reinforcement is a common theme not only throughout Blickenstaff’s piano pedagogy course but also in his presentations to teachers. In *Building on a Firm Foundation: Preparation-Presentation-Reinforcement* presented at Goshen College in 1999, Blickenstaff utilized video footage of his first year classes to demonstrate the initial step of preparation.

Blickenstaff states that the first step of preparation is never printed on the pages of a student’s method book. His notes from the workshop indicate:

In the elementary years, this is the step which is **not** written in books, for books start with the **presentation** of ideas. This **preparatory step** is the point at which the teacher is indispensable—for the books do not tell you

- a) to prepare
- b) how to prepare
- c) how long to prepare

We’re on our own, folks!! [emphasis from original]<sup>92</sup>

The teacher must consider all upcoming knowledge and skills, creating activities to prepare students for learning the new concept.

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91. Blickenstaff, Piano Pedagogy, Lecture on Introducing Pieces.

92. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Building on a Firm Foundation: Preparation-Presentation-Reinforcement*, Workshop Lecture Notes.

During *Building on a Firm Foundation*, Blickenstaff describes each step in detail. Preparation is completed through activities, without the name of the new concept and without the notation (occasionally a pre-notation symbol is introduced); it is experiential in nature, using the “body, hand, mind/eye” in exaggerated activities. Example videos of a class of six beginning students exhibited several preparation activities. Two of them are outlined below:

Preparation for reading, finding line and space notes:

MB has students on the floor, each with a large cardboard staff and three large black circles for note heads.

MB has students place the note heads on a large staff, saying “Fit the note head in a space so that it doesn’t touch a line” and then “Arrange them so that a line runs right through the belly of a note head.” MB has students arrange two note heads, one of each variety, saying “Those are obviously different . . . What could we call them?” He guides students to answer line notes and space notes.

MB asks the students to place the note heads on lines and then sings what each student has notated. MB asks them to do the same but with spaces, singing each one. Then MB sings three repeated notes and asks students to put these on a space and then a line.

Preparation for playing skips (interval of a third):

MB has students at desks with wooden keyboards. MB plays a game called “Trip Around the Hand” where the student wiggles the correct finger based upon the direction he has given.

MB works with students on feeling skips in the hand by asking guided questions: “Start on finger 1 and go up a skip, what finger are you on?” MB continues with several guided skip questions.

MB makes the activity more complex, saying “Now, I’m going to give you a whole bunch of directions and you have to wait until I ask you, and we’ll see if we end on the same finger.” The students respond correctly and MB says, “We stayed on the trip together!” MB asks



questions using fingers 1, 3, and 5, and then a second time with fingers 2 and 4.

The teaching segment ends with combining steps and skips in the same “trip.”<sup>93</sup>

Method books, according to Blickenstaff, contain the presentation of a concept. In this same workshop, he states that presentation includes the following activities: “reading, playing, hearing, feeling/reacting, and naming.” He shows example presentation pages from method books: presentation of a dotted half note in “Winter Fun” from the *Music Tree* by Frances Clark and Louise Goss, presentation of legato and phrase in “See-saws” from the Alfred’s Basic Piano Course, and presentation of key signatures and hand positions in Robert Pace’s piano method.

Reinforcement is accomplished through what Blickenstaff describes as “moving, singing, hearing, creating, reading, playing, and spiraling to related concepts.” Blickenstaff used example videos from the same class to display reinforcement drills:

Reinforcement of pitch by linking the ear and hand in play-backs:

MB has two pianos at the front of the room. He is seated at one and the children are at their desks with wooden keyboards.

MB has the students intone the pitch middle C to the words, “This is the sound of middle C.” [This is reinforced each class, to develop the students’ relative pitch.] MB calls a student up to the second piano.

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93. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Building on a Firm Foundation*, VHS (Goshen, IN, Goshen College, 1999).

MB plays a three to five note pattern in C position (4 beats). The students sing back (and play on a wooden keyboard) while the student at the piano plays the pattern back.

A second student is called to the piano and the first student returns to the desks. While they students change positions, MB plays the next melodic fragment. This is completed in a constant rhythmic pulse, even when different students are called to the piano. The students hurry up to the piano, not missing a beat. All students are given a turn.

Reinforcement of skips (the interval of a third) with a composition activity, "You the Composer:"

The previous week, each student was assigned to create a piece titled "Checkers." The students are at their desks, listening while each performs his or her composition.

The first student performs his version of "Checkers," playing a variety of harmonic thirds throughout many octaves on the piano. MB asks "Which hand won?," allowing the first student to describe the story of his composition.

Other students are called to perform their piece [not all shown on the tape].<sup>94</sup>

Other reinforcement drills shown during this workshop include a movement activity and a game of note recognition. During the movement drill, students responded to Blickenstaff's piano playing by marching and clapping based upon aural cues in the music. The note identification activity required the students, divided into teams, to respond quickly by playing and naming the note on the flashcard. Blickenstaff believes preparation-presentation-reinforcement is essential because it facilitates attainment and retention in all students and because children learn best through experience and discovery.

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94. Ibid.

In addition to devoting ample time to preparing learning, Blickenstaff's pedagogy students were given a forthright explanation of how to effectively introduce new repertoire to a student. Blickenstaff defined the facets of understanding that must be fostered during this presentation of a new piece:

There are several kinds and levels of understanding:  
 technical -- the shifts, the position  
 reading the notation -- understanding intervals, rhythms, keyboard location  
 rhythmic -- recognition and feeling the beat  
 emotional -- identifying mood with the sound; taking clues from the title and lyrics<sup>95</sup>

He continued his lecture by providing a list of example activities, each to promote a different facet of understanding. Practice steps were also discussed in terms of the following priorities: accurate rhythm, seeing same and different patterns, analyzing form, and feeling technical gestures and movements. He challenged his pedagogy students to avoid assigning pieces without any introduction, regardless of time constraints:

One only shudders when one hears "*Sorry but we have not had time to discuss this piece. Just go home and learn the notes.*" We all get caught in the bind of time, and it is true that not every piece is a "presentation piece." But every piece not discussed and "practiced" or "experienced" in the lesson is a potential invitation to inaccurate reading the first week.<sup>96</sup>

Spending time in the lesson on new music will increase the effectiveness and success of the student's practice time between lessons. Therefore, preparation and

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95. Blickenstaff, Piano Pedagogy, Lecture on Introducing Pieces.

96. Ibid.

introduction are essential to Blickenstaff because they enable all students to succeed in their piano studies.

This approach to new learning is promoted by Blickenstaff in his workshops for piano teachers. Often, Blickenstaff gives an anecdote regarding young children learning to write the letter “W” to stress the importance of proper preparation. As told in 1992 at a music symposium:

How do children learn best? . . . and that is when children have correct first experiences. A very interesting piece of research went on a few years ago, in which some educational psychologists were trying to check this out: does it really make a difference for a child to learn something incorrectly first and then have to correct it, versus a child learning something correctly first and being able to capitalize on this? With some preschoolers, who were beginning to recognize and draw their letters, they did their research. There was one control group in a preschool class in which they were to draw . . . the capital letter W. They were allowed to draw it first in any way they wanted to. . . . Almost nobody got it right first. . . . They were very patient . . . . Control group number two, given same letter W, . . . but the real difference was, hey kids, we’re going to learn to draw the letter W. Let me take your arm and . . . [show you]; let’s try it again, until they were on their own. . . . [For] Group two with the controlled first experienced . . . it took between 40 and 60 times . . . before they could do it on their own. [The first group with the incorrect first experience], it took them between 1200 to 1400 times.<sup>97</sup>

Blickenstaff tells this anecdote in presentations to underscore the importance of guiding young students carefully. Thus, piano lessons do not amount to correcting errors but rather preparing the student for accurate practicing.

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97. Blickenstaff, *Piano Study’s Magic Triangle: Parents, Teachers, Students*. This anecdote, although the original research source cannot be traced, is told by Blickenstaff to highlight the importance of correct first experiences when learning. Telling stories and relaying information in a conversational manner, is a common trait of Blickenstaff’s presentation style.

As stated in his philosophy, Blickenstaff introduces repertoire carefully to his piano students. Faye (approximately age nine) was in her second year of lessons and studied out of *Music Pathways, Piano Discoveries D*. Evident from her ease of reading, ease in counting as she plays, and ability to expressively alter her sound, she had a strong musical foundation. Faye was assigned a new piece “On the Shimmering Sea” from *Piano Solos D*, and Blickenstaff introduced this piece to her:

MB: How do you count this piece? [It is in 6/8.]

Faye: Tapity. [“Tapity” is the three-syllable word used for counting 6/8 in *Music Pathways*.]

MB: Exactly. [MB closes the piano fallboard.] You’re going to say, 1-2-tapity-play. [This is a 2-measure count-off, counting 6/8 in two pulses per measure.]

[They count off before she begins. They tap and count together on the fallboard.]

MB: You are incredible. [MB opens the piano fallboard.] Give me your lead-in.

[She counts and sight-reads correctly until the middle section.]

MB: [stopping her] It’s actually an F. This is treble C, and you go up a fourth.

[She plays the correct notes and continues.]

MB: [stopping her for a second incorrect note] Where is this? It’s below high C. [She corrects the notes.] That’s right. Tapity tapity ta.

[She continues to play and count.]

MB: [stopping her] Okay, you’re missing one very important thing. I’m proud of you that you got the right notes, but this is [MB plays loudly] and this is [MB plays softly].

[She imitates and continues.]

MB: And then you clear your pedal, and you get some new notes.

[She continues playing and counting through to the end.]

MB: Thank you. I will remember this all evening. You've learned so much. Can you imagine a year ago trying to play this piece! . . . One thing that I want you to be really careful of is you're really good at holding the pedal, and I'm not sure you lift the pedal when you're supposed to. This shows you right when to lift. [MB points to the pedal markings in the music.] . . . I love the sound you got [MB demonstrates the forte piano section again.] . . . Before we finish this piece, I really think it has to go faster. [MB demonstrates a fast tempo.] Would you try the first two measures?

[She plays.]

MB: Play it louder, he [the composer] wants a bright sound. [MB demonstrates, and she copies. ] . . .<sup>98</sup>

Through this segment, Blickenstaff ensured that Faye could execute the rhythm and read the notes. He provided Faye with a musical sound ideal, with goals of dynamics, clear pedaling, and a fast tempo. In addition, the three primary practice steps were established: (1) tap and count, (2) play slowly with expression, (3) play at performance tempo. Blickenstaff, through his first years of lessons with her, provided Faye with a strong foundation in the skills of note reading and counting. His preparation of her work on this new piece at home will allow her to learn the piece quickly, accurately, and musically. It is this type of preparation that Blickenstaff believes is of paramount importance because students, regardless of their predilection towards piano, will learn to perform with precision and musicality.

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98. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Faye.

### Teacher Defined

Throughout his career, Blickenstaff has indicated explicitly in his writings, courses, and interviews, and implicitly through his own career, what constitutes an effective teacher. When the researcher asked Blickenstaff to identify who should teach piano and what prerequisites teachers should possess, he responded:

I would say that one of the first requirements is somebody who just really, really loves sound. . . . You don't teach piano because you need a little extra money and you've had a few piano lessons yourself, okay. [long pause] Then I would say that it is truly a prerequisite before you can teach piano to have some piano pedagogy because somebody has to lead your mind to think about the steps of the learning process. . . . If not, what will happen, is that you will teach exactly the way you were taught.<sup>99</sup>

This definition is further illuminated in his course syllabus for piano pedagogy. At Goshen College in 1994, he stated this objective at the beginning of the document:

There are many factors which combine to produce effective piano teaching. The teacher must first have a desire to teach and be a well-informed, skilled musician. The successful teacher is able to anticipate and analyze problems and to provide experiences which help the student avoid or solve those problems. In addition, a productive relationship between student and teacher involves a sensitivity and understanding of the student's interests, involvement, and learning styles.<sup>100</sup>

Blickenstaff not only feels that teachers must be enthused about music, they must be educated and skilled in performance and pedagogy and be able to forge a successful working relationship with the student. Additional aspects of Blickenstaff's teaching style that contribute to his effectiveness are how he

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99. Blickenstaff, Interview 1 of 6.

100. Marvin Blickenstaff, 1994–2000, Class and Lecture Files from Goshen College.

treasures the personal relationships with his students and openly gives of his time and expertise.

### An Educated Expert

Blickenstaff calls himself a “music educator” and believes that teachers must be skilled in piano and be exposed to piano pedagogy. He bemoans that during his career as a student, he only had one pedagogy course. This was largely a product of his generation because in the 1950s, piano pedagogy was not an area in which degrees were awarded. Blickenstaff is a pedagogue in the generation directly following the first master teachers specializing in pedagogy, such as Frances Clark (1905–98) and Robert Pace (1924–2010). It is actually surprising that he received pedagogy instruction as a mandatory part his Bachelor’s degree from Oberlin University (see Chapter III, College Years). Nonetheless, Blickenstaff has taught decades of piano pedagogy courses to upcoming piano teachers through his years as a faculty member at UNC-CH, Goshen College, and several other post-secondary institutions (see Chapter III). Throughout his career, Blickenstaff has always taught piano and piano pedagogy while remaining an active performer and teacher of children, even during his positions in academia. In fact, performance and pedagogy are truly inseparable, according to Blickenstaff. Beverly Lapp, a pedagogy student at Goshen, indicated that the performance and pedagogy were contiguous: “They felt really connected, the pedagogy and performance, which I think is how it should be ideally. And he would also make it very clear—he would



tell stories of great pianists who didn't know how to teach children—that this was important. I think because we saw him teaching children, it was much more convincing.”<sup>101</sup>

### *Knowledge of Piano Pedagogy*

Blickenstaff has provided stellar piano pedagogy education to a vast number of college students, providing both academic knowledge and a teaching practicum. Sam Holland, past director of the New School and executive director of the Frances Clark Center, commented on Blickenstaff's ability to train teachers. To maintain the high standards set by Clark and Goss, the early board of the Frances Clark Center sought to invite the most highly respected pedagogues onto their board, and Blickenstaff was their choice as president. Holland compared the outstanding training occurring within the Frances Clark school of thought to what Blickenstaff did with his college programs:

In a way, there are a lot of pedagogy programs that have proliferated since the 1970s, but frankly, from our point of view [the Frances Clark philosophy], most of them miss the point. They'll involve teaching performance and they'll do a survey of methods, and they may do some kind of a literature survey, and there may be some kind of a teaching internship. But very few approached that subject with the kind of discipline and overarching rigor that Frances Clark stood for, that Richard Chronister stood for, and that we know that Marvin stood for in the programs that he developed, and was developing at North Carolina, and really did develop at Goshen. We could look at the Goshen program and compare it to the

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101. Lapp, Interview.

program at the New School, and say, these are not identical, but boy, they sure are close.<sup>102</sup>

Blickenstaff's former collegiate students at UNC-CH and Goshen also held his courses in high esteem. Joel Harrison from UNC-CH said:

The training Marvin had provided in his pedagogy . . . has been helpful throughout my collegiate career, cause I actually did have to teach pedagogy course now and then, when I was a university professor. . . . So, really his pedagogy course was really terrific, really, really, really good. That gave me a foundation. . . . It was exposure to the literature in a graded way. . . . I thought you just learned to play the piano, but there really is a method to how some people teach, and they have put it into print. There are different philosophies about how to teach people to play the piano, and how to learn to read music, and you know, so you get into cognitive theory and all kinds of things.<sup>103</sup>

Karen Zorn from Goshen described his classes as “an encyclopedic experience in learning how to teach,”<sup>104</sup> and Arlene Steffen, now an independent teacher in California positively reflected on how Blickenstaff prepared them to teach the young students: “It wasn’t like he was just throwing you into it, okay, here, teach. Here’s how we are going to do it, watch me do it, now you plan to do it, you do it, and we’ll talk about how you did it. So it was a complete circle, you got everything.”<sup>105</sup>

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102. Holland, Interview.

103. Joel Harrison, interviewed by author (Music Teachers National Association Conference in Albuquerque, NM, March 28, 2010).

104. Zorn, Interview.

105. Arlene Steffen, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, January 18, 2010).

Teachers who were surveyed on the characteristics of Blickenstaff's workshops also felt that he was an expert in pedagogy. Teachers celebrated Blickenstaff's workshops, describing them with the following adjectives, terms, and phrases (duplicate responses counted parenthetically): knowledgeable (2), extremely knowledgeable (2), informative (2), knows what he is talking about, well researched, gives a vast amount of information, depth of knowledge, expertise, thorough, detailed, very practical and helpful, offered so much tangible information, keen insights. The piano pedagogy training provided by Blickenstaff is reflective of his expertise.

#### *A Pianist who Practices*

Blickenstaff is an expert pianist and has performed recitals on a regular basis throughout the majority of his career. As Blickenstaff stated in his interview with Bachus, "All great teachers are, and always have been, fine musicians. . ." <sup>106</sup> During many phases of his career, he performed full solo recitals on an annual basis (see Chapter III). A review of his playing, published in the *New York Times*, documented his skill in advanced repertoire and musicianship. The reviewer wrote:

Most of the time you can identify a first-rate pianist by his first note. There is a certain unidentifiable note authority that comes only with knowledge of one's abilities and the repeated assurance one is doing things right. Last night at Town Hall, Marvin Blickenstaff announced himself an expert with

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106. Bachus, "With a Passion."

his first note and, bearing out the theory, sustained the first impression throughout a sizable and very difficult program.<sup>107</sup>

Holland said:

First of all, he's a superb performer. He plays the standard repertoire with great artistry, and great maturity, and great understanding and technical mastery. I've heard him play the third Beethoven Piano Concerto, I've heard him play large solo recital programs. For somebody who is not full-time as a concert artist, he just plays incredibly well. . . . He's just such a beautiful pianist.<sup>108</sup>

His students were also impressed by his playing and performing abilities. Arlene Steffen, student at Goshen College explained how his performances, practicing, and investigation into music impressed her: "His performances were also so solid, they're so musical and interesting, the variety of literature that he exposed us to. It wasn't just his practice that he invested, he studied."<sup>109</sup> Blickenstaff performed a solo recital in November of 2010 at the New School and at the South Dakota Music Teachers Conference, for which he was the conference artist. This program consisted of two Scarlatti Sonatas in A major (K. 208 and K. 209), Sonata in A Major (Op. 120) by Schubert, two pieces by Ravel (*Jeux d'eau* and Toccata from *Le Tombeau de Couperin*), and Chopin's complete preludes, Op. 28, (in celebration of Chopin's birth year).

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107. RTJ, "Blickenstaff Gives Piano Recital Here," New York Times, April 10, 1969.

108. Holland, Interview.

109. Steffen, Interview.

Blickenstaff is indeed a pianist of the highest caliber, who has full command of his technique. Blickenstaff's presentation, *Technique for the Developing Pianist*, demonstrates his in-depth understanding of piano technique. In the presentation, Blickenstaff condenses a piano technique into three "technical axioms:"

No. 1: Fingers work easiest when guided by a larger gesture.

No. 2: Most notes/passages can be played in a variety of ways. The performer's task is to find the easiest most efficient way.

No. 3. Use the minimum amount of effort to accomplish the musical goal.<sup>110</sup>

He identifies in this presentation a "vocabulary of gestures," which name and define all of the physical movements that are possible at the keyboard. They are:

Out-Around – wrist moving outward to finger 5

Rotation – small from the elbow, large from the shoulder

Fingers only – finger swings from the knuckle, as a unit

Drop/lift – small from the wrist, medium and large from the forearm and elbow

Push – usually from the key surface

Throw – hand knock and wrist lift<sup>111</sup>

These gestures form the basis of his technical approach, and in this presentation, Blickenstaff demonstrates all of these within Kuhlau's Sonatina in C Major, Op. 60, No. 3. Not only does Blickenstaff have the expertise to utilize these technical principals in his own playing, but also Blickenstaff distills his approach into technical axioms and gestures for even the youngest students, such that students build these technical skills from the first lesson. Furthermore, he can readily

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110. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Technique for the Developing Pianist*, Workshop Lecture Notes.

111. Ibid.

explain these concepts for others to understand, whether it is for his students in a lesson, or for teachers in a workshop.

In addition to performing large works in recitals, Blickenstaff can demonstrate advanced repertoire with ease and fluency during piano lessons. Lara Troyer, student at Goshen College, wrote: "I was amazed at his knowledge; his ability to sit down beside me at the other piano in his studio and play, from memory, whatever I was playing." During many lessons of Blickenstaff's most advanced students at the New School, Blickenstaff demonstrated his ability to perform even the most difficult passages and techniques with ease. In Neil's lesson, Blickenstaff demonstrated, by memory, passages from Mendelssohn's Rondo Capriccioso, Bach's Italian Concerto (first movement), and Chopin's Scherzo No. 1 in B Minor.<sup>112</sup> In Henry's lesson, Blickenstaff performed passages from Brahms's Intermezzo in E Major (Op. 116, No. 4) and Chopin's *Fantasia-Impromptu*,<sup>113</sup> and in Iris's lesson, Blickenstaff modeled passages from Schubert's Impromptu in G-flat Major (Op. 90, No. 3) and Haydn's Sonata in E-flat Major (Hob XVI: 52).<sup>114</sup> Blickenstaff is a skilled pianist, manifested through his own performances and in his lessons with students.

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112. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Neil, DVD created by author (Kingston, NJ: The New School for Music Study, November 18, 2009).

113. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Henry.

114. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Iris, DVD created by author (Kingston, NJ: The New School for Music Study, November 17, 2009).

Despite his own advanced skill in playing, Blickenstaff believes that all teachers must be engaged in regular practice but does not state that all teachers must be high-level performers. In an article in *Keyboard Companion* regarding his own practice and why he continues to practice, Blickenstaff wrote:

I feel a three-fold motivation stimulating my practice—there is the purely personal, the professional, and the pedagogical. Most of us feel that way, I am sure. One of my colleagues refers to practice as a “personal ritual,” pointing out that our lives are filled with rituals, and for the musician, practice becomes a meaningful ritual in his/her life. When several days pass during which I cannot find time to practice. I feel something essential missing. I am not “whole.” I am less myself without that personal ritual. Further, I discover much about myself during practice about my body, about my responses, about my learning style, about my mind, and about my “soul”—my emotional responses and sensitivities. Much like the jogger, there is something personally satisfying about keeping in shape.<sup>115</sup>

In the same article, he compelled teachers to consider how essential personal practice is to being an effective teacher: “Practice is a bit like a rolling snowball—it accumulates proportion. My practice not only makes me a more complete musician, it enables me to be a better teacher and thus stimulates better work from the student.”<sup>116</sup> These reasons for insisting upon practice from teachers are further clarified in an article in which he encourages teachers to practice the pieces they are assigning their students, so that they have the ability to

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115. Marvin Blickenstaff, “Describe Your Own Home Practice. Why Do You Do It?,” *Keyboard Companion* 3, no. 1 (1992): 12.

116. *Ibid.*

dynamically model an artistic performance.<sup>117</sup> Blickenstaff does not believe all teachers must possess an advanced technical ability to perform concert-level literature, but he does believe in the importance of being able to model and demonstrate student pieces effectively.

*Related Areas of Expertise*

Beyond his knowledge in pedagogy and pianism, Blickenstaff possesses a keen literacy in the areas of piano literature, technique, and performance practice. As Louise Goss indicated, the faculty at the New School utilize Blickenstaff as a resource on these topics:

He is the person to whom anyone of the faculty can turn for that kind of help; interpretive help, technical help, musical help, theoretical help, whatever it is that they need to know to go to the next step, he has it. And not only he has it, but he can very quickly convey it [laughter]. Just amazing, just amazing! So, his influence on the faculty is that he stands head and shoulders above any else from the stand point of what he knows about literature; he is really an expert in the literature, and in performance style, and in the technique that it would take to bring that into life, and we're just all in total awe of these qualities which are beyond anybody I know.<sup>118</sup>

Many of Blickenstaff's presentations that he has given around the country to pianists and teachers combine all areas of his expertise. An example is his lecture on the complete preludes of Chopin.<sup>119</sup> During this presentation, Blickenstaff

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117. Marvin Blickenstaff, "For What Purposes Do You Play for Your Students?," *Keyboard Companion* 8, no. 3 (1997).

118. Louise Goss, interviewed by author (Kingston, NJ, November 18, 2009).

119. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Chopin Preludes, Op. 28*, VHS (Montana State Music Teachers Association Convention, 1994).



analyses the preludes from a historical, theoretical, pedagogical, and stylistic perspective. This well-researched lecture features Blickenstaff performing portions of the preludes; the complete preludes have appeared on many of Blickenstaff's concert programs.

As an example of this expertise, Blickenstaff provided students with a comprehensive survey of piano literature in the course Seminar of Upper Level Materials at Goshen College. The course contained music of the Baroque through Romantic eras, studied in a single, intense semester. The lecture notes of Beverly Lapp, a student in the course in 1990, not only reveal the detail covered but Blickenstaff's comprehensive approach; Blickenstaff discussed historical context, performance practice, technical approaches to achieve the style, teaching techniques, and specific repertoire.<sup>120</sup> Assignments consisted of reading historical texts, listening to recordings, sight-reading music at the piano, and memorizing key facts. For example, Lapp's assignment on Beethoven consisted of the following:

- Readings from:  
F.E. Kirby's *A Short History of Keyboard Music*  
Harold Schonberg's *The Great Pianist*  
Kenneth Drake's *The Sonatas of Beethoven as He Played and Taught Them*
- A comparison of two anthologies: Maurice Hinson's *At the Piano with Beethoven* and Willard Palmer's *Beethoven, An Introduction to His Works*
- Sight-reading and taking notes on 10 pieces from the previous two anthologies

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120. Beverly Lapp, 1990, Class Notebook, Music 412 at Goshen College: Survey of Upper Level Materials.

- Listening to and taking notes on 6 sonatas and the Diabelli Variations
- Memorizing the opus numbers, keys, and number of movements for all 32 sonatas

This type of assignment was given for each of the style periods and/or major composers. Arlene Steffen raved about the Seminar, stating that the knowledge she gained from Blickenstaff made her repertoire course in her Master's degree easy: "When I went to graduate school, they made me take piano literature, and I did not crack the book the entire semester. I knew it."<sup>121</sup> The lecture notes and assignments from Blickenstaff's literature course at Goshen demonstrate how he combined pedagogical, historical, pianistic, and stylistic topics into a single course.

In several of his presentations and in his teaching, Blickenstaff exhibits an insightful cognizance of style and interpretation. He has established three handouts for students and teachers titled, "Guidelines to Stylistic Performance," "Tips on Style," and "Shaping the Sound: Rules of Thumb." In each of these documents, Blickenstaff outlines principles for interpretation by the different style periods and musical elements. For example, rhythm guides interpretation by the following principles:

1. Shorts go to longs (cresc.)
2. Downbeats are magnetic – the sound is drawn to them....but....
3. No two successive downbeats should be alike
4. Upbeat figures are interesting and have great musical energy<sup>122</sup>

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121. Steffen, Interview.

122. Marvin Blickenstaff, Shaping the Sound: Rules of Thumb for the Student, Workshop Lecture Notes.

In the Classical Era, Blickenstaff's first out of three tips for interpretation are:

**Contrast** is the goal. Each element must have its own affect.

- contrast of themes
- contrast of keys
- contrast of texture
- contrast of figure
- form is created and communicated through these contrasts<sup>123</sup>

In his presentation *My First Sonatina: Classical Performance Practices for the Elementary Student*, Blickenstaff explores at length how the interpretation of Classical works is guided by the contrasts within the composition. His former student LeAnn House expressed admiration for Blickenstaff's scholarship in these areas:

Marvin stays very current on performance practice and music research, to a degree that few teachers and frankly very few pianists do. He really stays up with the musicological world and the latest research in areas, and that of course makes his teaching open to new ideas and to learning, but also very current. You are not learning what he learned 50 years ago with him.<sup>124</sup>

Blickenstaff demonstrates expertise in many areas including pedagogy, performing and technique, literature, and style and interpretation.

#### A Passion for Music and Learning

The words "energetic," "inspiring," and "enthusiastic" are often used to describe Blickenstaff because he radiates zeal for people, music, and music

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123. Marvin Blickenstaff, *The End Is in the Beginning: Coaching Repertoire to Performance*, Workshop Lecture Notes.

124. LeAnn House, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, January 28, 2010).

education. When recently asked what motivates him to teach, Blickenstaff noted in his vivacious and playful style how he is motivated by music and inculcating his ideas in others:

MB: But, what motivates me to teach! Well, I'm ninety percent used car salesman and ten percent missionary. And, I think that's kind of it. And sort of one hundred percent musician [laughing].

Ernst: What exactly does [ninety percent used car salesman] mean?

MB: It means . . . that I just *love* to try to convince other people of my ideas. I know that that's why I give a fairly decent workshop, is because I stand up there on stage and I want them to become believers in what I'm saying. And, I feel that I have been at it long enough, that I know ways that I can help. . . .

Ernst: So what is the ten percent missionary, what does that mean?

MB: Oh, it's kind of the same thing. I want to *give* music to these people, you know, the gospel of music. And that's more than ten percent. In fact, I think in a way, it's kind of the whole thing. I want to do that for teachers and I want to do that for kids. [emphasis his]<sup>125</sup>

This aspect of his philosophy was also present during the midpoint in his career. In an interview in the 1980s with Jane Magrath, Blickenstaff described how fascinating the learning process is to observe:

But, the interesting thing has been that I've just absolutely loved it [teaching]. I loved thinking about how people learn on levels. I thoroughly enjoy working with children. It's so exciting to see children learn because the learning is so obvious with youngsters. With the more advanced students, you see progress, but it's really spread over a longer time frame. With the younger students, it just happens over night! I'm still mystified by this. . . . What is that transition of neurons in the brain that you can document and say learning has taken place. It's very mysterious and so wonderful. But I have just been fascinated with that! . . . I suppose that some of the people who don't like to teach, somehow or another, have not involved themselves in the learning process. Because one of the most

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125. Blickenstaff, Interview 4 of 6.

exciting things that I have ever experienced is to get involved in this business of how learning takes place.<sup>126</sup>

In an interview with Robert Dumm in 1989, Blickenstaff said that the music is what engages him to teach a student: “I think actually that always the inspiration comes from the music, and I really am inspired by the individual there and a desire to see whether I can figure out how to change that individual and get them to respond more to the music.”<sup>127</sup> The nexus of Blickenstaff’s definition of a teacher is that a teacher should be passionate about music and guiding the musical education of others.

In his lessons, Blickenstaff’s love of music and desire to pass on this fervor to students is pervasive. For a teacher with such a lengthy career, it is hard to imagine avoiding burnout or becoming weary teaching conventional repertoire. But, Blickenstaff is perpetually motivated by the sound and desire to enthuse the student. For example, nearly all piano students learn Muzio Clementi’s Sonatina in C Major, Op. 36, No. 1, yet he remains captivated by this teaching piece. The researcher asked him, “How do you as a teacher keep repertoire and ideas fresh, so that when you present them to a student they are fresh?” Blickenstaff replied:

How many times has one taught the Clementi, Op. 36, No. 1? And I [laughing] don’t know what this says about me, I can still get very excited about Op. 36, No. 1. I think the scales in the second part of the exposition are wonderful [laughing] and I think that trumpet call at the beginning is

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126. Blickenstaff, Interview, ca. 1983.

127. Blickenstaff, Interview at Shenandoah College Conservatory of Music in Winchester, MA.

exciting, and if the student doesn't get that, we work on that. . . . I cannot bring myself to think that the music I'm teaching is boring in any way. And I guess that's the answer to the freshness, because the music is wonderful, and I want the student to experience this, and so it's a matter of trying to share the experience with the student.<sup>128</sup>

Blickenstaff realizes that an effective teacher must love music and share this with students. He voiced a concern to readers of *Keyboard Companion*: "I fear that there may be students taking piano lessons who do not receive the message from the teacher, unspoken or repeatedly articulated, that the teacher loves to play the piano."<sup>129</sup> He acknowledges that a passion for music can inspire teaching to such a degree that it can override a lack of expertise: "I have seen very poor teachers who really wanted so much to give to their students be surprisingly successful with their students simply because of their own love of music."<sup>130</sup> In Blickenstaff's philosophy, it is essential that music must be at forefront of piano lessons and that teachers must love the sound and expression inherent to music making.

This tenet of his philosophy was felt by his students and colleagues, and they have pronounced how his love of music and teaching has impacted them. Kelly Marquis Frieje was Blickenstaff's student when she was in high school, as she prepared to enter college as a music major. She said, "He had such a pure passion . . . and love for music and then also just for teaching it. It was so obvious that he loved doing what he was doing, but all I knew was he loved being there with me,

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128. Blickenstaff, Interview 6 of 6.

129. Blickenstaff, "For What Purposes Do You Play for Your Students?."

130. Blickenstaff, Interview 1 of 6.

helping me with music, and helping me to grow.”<sup>131</sup> Tom Lohr, an undergraduate student at UNC-CH, said: “I think it’s because he keenly shows, and it’s not an act, a sincere sense of enthusiasm with what he’s doing. And he really enjoys the discovery process, for himself, but he really enjoys helping teachers and students discover that for themselves too.”<sup>132</sup> One student from Goshen College described:

He seemed to view all aspects of piano learning as exciting, important, almost spiritual, and conveyed that passion to others he was working with. He made the beginning students learning ‘this is the sound of middle C’ seem as exciting and wonderful and important as the progression of the advanced college students.<sup>133</sup>

His colleagues, Amy Glennon (The New School) and Kathryn Sherer (Goshen College), also commented on Blickenstaff’s love of music and learning. Sherer said that Blickenstaff demonstrates a “love of learning that motivates other people.”<sup>134</sup> Glennon said, “He’s very inspirational in the way that he talks about [music]—it’s obvious he loves music. It’s very inspiring because there is nothing jaded about Marvin.”<sup>135</sup> Blickenstaff’s excitement in learning and music is a tangible aspect of his teaching style and is a principle of his philosophy.

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131. Kelly Marquis Frieje, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, March 5, 2010).

132. Lohr, Interview.

133. Ernst, “Survey for Students.”

134. Sherer and Sherer, Interview.

135. Glennon, Interview.

### Treasuring the Personal Relationships

Not only does Blickenstaff speak openly about his devotedness to music and learning, he conveys his fondness for his students. Throughout his career, Blickenstaff has forged meaningful relationships with many of his students. He feels a profound responsibility towards his students and a deep admiration for them:

If I have any success with children, it comes through the fact that I feel that they are just as worthy human beings as I am. So what we do is simply gather around the piano and we learn about music together. It is a process of sharing some experiences and through these experiences, we learn. I feel very humble, because these are just wonderful human beings that I am working with. And I feel my life is enriched because I know little Erica and I teach Phil. These little kids are wonderful people. It is a humbling experience to realize that you are now an influence on their lives.<sup>136</sup>

Susan See, an independent teacher from Iowa, succinctly stated, “I think Marvin loves people and music, and in that order. It’s so genuine; he can’t be faking it for this long [laughing]!”<sup>137</sup> As a natural outgrowth of the relationship he cultivates with students, he often stays in communication with them beyond the end of their lessons. Cathy Albergo believes that part of his legacy as a piano teacher is the lasting relationships he builds with students. She said, “I think he has been there as a mentor and our teacher, both musically and personally, pedagogically. I think he’s remained a part of everybody’s lives. . . . I don’t think a lot of professors and

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136. Blickenstaff, Interview, ca. 1983.

137. Susan See, interviewed by author (Telephone interview, January 8, 2010).



teachers remain as much as part of their student's lives as Marvin does."<sup>138</sup> This has frequently resulted in former students becoming friends and colleagues, long after they worked together as teacher and student.

Blickenstaff feels that an amicable relationship must exist between the teacher and the student. Students must understand that the teacher likes them, regardless of their musical abilities; this feeling is a prerequisite for learning.

Blickenstaff expressed:

I just love my students. But I think one of the things in the student-teacher relationship is that the student has to know that the teacher really likes them as a human being. And I just pray that all of my students get that message from me, because I really do like them. And, I have some students that challenge me a little bit because they may not be working very well, [pause] but even the ones who are limited. I have this little [student] who is—she's not learning disabled, but she is intellectually challenged. And I just find that my heart goes out to her, and am just so grateful for every minute that she spends at the keyboard because she's working uphill all the way. And why shouldn't I honor that?<sup>139</sup>

He has communicated to teachers in workshops the importance and gravity of the student-teacher relationship in young childrens' lives. In a workshop entitled *The Intermediate Student*, Blickenstaff stated in his introduction:

For the most part, they are great kids,  
with wonderful potential to become outstanding citizens,  
they will go on to college and will find a profession  
eventually become wonderful parents  
and perhaps, in one form or another, will be life-long participants in  
music.

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138. Albergo, Interview.

139. Blickenstaff, Interview 6 of 6.

We are, in a way, a Way Station [sic] on their journey through life. They will never forget us, the relationship they had with us, their favorite pieces, contests and auditions, parties, concerts we attended together, gifts exchanged, etc. It is an important Way Station, and for some students it may change the course of their life's journey. [spacing from original]<sup>140</sup>

Nonetheless, Blickenstaff is adamant that the relationship is focused upon music and learning, balanced with the student's need to have a mentor, friend, and teacher. In his workshop on *Studio Efficiency*, Blickenstaff describes how building compassionate working relationships with students is a key to effective teaching. He wrote in his lecture notes:

We treasure the relationship and we feel the responsibility of our role as model, mentor, and affirming friend.  
 . . . there is a Danger:  
 too much chatting in the name of being friendly  
 . . . or the opposite:  
 S [student]: "I've had a terrible day and feel awful about myself"  
 T [teacher]: "Fine—now let's here [sic] your Hanon"  
 [punctuation and spacing from original]<sup>141</sup>

Taking the responsibility of an educator seriously, Blickenstaff strives to ensure that his students feel cared for and that lessons are focused upon music making (for a continued discussion, see Chapter V, the Student-Teacher Relationship).

Blickenstaff's personal correspondence reveals the depth to which he cares for his students and his students care for him. In his farewell letter to his students at Goshen College in 1999, he wrote:

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140. Blickenstaff, *The Intermediate Student*.

141. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Studio Efficiency, Workshop Lecture Notes*.

But the aspect of GC [Goshen College] I will cherish to the end of my life is the relationship with students, some who have become best friends since the years of their graduation. There is a unique, almost sacred chemistry which develops between a teacher and student making music together. It has been my privilege to be part of that chemistry for twenty years at GC, and my life is inexpressibly rich because of the hundreds of students I have taught here.<sup>142</sup>

Following this final academic year at Goshen, he wrote a personal letter to a student for whom he was concerned. This student was in the middle of his degree and would be continuing with Blickenstaff's replacement in the fall. He had received correspondence from this student that the student believed Blickenstaff was disappointed in his work. Blickenstaff did not want this student to continue to have this impression and wrote to him:

In your note you mentioned something about my disappointment in you -- something like that. That is not the case. How could anyone be disappointed with a student like you. You are the definition of a good student. What has frustrated me for some time is the fact that I have not found a way to help you to more secure performance. The door is not yet open. And that has been my frustration as your teacher and friend. I feel I leave you with unfinished work to be done, and I am angry at myself for not being able to solve that issue in your playing. You have made much progress in so many areas of your work and we can both rejoice in that. Please know that I am very fond of you, very grateful for the years we have had together, and totally confident that you are going to play a wonderful recital this year.<sup>143</sup>

Blickenstaff felt similar concern about the young students enrolled in his beginning piano class. During their first year, these children were taught individual lessons by the college students of his piano pedagogy course. A young student (name

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142. Marvin Blickenstaff, 1994–2000, Personal Correspondence during Goshen College Years.

143. Ibid.

changed to Ben) in 1996 was not enjoying lessons and not progressing well.

Blickenstaff wrote a detailed memo to the college student instructing Ben. The memo began:

I regret that we are off to a rough start with Ben. Little did I suspect...  
I sincerely hope that the die has not been cast in its final form. But it may  
take a lot of work. Here are some of my thoughts:  
-- we need to be sensitive to every clue Ben gives us about his  
learning style and what is most interesting to him.  
[spacing and punctuation from original]<sup>144</sup>

The memo included a detailed list of goals and teaching tips for the college student to use in Ben's next lesson. This type of correspondence is plentiful among Blickenstaff's personal files from Goshen College; he must have used vast amounts of time writing these types of memos and letters to ensure that each student was having a good experience in piano lessons with him. He treasures his relationships with his students, both the young pre-college students and the college students.

The import that Blickenstaff places on his relationships has been readily apparent to his students and other teachers. Many of his former students, both in interviews and surveys, commented on Blickenstaff's unrelenting bigheartedness. Frieje, a pre-college student, said that what was most memorable about lessons was "his caring for the students and their progress, who they are as musicians and human beings. . . because some people just care about your progress as a musician,

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144. Ibid.

but he has both, and in a good proportion.”<sup>145</sup> An anonymous student from UNC-CH wrote:

While we were dazzled by his skills as pianist and teacher, lessons were always focused on us, and not on him. His considerable knowledge and talent were unselfishly brought to bear on our needs, our problems, and our musical development. The extra time and effort that he so generously gave to us left no doubt that he cared deeply about the work each of us was doing.<sup>146</sup>

Furthermore, teachers in masterclasses are aware of this quality of Blickenstaff's teaching. Even though teachers work with students in masterclasses for roughly ten to twenty minutes, Blickenstaff still forges a special relationship with these students. Teachers described his manner with students using these adjectives, terms, and phrases: warm (3), caring (2), makes the student feel at ease (2), kind (2), thorough attention to the needs of the student, gentle, helping the student to relax and enjoy the experience, sincere concern for the student, and consideration.<sup>147</sup> “The one-on-one relationship independent teachers have with students is very special, almost sacred,” Blickenstaff explained, continuing, “The beautiful part of teaching is the strong feelings that come from seeing my students grow into mature beings over the three to five or more years that we work

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145. Frieje, Interview.

146. Ernst, “Survey for Students.”

147. Ernst, “Survey for Teachers.”

together.”<sup>148</sup> Blickenstaff’s ability to show concern for all students and to develop lasting relationships is an irremovable tenet of his philosophy of teaching.

Another unique trait of Blickenstaff’s relationships with his students is that he willingly transitions from being their teacher, to mentor, to friend, and for some, to colleague. Blickenstaff said in his public speech at the MTNA conference:

It would be interesting to know how many hundreds, perhaps thousands, of students have passed through my studio doors in the past 50 years. This certificate/plaque is not big enough for all of their names, but I confess that my students have been my best teacher. And now, after some decades have passed, many of those former students have become colleagues and count among my closest friends. How rich is that?!<sup>149</sup>

Steffen, student from Goshen College, recalled another MTNA conference during which several of his former students gathered to celebrate his 70th birthday. A focal point of this celebration was a gift for him, which was a collection of notes from his former students. Steffen described how she had the box for these notes engraved: “I bought a really nice box and put them all in there, and I had a plaque made, engraved with a phrase that he had written to me once about our relationship. ‘First it was teacher, and then mentor, and colleague, and friend.’”<sup>150</sup> In the surveys taken by his former students, Blickenstaff was referred to as a mentor and a friend numerous times:

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148. Bachus, “With a Passion.”

149. Marvin Blickenstaff, Response to the MTNA Achievement Award, Personal Files.

150. Steffen, Interview.

“Marvin was both teacher and friend for me during my 4 years at UNC. My mother died 5 weeks after I started school and he was a strong and helpful friend during that critical time.” Judy Cole (MacLellan), 1976–77, UNC-CH

“He trained me as a pianist and teacher. He has mentored me throughout my life. He gave me a job!” Anonymous student, unknown years, Goshen College

“He was a fabulous instructor, guide, mentor and friend.” Anonymous student, 1982–86, Goshen College

“I also remember him kissing me goodbye like an old dear friend after I had graduated and was returning to Florida.” Julie Gensmer, 1982–86, Goshen College

“While at Goshen, I looked forward to my interactions with him - during lessons and studio classes. . . . He has been one of the most influential [sic] music mentors of my life, and I feel lucky to have been able to be his student.” Lara Troyer, 1990–92, Goshen College

“While a student at GC [Goshen College], my car was stolen. He offered the use of his car whenever I needed one-- that’s the sort of teacher and friend he was.” Anne Waltner, 1996–99, Goshen College

“I got the impression that he saw his committed students as colleagues or perhaps apprentices, not just students who would come for a lesson then leave.” Anonymous student, unknown years, Goshen College<sup>151</sup>

For his students, Blickenstaff is more than a teacher. He develops lasting relationships with his students, many of whom viewed him as a mentor and a friend, and many of whom later became colleagues.

Blickenstaff does not strive to maintain a superior position over individuals who were his former students; at numerous times, he has welcomed students as colleagues. Beverly Lapp was his piano and piano pedagogy student at Goshen College; after completing a master’s degree and working at the New School, she

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151. Ernst, “Survey for Students.”

returned as faculty, filling the vacancy left by Kathryn's Sherer's retirement. Lapp was appreciative of Blickenstaff's willingness to accept her as a faculty colleague: "But when I came back to teach. . . he was very good about not treating me like a student anymore. He did well with that, and there were a few times where we probably slipped, times when I would ask him advice or a question. And, he would usually clarify, 'You don't need to ask me this now, you're a teacher here.'"<sup>152</sup>

Steffen, as an established piano teacher, arranged for a student from her independent studio in California to take several lessons with Blickenstaff during the summer of 2009. Steffen participated in all lessons, and Blickenstaff indicated to her that he wanted it to be a team-teaching situation, where her guidance would be welcome and valuable. Steffen explained this unique experience: "You know at the beginning Marvin said to me, feel free to jump in and take this whatever direction you think needs to go, whatever you have to add. And, I couldn't believe that he'd say that; we were there for him to have a week of his input."<sup>153</sup>

In addition, Blickenstaff creates professional opportunities for his former students and colleagues. For instance, he invited several of his students including Karen Zorn and Cathy Albergo to participate in and be presenters at the Goshen

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152. Lapp, Interview.

153. Steffen, Interview.



College Piano Workshop.<sup>154</sup> Zorn was impressed by Blickenstaff's encouragement of her presenting at the workshops; at that time, she was young, being tentative and uncertain that she could contribute. Zorn explained, "But he was like, you have something to say, you should do it. . . . He wouldn't [take] no for an answer."<sup>155</sup>

Albergo recalled Blickenstaff being a key reader in the drafts of her piano method *Celebrate Piano* (co-authored with J. Mitzi Kolar and Mark Mrozinski). She spoke with gratitude for his support and ideas:

When it came to writing *Celebrate Piano*—there are some professors who cannot let go of you as a student, and would compete with you as a student, if you're trying to do something on your own, you're violating that relationship. Marvin's not that way. Marvin is your biggest supporter. . . . [He] was extraordinarily supportive during that process, and proud of us when we got through it. I find that not every mentor can do that, and he does with such graciousness. I think I was in tears when we premiered *Celebrate Piano* because I realized what a contribution and what a gift he had given me. . . . [speaking with tears in her eyes and a shaky voice] And how can you say, if it wasn't for you, none of this would be. That's the way I felt about Marvin.<sup>156</sup>

Albergo has had further collaborations with Blickenstaff, including writing the three editions of the *Handbook for Teachers to the Celebration Series* (see Chapter III, Professional Engagements with Frederick Harris Music). Additionally, Blickenstaff has performed with one of his former Goshen College students; he has

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154. Goshen College Music Department, "A History of the Goshen College Piano Workshop and Academy," <http://www.goshen.edu/music/piano-workshop/piano-workshop-history/> (accessed July 19, 2012).

155. Zorn, Interview.

156. Albergo, Interview.

been the pianist for several of Rebecca Martin's concerts as a mezzo-soprano.<sup>157</sup> This willingness to accept students as colleagues, cherishing each relationship as it changes, provided a stellar model to his students. Steffen summarized this in an email to Blickenstaff: "You taught us how important relationships are. I am so much richer for the relationships I have forged with you, my classmates, my colleagues, and my students."<sup>158</sup> An essential tenet of Blickenstaff's philosophy is that it is essential to build relationships with students with an openness to becoming their friend, their mentor, and often their colleague.

#### An Open and Giving Spirit

Engrained in Blickenstaff's personality and moral fabric is that the purpose of life is to give your best humbly to others. As a preface to a tribute to his career in the *Piano Pedagogy Forum*, Blickenstaff wrote about learning this during his upbringing: "From my parents I learned the value of hard work and perseverance, that life is for *giving* and not for *getting*. [emphasis from original]"<sup>159</sup> Blickenstaff's long-time childhood teacher Fern Nolte Davidson modeled this attribute; he said

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157. Goshen College, "Goshen College Alumna Rebecca Martin to Give a Recital with Former Professor," <http://www.goshen.edu/news/pressarchive/10-06-08-martin-blick158.html> (accessed July 11, 2011).

158. Blickenstaff, Email from Arlene Steffen.

159. Marvin Blickenstaff, "'Good Luck' – a Message from Marvin Blickenstaff," *Piano Pedagogy Forum* 10, no. 1 (January 2007), <http://www.music.sc.edu/ea/keyboards/ppf/10.1/10.1.PPFBlickenstaff.html> (accessed July 3, 2011).

that she had “an unquenchable desire to give us [her students] her best.”<sup>160</sup>

Blickenstaff’s open and giving spirit is further witnessed in his indiscriminating policy to accept any student into his studio, regardless of perceived talent (see previous section Student Defined, Music Education is for All Students).

### *Giving of Time*

One way in which Blickenstaff has been generous to his piano students is by giving long and extra lessons when needed. Lapp described all the extra time she received:

He was very generous with his time. I think he often scheduled me so there was fifteen minutes for potential overflow if we needed it. One May term I did some sort of MTNA competition, and it was here on campus, and I remember we just had all sorts of extra lessons during those [weeks]. He was very generous with his time, especially with the small group of us that were his top students.<sup>161</sup>

Similarly, Donna Hughes Sanders fondly recalled an extra lesson at UNC-CH:

During one of my lessons we had both worked especially hard with minimal success. Time was up and the next student had arrived. He said that he was not satisfied and did not want to wait a week to resume so he told me to come back the next day which I did for a two hour lesson. We both laughed, almost hysterically, when we realized how much time had elapsed.<sup>162</sup>

Frieje prepared to audition as a music major in college under Blickenstaff’s mentorship. She and her parents drove a long distance to take lessons with Blickenstaff. She explained that Blickenstaff, aware of her family’s exceptional

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160. Marvin Blickenstaff, Fern’s Recital Tribute, Personal Files.

161. Lapp, Interview.

162. Ernst, “Survey for Students.”

commitment, ensured every goal was accomplished before the lesson concluded, regardless of the time. Frieje recollected:

My family certainly is not wealthy in any way, and we committed to drive two hours one way, every week for two years, and he knew that, and he knew how hard I was working. And quite frequently, he would go over the hour, just to make sure we got everything done, and never asked for more [payment]. He was just happy to do whatever he could to help me because I was also working so hard and my family was sacrificing, and that is part of who he is too as a human being.<sup>163</sup>

At the New School, Blickenstaff even volunteers teaching time. As Amy Glennon described, Tyler (name changed) is a gifted student in the PEPS program whom Blickenstaff admires. Blickenstaff felt too limited in the rotation classes to give Tyler all the attention that he wanted. Glennon explained: "So he basically volunteers his time and he meets with [Tyler] every other week, and gives him a lesson. And he doesn't get compensated for that, he just does it. And then of course he says, it's my privilege to work with [Tyler]."<sup>164</sup> The researcher also observed Blickenstaff's generosity. One of his current high school students, Vicki, has a medical issue in her back, causing her extreme pain after prolonged sitting. Blickenstaff allows her lesson to be a different length each week, based upon Vicki's pain threshold. Furthermore, Blickenstaff charges her family tuition by the minute, rather than charging her for a full lesson. Basing lesson time on the

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163. Frieje, Interview.

164. Glennon, Interview.

student's needs, even when this requires giving extra time, is part of Blickenstaff's *modus operandi*.

The time that Blickenstaff gives freely is not just for lessons. Numerous of his former students indicated that they contact him for advice and career guidance. Jeffery Weaver, who took lessons with Blickenstaff during high school, commented on how he sought guidance from Blickenstaff when he was choosing schools for a Master's degree and deciding what to pursue following his Master's. Weaver said, "At every time I go through a major transition, there is an email that makes its way towards him, asking am I doing the right thing?"<sup>165</sup> Albergo summarized Blickenstaff's role in his students' lives: "From the time you get to know him, he's part of your life, he's there. Which is really important because he's such a beautiful person. He makes time for everybody. If you call Marvin, he'll make time. Busy, busy, busy, busy man, but he'll make time for you."<sup>166</sup> Steffen echoed: "He just invested so much of himself in you. It wasn't just in the lesson, you could knock on the door anytime he was free, for any reason. . . . For many of us—when you're away from your family—he was a father figure to many of us." Blickenstaff has a generous spirit to his students, even once he is no longer their teacher.

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165. Jeffery Weaver, interviewed by author (Interlochen, MI, July 25, 2010).

166. Albergo, Interview.

*Giving of Knowledge*

Beyond giving his energies, Blickenstaff is known for openly sharing all of his knowledge and talents. As Goshen colleague Sherer aptly described, he “really wants to spread the good word” to students and piano teachers through his presentations, and he “travels and lectures tirelessly to help teachers become better musicians and teachers.”<sup>167</sup> An anonymous teacher commented, “He comes across as a genuinely [sic] teacher who cares about students and do [sic] not mind sharing his knowledge and ideas with colleagues.”<sup>168</sup> An anonymous Goshen student echoed a similar sentiment: “Marvin was accessible, and allowed his creativity to be accessible too.”<sup>169</sup> One of his former students from UNC-CH LeAnn House accepted a faculty position in which she had to teach piano pedagogy. She, feeling uncertain of how to proceed, sought Blickenstaff’s advice. Blickenstaff not only gave of his time, but also tutored her in the pedagogy curriculum he had been developing through his academic career. House described this occurrence:

Marvin was so gracious and generous. I went to visit him for a weekend and he basically gave me a crash course in how to teach piano pedagogy. And again, what he was able to do, sitting down with a pencil and paper, and a few hours—and again I didn’t come into with no experience and no expertise or no skills—but what I think he is able to do, in a way that is to

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167. Sherer and Sherer, Interview.

168. Ernst, “Survey for Teachers.”

169. Ernst, “Survey for Students.”

me completely remarkable, which I try to emulate in my own teaching, is to give you the big picture and the ideas, and enough details to go with.<sup>170</sup>

Rather than feeling protective over his pedagogy curriculum, Blickenstaff shared his knowledge and years of experience. Blickenstaff, with degrees from Oberlin and Indiana University, a career of national prominence, and awards of the highest merit, does not limit himself to exclusive circles, but rather is munificent with his knowledge and expertise.

### *Genuine Humility*

An aspect of Blickenstaff's generosity is that he is not egotistical, remaining humble in all circumstances. Two recent honors Blickenstaff has received are the tribute in the *Piano Pedagogy Forum* in 2007 and his Lifetime Achievement Award from MTNA in 2009. In his written response to the *Forum*, Blickenstaff began:

"Being honored by the *Piano Pedagogy Forum* in this way comes as a total surprise.

Both hands are insufficient to count the number of equally deserving piano pedagogues who should be receiving this exceptional tribute. I am humbled,

flattered, and feel undeserving."<sup>171</sup> In his verbal response to the Achievement

Award, Blickenstaff began:

I shall not waste your time professing my humility in the face of this honor, or my confession of unworthiness for being singled out in this manner. Rather, I wish to focus on the fact that none of us who has achieved any amount of success in the teaching profession can claim that this accomplishment was a solo endeavor . . . The honor which I receive this

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170. House, Interview.

171. Blickenstaff, "Good Luck'."

morning bears my name, but in reality the award belongs to the host of encouraging persons and events who have helped me become an effective piano teacher.<sup>172</sup>

Frieje aptly described how she felt about Blickenstaff as a high-school student, unaware of his prominence, and how she retrospectively understands his humility:

The other thing about him, which I always remember, and I try to be as well . . . is humble. . . . I didn't realize exactly who he was. . . . He's just really a nice, good teacher who lives really far from me. . . . But, I never knew because he never acted like anything. He was just a guy who loved to teach and loved to show other people how awesome music is and how awesome the piano is specifically. . . . Even as big as he was, . . . he just acted like he was this guy at Goshen, and he was just plugging along, doing his thing.<sup>173</sup>

Blickenstaff, despite his prominent position in the field, does not feel the need to flaunt a larger-than-life ego, but rather speaks humbly and unstintingly.

Teachers and colleagues also appreciate Blickenstaff's humility. When teachers were asked "What distinguishes Blickenstaff from other presenters?," teachers responded with the following adjectives: humble (2), unpretentious, and down-to-earth (2). A couple teachers responded in more detail:

"He talks as if he is at the same level as the teachers, not above."  
Anonymous

"He brings you along with him without making you feel he is the 'only' expert. He elicits your input and assumes that you have valuable information to share. He is not 'preachy' or dogmatic and his teaching ideas are excellent and well thought out and tested." Anonymous

When teachers were asked what distinguishes him as a masterclass teacher, most responses indicated that his focus is not on himself but on the student. One

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172. Blickenstaff, Response to the MTNA Achievement Award.

173. Frieje, Interview.



anonymous teacher thoughtfully stated: “He does not put himself on the pedestal.”<sup>174</sup> His colleagues at the New School are also thankful of his humble spirit. Scott Donald said, “He doesn’t present himself as the master; in many ways, he is one of us and in the trenches, just like everybody else.”<sup>175</sup> Glennon echoed: “When Marvin first came to the school, I was a bit ‘star-struck.’ Then I realized that he has a deep humility and is a real team player. At our ‘clean the school day’ he rolled up his sleeves and washed all of the windows.”<sup>176</sup>

Even in leadership positions, Blickenstaff maintains a selfless demeanor. Louise Goss explained how Blickenstaff does not place himself first in decisions they (Blickenstaff, Goss, Holland) make for the National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy. Goss explained: “He is always looking out for how a decision will affect an individual or a group, in an incredible way. He never puts himself in the middle of the decision; he is always back here [gestures to herself], but he sheds this wide beam of light and wisdom on all the decisions that we make.”<sup>177</sup> Gerald Fischbach, founder of the International Workshops for which Blickenstaff presented during numerous summers (see Chapter III, International Workshops), relayed how important an unpretentious environment was to the success of these workshops. Informal conversations and discussions were encouraged amongst participants

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174. Ernst, “Survey for Teachers.”

175. Donald, Interview.

176. Glennon, Interview.

177. Goss, Interview.

and lecturers. Fischbach explained how Blickenstaff was a natural fit in this environment:

. . . it was just kind of informal groupings of faculty and participants, so there was a lot of opportunity for mingling, and you know if you wanted to, for picking the brain of your favorite teacher. Marvin was a very generous and enthusiastic member of the family. . . . At breakfast if you happened to be at the same hotel with Marvin, you might find that he would come sit down with you, or you might ask to sit at the same table with him . . . [or] you'd grab a lunch and go out to one of the picnic tables and sit down with Nelita [True] or Marvin. It was a very unexclusive [sic] kind of approach.<sup>178</sup>

Students, teachers, and colleagues alike have benefited from Blickenstaff's candidness and humility, learning from his vast knowledge and abilities.

Blickenstaff has gained a tremendous degree of respect and admiration through his service to others as a music educator and piano pedagogue.

### **Summary**

Blickenstaff's teaching philosophy is grounded in the definition of music, the student, and the teacher. Blickenstaff believes that music is an intensely expressive art form, one to which he has been drawn throughout his lifetime. Music is fundamentally sound, expressive of the whole range of human emotions. Music must be expressive, at all levels of pianism, and Blickenstaff delights in the expressive qualities of the easiest pieces for young beginners and in classical masterworks. Blickenstaff's goal in music education is to guide his students towards an appreciation and passion for Western European classical music. Piano

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<sup>178</sup>. Gerald Fischbach, interviewed by author (Phone Interview, February 5, 2010).

study provides students a unique opportunity to integrate knowledge, technical skill, and emotional expression. He does not limit his studio of pianists to the talented; rather, he is willing to teach any student, regardless of age, level, or ability. Blickenstaff asserts that all students must be held to standards of excellence to promote success for all students. Teachers are ultimately responsible for student achievement by carefully guiding each student's attainment of knowledge and skill. A piano teacher, as a music educator, must be an well-informed expert, in piano playing and piano pedagogy, and must be enthusiastic about music and learning. Blickenstaff believes that teachers must appreciate the relationships forged with students and that teachers needs to give openly and freely of their expertise. These primary definitions of music, the student, and the teacher, are the genesis of Blickenstaff's belief system, which lead into an exploration of the greater purposes of music study, the student-teacher relationship, and the learning process.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **FOUNDATIONS FOR MUSIC STUDY**

Marvin Blickenstaff has developed a highly personalized and effective approach to teaching the piano, and the current study documents his philosophy of piano teaching. Resulting from his prominent career as a national figure of piano pedagogy, his beliefs and ideas on teaching and piano have been shared with many musicians. Chapter IV established how Blickenstaff defines music, the student, and the teacher. The present chapter proceeds with a discussion of Blickenstaff's viewpoints on the importance of music study and the student-teacher relationship. This chapter also contains analysis of his piano lessons and classes, the perspectives of his students and other teachers, and Blickenstaff's opinions as quoted from his interviews and writings. The following questions will be addressed in detail: Why should music be taught and studied? What motivates musical study? What is learned through music study? What are the traits of an effective student-teacher relationship? How does a teacher cultivate and maintain this relationship?

#### **The Value of Music Study**

Blickenstaff holds distinct opinions on why music is valuable to study and teach. He values music as an artistic form, addresses the composers of the Western European classical tradition and piano teaching literature with a reverent spirit,

and assumes the duty to pass on this heritage to his students. This collection of music is intrinsically valuable to Blickenstaff as an art form that is shared between people, whether the music is shared during formal performances or the piano lesson. According to Blickenstaff, enjoyment of music making and the learning process are the foundational motivators for studying piano, and hence, he ensures that each lesson connects students to active music making and expands their knowledge and skill. In addition to advocating the intrinsic value of music, Blickenstaff believes that learning music can become a lifelong process of personal development; he subscribes to this belief personally as he continually strives for his own continued growth as a pianist and educator. Furthermore, he views teachers as a life model for their students and is concerned with each student's growth as a human being, not just their growth as a musician.

#### Passing on a Cultural Heritage

Blickenstaff ardently believes his mission in life as a music educator is to pass on the tradition of playing Western art music at the piano. In a letter to the editor published in MTNA's *American Music Teacher*, Blickenstaff boldly stated his belief: "I have an intense interest in tradition and cultural legacy. A major part of the reason that I am a music teacher is my desire to pass on the tradition and cultural legacy that has enriched my life so much."<sup>1</sup> Emanating from his

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1. Marvin Blickenstaff, Letter to the editor, "Plea for Traditional Church Music," *American Music Teacher* 41, no. 5 (April/May 1992): 4.

enthusiasm for Classical music and helping others learn, Blickenstaff exudes pride and surety in his chosen profession:

I believe first of all that teaching is truly a noble profession. I think handing on a heritage to the next generation of whatever your subject matter is, is sort of what makes us go from one generation to the next, and so in that I feel that my chosen field has been a good one and a worthy one. And I often say that if I had to live my life over again, I think I would do exactly what I am doing right now. I really do.<sup>2</sup>

His colleagues commented on this proponent of his philosophy. Amy Glennon at the New School concluded: "I think for one thing, he passes on a legacy that the study of fine music is a really worthy pursuit. It's important and it's interesting and it's valuable. I think he passes that love of music on to his students through his own enthusiasm and his high standards."<sup>3</sup> Kathryn Sherer, a colleague from Goshen College, reminisced that in the 1990s she and Blickenstaff felt like "musical missionaries to the world," both believing in the importance of children being exposed to the best music.<sup>4</sup>

Blickenstaff is devoted to the undertaking to pass on the tradition of music making at the piano to future generations especially through his lessons to children. In a presentation given at the MTNA National Conference in 1989 in Kansas City, Blickenstaff recalled a documentary on the Texas Boy's Choir that

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2. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by author, Interview 1 of 6 (Collegeville, PA, November 16, 2009).

3. Amy Glennon, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, March 18, 2010).

4. Kathryn Sherer and Lon Sherer, interviewed by author (Goshen, IN, January 14, 2010).

contained an interview of their conductor. The conductor spoke of the “clean slate” of children, and as Blickenstaff summarized the video, the conductor desired to impress upon the children “the wonder of musical sound, the thrill of expressing ourselves through music, and the rewards of discipline and effort.” Blickenstaff professed the same belief at this national conference in 1989, utilizing the same metaphor as the conductor in his presentation entitled *Are We Really Teaching Music?*:

Why do we teach? We are writing profound messages onto the slates of our students’ lives. We attempt to lead them to an experience and awareness of some of the highest and most noble achievements of humankind. We are working to place the experience and knowledge of Classical music onto the slates of their lives.<sup>5</sup>

The youngest students motivate Blickenstaff in a unique way because of the “clean slate” they possess and the potential to inspire them into an active pursuit of Classical music.

Blickenstaff strives to positively influence his students’ interest in and engagement with music and the piano. Blickenstaff expressed how humbled he is by this profound responsibility in an interview with Jane Magrath:

MB: It is a humbling experience to realize that you are now an influence on their lives.

Magrath: A strong influence.

MB: Very much so. And, that probably you are setting their minds for whether they will like music or not like music.

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5. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Are We Really Teaching Music?*, Workshop Lecture Notes. This presentation was given at the 1989 national conference of Music Teachers National Association in Wichita, Kansas.

Magrath: For life.

MB: For life, exactly. You turn them on or you turn them off. And if you have a good time, and they feel really successful, about their piano experience, they may be turned on for the rest of their lives.<sup>6</sup>

This profound responsibility of captivating students through music has been prominent in Blickenstaff's mind since his resignation at Goshen College (1999), in part as a result of his teaching predominantly pre-college students and adult hobbyists. Blickenstaff reflected on this change of focus in his teaching:

I'm teaching little kids. . . . I find that the work with the kids, is in a way, so much more important than the college kids. It's almost like, and this is a little bit over stated, but it's almost like the college kids don't need me. Because they've made their choice about what they want to do with their lives, and yeah, we can learn some Beethoven sonatas, but the little kids really need me, you know [laughing]. Because they need me to be excited about music, and they need me to show them that they have this wonderful skill and potential, . . . but I still feel there is something so important about sharing music with these young kids.<sup>7</sup>

Blickenstaff believes music teachers can become an "unforgettable part of [students'] lives" as potentially the sole resource that exposes them to Classical music.<sup>8</sup>

Blickenstaff attests to the need to pass on his cultural heritage and pronounced this important dictum to piano teachers and pedagogy students at various times. In his pedagogy lectures and in presentations for piano teachers,

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6. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by Jane Magrath, VHS (The University of Oklahoma, ca. 1983).

7. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by author, Interview 6 of 6 (Music Teachers National Association Conference in Albuquerque, NM, March 27, 2010).

8. Marvin Blickenstaff, The Intermediate Student, Workshop Lecture Notes.



Blickenstaff has referenced an article “The Expression on the Mask” by Timothy Smith, published in the *American String Teacher*.<sup>9</sup> In this article, Smith urges readers to cultivate a love and appreciation of Classical music in their students, and he claims if teachers overlook this duty, the cultural heritage will be lost. The title of the article refers to a molded reproduction of Beethoven’s face, created just before his death; a reproduction of this mask was prominently displayed in the studio of the violin teacher of Smith’s children.<sup>10</sup> As Blickenstaff expressed to a presentation to piano teachers:

I think there is every reason to hold our heads high and say we are music teachers. Because in Tim Smith’s analogy, we are passing a culture of the epoch on to the succeeding generation, and that’s a very grim responsibility, a profound responsibility. I think our place in our society is unique in its importance, and I feel that the thing that we must do is to cherish that responsibility and resolve to do a better job each day that we teach.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, Blickenstaff required his pedagogy students to read this article by Smith in their first assignment.<sup>12</sup>

Blickenstaff has echoed the sentiments of Smith throughout his career and has expanded his responsibility to include encouraging piano teachers to embrace

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9. Timothy Smith, “Private Teacher’s Forum: The Expression on the Mask,” *American String Teacher* 39, no. 3 (1989).

10. In 1997, Blickenstaff was given a similar reproduction of this mask as a gift, and in return, sent a thank you letter and a copy of this article to the gift giver.

11. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Piano Study’s Magic Triangle: Parents, Teachers, Students*, VHS (Elizabethtown, PA, Elizabethtown College, 1992).

12. Marvin Blickenstaff, 1994–2000, Class and Lecture Files from Goshen College.

his life's mission as their own. In Robert Dumm's interview in 1989, Blickenstaff said:

Now it is for that reason in part that I go out and do workshops and do everything I can to affirm the role of the piano teacher. Because I think that in many instances and many communities it is the piano teacher that carries the torch for the tradition that has been so dear to us. And once we lose that, I'm not sure who is going to come along and say Mozart and Beethoven are really factors that can ennoble your lives.<sup>13</sup>

Piano teachers have heeded Blickenstaff's inspirational message. Susan See, an independent piano teacher in Iowa, professed how Blickenstaff's words have inspired and equipped her:

He makes it feel like this is a noble cause to take piano or teach piano. . . . It's that passion for teaching that makes me not apologize for being an independent piano teacher. When I watched that old movie, *Mr. Holland's Opus* . . . I think, well, why, what's wrong with [teaching music]? I feel like he has given tools that we can use to be successful and to be proud of what we do. We're always just one generation away from not having pianists. . . . The world needs piano teachers, there's so many lessons that we can teach at the piano, and I think that is one of things that Marvin has hammered into us [independent piano teachers] and it makes me know that I'm comfortable with who I am.<sup>14</sup>

As See explained, piano teachers can lose touch with this profound philosophical reason for teaching piano. Blickenstaff has encouraged piano teachers to personally regard this responsibility.

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13. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by Robert Dumm, Interview at Shenandoah College Conservatory of Music in Winchester, MA (Audio Cassette held at Stetson University's duPont-Ball Library, 1989).

14. Susan See, interviewed by author (Telephone interview, January 8, 2010).

Blickenstaff's students sensed his respect for music and teaching and his desire to pass this to the next generation. A Goshen College student who was not a music major commented on how she considered Blickenstaff's devotion to his profession as one of his strengths as a teacher. This anonymous student wrote, "playing and teaching are \*real\* to him -- not just ways of expressing emotions or entertaining -- they were things you could do with your life."<sup>15</sup> In the surveys conducted by the principal investigator, nearly one out of three of his former students commented on Blickenstaff's dedication and commitment to the piano and the field of music. Alison Charbeneau Bryant described that although she was not a music major, his modeling helped her realize that she needed to "find a career that I felt passionate about - that I could completely dedicate myself to."<sup>16</sup> Tom Lohr from UNC-CH commented further on Blickenstaff's passing on of the musical legacy: "So it was that real respect for style and for our becoming the extension of those composers long gone as we help preserve and pass on their legacy, in terms of what they left in their compositions. To make sure we come to understand it as fully as the music that is as fully as we possibly can."<sup>17</sup>

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15. Sara M. Ernst, "Survey for Students of Marvin Blickenstaff," (Online survey conducted via SurveyMonkey™, <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Blickenstaff2>, 2010–2011).

16. Ibid.

17. Tom Lohr, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, March 11, 2010).

*Reverence for Composers and Their Music*

The music score and the composer are held in high esteem by Blickenstaff, constantly inspiring him in his teaching. He delves into score study and marvels at his discoveries, which he shares with his students. This detailed attention to the score was presented to young Blickenstaff, during his formative studies (ca. 1947–54) with Fern Nolte Davidson. Blickenstaff explained his lessons with Davidson: “I never knew anybody who could find more rests and staccatos [laughter from the audience] and wrong notes on a page that were undiscovered in my practice. . . . [N]o teacher that I had after that ever had to help me read a score after Fern.”<sup>18</sup> Blickenstaff further credited Emil Danenberg, his piano teacher and instructor in piano literature at Oberlin College for furthering his abilities at studying a score.<sup>19</sup>

Blickenstaff remains fascinated by composers and score study and has presented entire workshops on single masterworks and composers. For example, he lectured on Chopin’s Nocturne in F-sharp Major (Op. 15, No. 2) for the International Workshops in 2000 and concluded: “What eludes the casual listener is the great care and craftsmanship which Chopin expended on the piece. Because craftsmanship serves the ultimate end of beautiful music, we can call this nocturne

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18. Marvin Blickenstaff, Fern Nolte Davidson, and Phillip Kevern, *Basics at the First Lesson and Forever More*, CD, (Seattle, WA, Music Teachers National Association, 2005).

19. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by author, Interview 3 of 6 (Collegeville, PA, November 18, 2009).

a ‘masterpiece.’”<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, in his comprehensive lecture on the execution of ornamentation in the music of Chopin, he marveled at Chopin’s compositional process and genius:

Chopin’s scores are a miracle of fastidious detail. He worked and reworked until he found just the right sound and way to portray it on the page. . . . Contemporaries say he was extremely demanding that his students followed the score precisely, yet he himself is reported to have never played his pieces exactly the same way twice. Behold, the genius. Behold, the creative mind and the wealth of ideas from someone who had complete control over the improvisational skill. . . . The more I look at Chopin scores, the more admiration I hold for the superlative craftsmanship of his pieces. . . .<sup>21</sup>

These two presentations on the music of Chopin are two taken from many (see Appendix E for a listing of Blickenstaff’s presentations), as his admiration and respect extends to the other great composers within the Western European fine art tradition. The analysis of music is inspiring to Blickenstaff, and additionally he is immensely interested in delving into the minutia of musical style.

Intrigued by the musical score, Blickenstaff endeavors to analyze music deeply, and the composer’s creative process forms the impetus of his investigation. He frequently challenges himself and his audience to consider the perspective of the composer, to hypothesize the reasons behind the notes and indications in the score. In a presentation on Beethoven’s Bagatelles, Blickenstaff acutely defines this unique genre of pieces as “experimental.” He stated:

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20. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Anatomy of a Masterpiece: Chopin’s Nocturne in F-Sharp Major, Op. 15, No. 2*, Workshop Lecture Notes.

21. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Chopin Ornamentation*, Workshop Lecture Notes.

One characteristic serves as a common link among the Bagatelles. They are experimental. When studying and performing the Bagatelles, one has the impression that these represent a working out of compositional ideas:

“How far can I push this idea?”

“How can I create a new harmonic surprise?”

“What would create the greatest surprise?”

Here we find Beethoven not as [sic] his most refined and elegant, but with the rough edges showing. And with that comes a special glimpse into Beethoven’s humor (which is usually broad and a bit rough). (Not the elegant humor one finds in Haydn and Mozart.)<sup>22</sup>

Blickenstaff, placing himself in the position of the composer Beethoven, strove to understand the compositional impulse behind the Bagatelles.

In a similar presentation, Blickenstaff innovatively organized his entire lecture on Baroque ornamentation in the music of J.S. Bach around understanding Bach’s compositional goals.<sup>23</sup> For many teachers and pianists, ornamentation poses a complex set of interpretive issues. Yet, Blickenstaff clarified the seemingly confusing mix of trills, mordents, and other symbols by discussing how a composer would deal with the innate issues of the harpsichord, one of the keyboard instruments of Bach’s time. After considering the limitations of a harpsichord and the creative intuition of Bach, ornamentation can be viewed as a practical vehicle for expression rather than an interpretive quagmire.

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22. Marvin Blickenstaff, Beethoven’s *Bagatelles*, Op. 33: Experimenting with Humor, Workshop Lecture Notes.

23. Marvin Blickenstaff, Ornamentation (and Articulation) in Bach’s *Short Preludes*, Workshop Lecture Notes.

Blickenstaff maintains it is pivotal for a pianist to seriously and carefully study the score to understand the composer's intentions. Blickenstaff clarified the many layers of understanding that teachers and performers must cultivate:

When we perform and when we teach, there are a variety of considerations which join together to form our interpretation:

the technical -- how to play the notes with greatest efficiency and ease

the inspirational -- perceiving the message of the composer

the analytical -- understanding how the composer constructed the work

the notational -- deciphering what he [the composer] wrote

the historical -- placing the piece in context

When any one element is missing, it will have a negative impact on the performance as a whole.<sup>24</sup>

He does not advocate being a mere technician who unthinkingly reads the music; it is five-faceted method of analysis that emphasizes the composer's craft and the score. Blickenstaff succinctly defined interpretation as "coming as close as we can to the composer's experience and intent,"<sup>25</sup> and views score study as the vehicle for interpretation.

Blickenstaff identified how expressive performances can reflect the significant musical traits discovered through score study. Blickenstaff often locates where the composer has introduced "contrast" into the music believing these

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24. Blickenstaff, Chopin Ornamentation.

25. Marvin Blickenstaff, My First Sonatina: Classical Performance Practices for the Elementary Student, Workshop Lecture Notes.

moments are significant to the musical experience.<sup>26</sup> The contrast can be “subtle” or “obvious” and found in a musical element such as melodic contour and structure, harmony, rhythm, and texture. The listener’s awareness is heightened through these pivotal, surprising variations in sound, and Blickenstaff labels these musical happenings “purple moments.” He indicated to teachers in his presentation *Interpretation through Analysis* that students must be guided to keep these moments magical, even after weeks of repetitious practice:

We practice the surprise, the “Purple Moments,” out of a piece and lose the awesome experience of those harmonic juxtapositions. Without our guidance, our wonder at the composer’s creative use of colorful chords, the student’s performance can change a breathtaking moment into a mundane realization of pitch and rhythm.<sup>27</sup>

Discovering key dramatic moments and areas of contrast in a composition’s structure is crucial to Blickenstaff’s process of analysis and interpretation.

Analyzing a piece with his students of all levels is Blickenstaff’s foremost teaching strategy, through which he strives to engage his students in score study and educate them in styles. After working with an intermediate student on Dmitri Kabalevsky’s “Novelette” (Op. 27, No. 25), Blickenstaff wrote of his success with her understanding of the dark, Russian style: “I felt highly rewarded when one student, after finishing a convincing performance of the piece in a lesson, sat back

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26. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Interpretation through Analysis*, Workshop Lecture Notes.

27. *Ibid.*



and said ‘I can’t image anything more Russian!’”<sup>28</sup> In a unique introduction to an article in the repertoire section of *Keyboard Companion*, Blickenstaff wrote a fictitious letter to his students, beginning “Dear Piano Friend” and signed “Your Piano Partner.”<sup>29</sup> In this letter, Blickenstaff discussed how to discover the meaning behind the notation through exploring the sound and their relationships: “The great joy of music study lies in uncovering these clues and giving music the life and movement, the surprising contrast, or the peace and relaxation the composer intends.”<sup>30</sup>

Reverence for the composer and the musical score is demonstrated in Blickenstaff’s masterclasses and piano lessons. In a masterclass at the Goshen College Piano Workshop in 2003, Blickenstaff instructed two young students on the importance of reading the score carefully.<sup>31</sup> Alyssa, who appeared of high-school age, performed *Petit Noir* by Claude Debussy, and Blickenstaff coached her through an accurate rendering of the articulation marks in this cakewalk. Following her performance, he interacted with Alyssa through discussion and lecture:

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28. Marvin Blickenstaff, “How Do You Find the Musical Messages in a Piece of Music? Part II,” *Keyboard Companion* 3, no. 4 (1992): 32.

29. Marvin Blickenstaff, “How Do You Cultivate Your Student’s Understanding of Theory through the Repertoire They Play?,” *Keyboard Companion* 12, no. 3 (2001): 36.

30. Ibid.

31. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Masterclass*, DVD, (Goshen, IN, Goshen College, 2003).

MB: Would you describe verbally to the audience what Debussy has written for articulation in the first measure? How many notes are really slurred?

Alyssa: Two, well there's four but [inaudible] . . .

MB: See, I'm getting all kinds of [answers]. . . . [audience and student laugh] Would you buy the fact that there is only one slurred note in the whole first measure?

Alyssa: No.

MB: [laughing] What can I do to convince you?! Debussy writes a slur over the first two notes, and the reason I am saying that there is only one slurred note is that at the end of that slur, at that second note, you have to lift up your hand [MB plays first 2 notes]. Now the next note has nothing over it, and I think what Debussy is trying to tell us, "If I don't slur it, you don't connect it." Then the last two notes [MB plays them] have a slur over them but it also has a staccato over each of those. What do you do when there is a slur and staccato [portato marking]?

Alyssa: My piano teacher told me to separate them.

MB: To separate them, and your piano teacher is absolutely right. And what's the difference between those notes and a staccato?

Alyssa: A staccato is short.

MB: A staccato is shorter. I tell my students these notes are sticky notes. [MB plays the notes with the portato marking.] So we got one slur, and one note that doesn't have anything, and we got two sticky notes. When a composer writes a slur over two notes, is there any dynamic connotation that goes with that marking? Is one note supposed to be louder than the other?

Alyssa: [silence]

MB: Yeah [to audience, nodding head]. Which note is louder?

Several from the audience: The first.

MB: [holds up 1 finger] Exactly. So what Debussy has written here is [MB plays the first measure]. Don't tell me that that's not more fun than [MB plays without the articulation and dynamics]. It dances! [MB sings and dances around on the bench.] You can just see him lift his shoulders and say "let's go man!" [MB sings.] Cakewalks were derived from early jazz, and it's

a direct American export into France. Debussy and Ravel just loved this music they were hearing from America, but it was high-strutting stuff. And they saw some of this stuff because the minstrel shows were exported over there. I will not embarrass myself and strut around on stage, but you can imagine, it was really great.

Following this detailed introduction, Alyssa was able to execute the articulation and carefully listen for this new sound, which revitalized her interpretation of Debussy's cakewalk. Blickenstaff, as in this example, is able to magnify the importance of musical ideas and has an ability to make intensive study on just one measure of music captivating and productive.

During the same masterclass, Blickenstaff, with great import, required an additional student to dutifully honor the markings of the composer. Jennifer performed Rachmaninoff's well-known Prelude in C-sharp Minor (Op. 3, No. 2).

Following her performance, the masterclass began:

MB: I'd like to have you start right here [pointing to the score].

[Jennifer plays the opening theme.]

MB: [flipping to the last page of the score] Jennifer, Rachmaninoff says here at the end that you're supposed to take exactly that tempo. He says "exactly the first tempo."

[Jennifer plays the last section; MB claps the steady pulse as she plays.]

MB: OK, try to remember that, after all of this stuff in through here [pointing to the B section] you come back to that tempo.

Jennifer: OK.

MB: Now, this is a loaded question Jennifer. Where on the first page do you see that Rachmaninoff says, "Now, I want you to go faster?"

Jennifer: Umm.

MB: *Loaded* question. [emphasis his]

Jennifer: Here? [pointing to the music]

MB: What words does he use to tell you that?

Jennifer: [laughing] Nothing.

MB: So did you talk with Rachmaninoff this morning on the telephone?  
[everyone laughs]

Jennifer: No!

MB: I don't see anything. You could say, "I just feel it." And I would say, there are lots of things in our music that come out in our interpretations because we feel it that way, but I think it's a serious consideration when you end up playing these eighth notes almost twice as fast as these and Rachmaninoff didn't tell you to do that. Better watch out for that. You may come to musical heaven and St. Peter says, "But Jennifer, I remember the time when . . ." [laughter] I hold you accountable for that, that's a musical sin! Alright, let's start the piece again.

[Jennifer plays.]

MB: It's interesting that Rachmaninoff wrote plenty of stuff to keep you busy. What do all those marks mean? . . .

Jennifer and Blickenstaff continued to work through the opening section, exploring the articulation and dynamic markings, while keeping the pulse regular and steady. Blickenstaff voiced to this student his philosophy on the spiritual nature of score study and accurately rendering the desires of the composer.

### Intrinsic Motivation of the Music

Guided by his personal experiences, Blickenstaff believes that playing music is innately motivating for students. He succinctly stated that students "constantly

reinforce my conviction that music motivates learning.”<sup>32</sup> In his own early training under Davidson, Blickenstaff recalled being motivated by the repertoire he heard other students perform. Davidson’s advanced students, Blickenstaff explained, “were playing repertoire that was just a jaw-dropper for me. I thought it would be so wonderful to play this big music. So, it was a combination of repertoire and challenge that kept me going.”<sup>33</sup>

Other master pedagogues have stated a similar conviction to the importance of sound-based learning, and Blickenstaff has often quoted these others when discussing this outlook. Richard Chronister, the founding editor of *Keyboard Companion* and the inaugural president of the Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy, solicited Blickenstaff as one of the original members of the magazine’s editorial staff (see Chapter III, *Keyboard Companion*). Blickenstaff frequently references Chronister’s call to action in *Keyboard Companion*:

Richard Chronister wrote . . . It is asking too much of our students to be excited about a piece they have never heard, and an assignment that represent only obstacles to be solved. Students deserve to know how the piece sounds in its finished form and how to proceed in reaching that musical goal.<sup>34</sup>

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32. Arthur Houle, “5 Minutes With. . . Marvin Blickenstaff,” *American Music Teacher* 54, no. 3 (2004): 51.

33. Rob Hallquist, “Learning Music Together: An Interview with Marvin Blickenstaff,” *Early Childhood Connections* 8, (2002): 8.

34. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Pedagogy 101: Reviewing the Basics*, Workshop Lecture Notes.

These statements of Chronister were of such importance to Blickenstaff that his pedagogy students were assigned to read this article (along with Smith's article on Beethoven's mask and another on the development of prodigies by educational psychologist Maya Pines). As taken from his pedagogy lecture notes, Blickenstaff paraphrased Chronister, "Students come to piano lessons to make exciting sound at the keyboard. Every lesson that does not capitalize on that natural [musical] desire cultivates a potential drop-out."<sup>35</sup> Blickenstaff also found an ally in Frances Clark, nationally recognized pedagogue and founder of the New School for Music Study. Blickenstaff quoted her and expounded:

Frances Clark said, "I want my students right from the beginning to play the same piano that Horowitz plays." And there are so many people that start out here [gestures to a middle C position, with both thumbs sharing middle C], and then they wonder why their students are bored around middle C. Well, there's all that piano [gesturing to the low and high regions of the keyboard]. I feel very strongly about that. . . . [I]t is at least, where I am emotionally and intellectually. I hope I am there pedagogically. . .<sup>36</sup>

Piano lessons are fundamentally about making music, and piano teachers must teach lessons that are focused on this goal. Blickenstaff asserts that if music is not used to motivate learning, it is unlikely that students will become fascinated with piano and continue study.

Blickenstaff aims to balance a student's fascination with sound with instruction on music fundamentals, such that each activity stimulates a student's

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35. Marvin Blickenstaff, 1996, Piano Pedagogy, Session II, Class and Lecture Files from Goshen College.

36. Blickenstaff, Interview 1 of 6.

involvement in and enjoyment of music. A fundamental tenet of his philosophy is that students achieve expressive musical performances through the integration of both knowledge and skill (see Chapter IV, In Service of Musical Sound).

Blickenstaff maintains that the lasting memory will not be these fundamentals but will be the music:

Are we really teaching music? . . . Yes . . . [underline and punctuation from original] if we balance skill with thrill. It is a very natural that we teach and test the tangible. It is understandable that we assign and correct the theory sheets, drill the technique and insist on the sharp staccato and accuracy of the LH rests. But long after the theory tests have been passed and the Hanon is threadbare, what remains in the heart and soul is the thrill of having made that music.<sup>37</sup>

While the growth of skill is necessary, Blickenstaff insists that the teacher dare not focus too much on knowledge and technique to the detriment of making music. At the conclusion of the first semester of the two-semester piano pedagogy course at Goshen College, Blickenstaff enumerated what he has learned about teaching to his pedagogy students. The fifth item on the list was: “The joy of piano lessons for a child lies in the act of making music: Lessons that focus on mechanics are not enjoyable to the child; lessons that focus on sound, expression, and contrast are fulfilling.”<sup>38</sup>

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37. Blickenstaff, Are We Really Teaching Music?

38. Marvin Blickenstaff, 1996, Piano Pedagogy, Final Session, Class and Lecture Files from Goshen College. The additional items on Blickenstaff’s list of what he has learned about teaching are: “That all children have ability. That good teaching takes careful planning and involves work. That the positive approach yields best results. That the biggest time-saver in a lesson -- and one of the most

The researcher observed that Blickenstaff motivated his students intrinsically through the music, not through extrinsic rewards. Many piano teachers utilize charts, bulletin boards, stickers, and prizes, as motivational tools in the piano studio, but Blickenstaff does not use this approach. The only reward consistently given to students was verbal praise for their accomplishments and progress. There were only a few other motivational tools, each of which was given for accomplishing a skill other than learning repertoire. Blickenstaff awards certificates of accomplishment for passing a level of his curriculum Technical Skills; each level is comprised of a significant number of warm-ups (scales, arpeggios, chords, and exercises) and requires a year to complete for an average student.<sup>39</sup> Blickenstaff awarded jelly beans for successful reading to beginning students in the preparatory program at Goshen College.<sup>40</sup> Students were asked to read note flashes of several notes and were offered jelly beans for a correct reading. Blickenstaff explained: "At the end of class the students would tell me how many jelly beans they had earned and I would distribute the loot. As far as I recall, that was the only type of reward they received, and only as an incentive for correct

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important things we teach -- is to do it correctly from the beginning. That the joy of piano lessons for a child lies in the act of making music. That children come to piano lessons with bright minds and full hearts. That reinforcement of rhythm and reading are on-going, never-ending aspects of elementary piano lessons."

39. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Technical Skills: Level 1–5*, Teaching Files.

40. Marvin Blickenstaff, *My First Piano Class*, VHS (Goshen, IN, Goshen College, 1994).



reading.”<sup>41</sup> From the researcher’s perspective, students were motivated by their repertoire and engaged during the lesson, intently focused on their learning and playing.

### *Repertoire and Expression*

As an extension of his definition of music (see Chapter IV, Music as Sound and Expression), Blickenstaff affirms that performing repertoire expressively is the goal of study and motivates learning. When teachers focus on correcting wrong notes and pointing out errors, they have ignored, according to Blickenstaff, the inspirational quality of the music:

MB: As a piano teacher who comes and says, “You are supposed to play F-sharp there,” [doesn’t] realize that these kids say, “Oh, music is the thing that I grab close to my heart, and it’s just mine.” . . . That’s where we want them to be.

Ernst: So in what ways as a teacher can you help them get there, or help them find that with the piano?

MB: You go to the music. You go to the music. Every piece has a little message. I am so tired and really impatient with teachers who just teach notes because you’re bypassing an opportunity to bring the music alive. . . . So you go to the music, and say, “What does this music have to tell us?” . . . You open up their imagination of what *sound* [emphasis his] can convey. And that’s where the magic of music is, what it does to our minds and spirits.<sup>42</sup>

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41. Marvin Blickenstaff, 2010–2012, Personal Correspondence with Sara Ernst.

42. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by author, Interview 4 of 6 (Collegeville, PA, November 19, 2009).

He often uses the phrase “to hook” the student to describe how a teacher can inspire students through the powerful sound of the music they learn. In Blickenstaff’s philosophy, the opposite pedagogical approach is to motivate through mechanics, theory (notation), and accuracy. He explained:

I’m afraid that if we don’t hook the students, right from the very beginning, into feeling what they’re doing is something very special, for themselves and everybody who hears them, that they’re manipulating sound in a very special way, we’ll lose them. . . . It fun’s for awhile to learn a little bit about that dot on that page equals this note . . . but that runs dry after awhile, and pretty quickly actually.<sup>43</sup>

A fundamental tenet of Blickenstaff’s philosophy is that the act of making music and creating expressive sound must be at the core of instruction in piano.

Blickenstaff performs for students, giving them an essential understanding of how the music sounds, which from his viewpoint, will inspire them to learn the repertoire. He summarized in an article on performing for students that “sound motivates” and that his modeling will inspire students through giving them “a view of the road ahead.”<sup>44</sup> In a lesson with Rose, a high-school student, Blickenstaff performed a complete piece for her.<sup>45</sup> Rose had practiced this new piece, Alexander Dorn’s Etude in C-sharp Minor, during the prior week. Rose and Blickenstaff spent nearly a quarter of her lesson in detailed, repetitious, and slow

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43. Blickenstaff, Interview 1 of 6.

44. Marvin Blickenstaff, “For What Purposes Do You Play for Your Students?,” *Keyboard Companion* 8, no. 3 (1997): 36–37.

45. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Rose, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff’s Home Studio, November 19, 2009).

practice on the etude; Blickenstaff guided her, often correcting her fingering and her reading (the key signature of this etude has four sharps, which poses a challenge for most intermediate-level pianists). Instead of ending the lesson segment at this point, Blickenstaff performed the piece with Rose looking over his shoulder at the music. With the sound of a refined performance, he encouraged Rose to continue the strenuous reading and repetitious practice.

As Blickenstaff stated, he as a youth was awed by performances of large masterworks, and he has witnessed how his students are motivated to learn music that inspires them. At Blickenstaff's home studio, the researcher observed the lesson of Elaina, a senior in high school, and noted that her repertoire consisted of several early-advanced pieces, including Debussy's "Clair de lune" and Sibelius's "Romance in D-flat." At the same time, a concert-level work Chopin's *Ballade in G Minor* appeared on her repertoire list, and this constituted a significant increase in level. During her lesson, Elaina struggled to read small excerpts from the *Ballade*, and Blickenstaff patiently guided her through the fingering and practice techniques for this challenging repertoire. Blickenstaff explained this unexpected repertoire selection (without being directly asked) during a later question and answer session with teachers at Interlochen Arts Camp. A teacher (other than the researcher) asked Blickenstaff how to handle the situation when a student wants to play something that is much too difficult. Blickenstaff's answer was hardly predictable:

I had the most interesting experience with, again, this phenomenon of how motivation can really be very, very effective in the learning sequence. Every student wants to play Für Elise and you have to deal with that. I had a student this year, a senior in high school, [who] had lots of deficiencies. This was Elaina [directed to the researcher]. Lovely girl, but couldn't sight read well at all. But this was my last licks with her, and she saw the movie *The Pianist*, that incredible story of Warsaw and the guy who survived the Warsaw ghetto experiences. And she fell in love with the G Minor Ballade, just fell in love. And she ordered the music and she said, "I just love this piece." And I said, "Elaina, I'm sorry but you're not ready for this piece." And she said, "I just *love* that piece!" [emphasis his] And, I said, "Well you can fool around with the notes a little bit if you want to, that's fine." And by the end of the year, she played the whole thing, except for the coda, very acceptably. I thought, with tears in my eyes, what a tragedy that would have been if I had stayed by my guns and said, [in a high preachy tone] "Elaina you can't learn this piece, you're not ready!" . . . And it was such a passion with her, that she worked measure by measure by measure until she could play this piece that she loved. Every time that happens, I really feel that I am learning from my students, that motivation is such an incredible stimulating experience in the learning sequence.<sup>46</sup>

This experience was undoubtedly formative for Elaina, and Blickenstaff confirmed his attitude that music motivates learning through this incidence.

Blickenstaff declares that beginning repertoire can have the same expressive and inspirational qualities for children as the music of the Classical tradition does for adults. He preached to his pedagogy students that modeling a refined interpretation and guiding a student to perform with heightened expressivity will create a moment of "thrill:"

I emphasize with my pedagogy students that on their level [a beginner's level] they [beginners] too are playing . . . slow beautiful pieces that have wonderful, dreamy or floaty [sic] moments about them that are for them, on their level, what a beautiful Chopin Nocturne would be for us. We don't

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46. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Questions and Answers*, MP3 created by author (Interlochen, MI, Interlochen Center for the Arts, 2010).

have to wait to the 5th, 6th, 7th year of piano study so that we can really get to make wonderful musical thrilling experiences, but we have to talk about that and document that in the lesson, otherwise it's really lost."<sup>47</sup>

In a lesson with a Goshen College pedagogy student, a student teacher coached a student on the piece "Dreaming" from *Music Pathways*, and Blickenstaff encouraged the teacher to captivate the student's imagination through a sophisticated interpretation. He explained his philosophy in the lesson evaluation:

She put on the pedal, played it high, and you praised her for her performance. All fine. What would the piece sound like if it were considerably slower? Experiment. Think interpretation much in the same light as you do in your own repertoire. "Dreaming" is, for the moment, Rosabeth's preparation for Debussy.<sup>48</sup>

Because expressive music making motivates students to learn piano, Blickenstaff instructed his student teachers how to explore interpretation and create lasting musical experiences in their lessons with young children.

### *Self-Expression through Composition*

To motivate learning through music making and self-expression, Blickenstaff includes composition in his curriculum, most rigorously in his training of young beginners. Blickenstaff summarized the goals of these assignments as "self-expression, ownership of the keyboard, use of concepts,"<sup>49</sup> and these activities are referred to as "You the Composer" in *Music Pathways*, his elementary

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47. Blickenstaff, *Piano Study's Magic Triangle*, VHS.

48. Marvin Blickenstaff, 1996, Piano Pedagogy, Lesson Evaluations, Class and Lecture Files from Goshen College.

49. Marvin Blickenstaff, How Children Learn, Workshop Lecture Notes.

method. Among the students surveyed and interviewed for this study, five students were enrolled as children in Blickenstaff's group classes at Goshen College. All five individuals mentioned "You the Composer" as a memorable aspect of this curriculum. Mary Rose Jordan expanded upon her enjoyment of these exercises: "I loved that because I loved writing music. . . . [I]n our early recitals . . . we were allowed to play some 'You the Composer' pieces. I feel like that was another way he inspired creativity."<sup>50</sup>

Blickenstaff insists that students are guided through these composition activities because not all students are drawn to this creative self-expression. For instance, Amy Thut remembered these assignments as "challenging" because she "didn't think of herself as creative."<sup>51</sup> Blickenstaff wrote detailed observation comments to his piano pedagogy students upon listening to tapes of their lessons with these beginners. On one occasion, Blickenstaff guided the teacher on how to help the young child become more expressive; the composition assignment was a reinforcement activity, in which the student was required to use a specific rhythmic idea. Blickenstaff wrote to the teacher:

"You the Composer" -- She [the young student] got the correct rhythm idea. You said "That was beautiful" which you might truly feel. What needed comment was the fact that she made the required rhythmic formula very clear. [There was] No comment on [the] title or what is being expressed. Help her with that. There is little talk in your lesson about mood and

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50. Mary Rose Jordan, interviewed by author (Skype Interview, February 1, 2010).

51. Ernst, "Survey of Students."

expression. Remember the statement about the reason children take lessons? to make exciting sound at the keyboard? If we do not help them with expression, we deprive them of an important emotional/musical experience. With most students it does not happen naturally, it needs our coaching.<sup>52</sup>

Composition activities are a critical aspect of motivation and self-expression in lessons of the young child, and Blickenstaff includes these guided activities as a way for students to be creative at the piano.

### *Enjoyment of Musical Experiences*

When students perform artistically and with mastery during each lesson, the shared musical experience between teacher and student confirms the importance of piano lessons in the student's life. "Ultimately the **only** important thing about the lesson, the only lasting contribution our lessons make to the student's life," Blickenstaff wrote, "is involving the student musically" [emphasis from original text.]<sup>53</sup> Every lesson, from Blickenstaff's viewpoint, must contain an experience where the student and teacher delight in music together:

Each lesson has a **musical thrill**; a very special moment to you and the student. It could come... through a duet between you and the student (a wonderful attitude to foster: **we** make music **together**); through a special repertoire selection; through some moment of musical break-through

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52. Blickenstaff, *Piano Pedagogy*, Lesson Evaluations.

53. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Effective Teaching: A View from the Other Side of the Coin*, Workshop Lecture Notes.

where the progress is breath-taking. [emphasis and punctuation from original text]<sup>54</sup>

Musical thrills are memorable because the purpose of the lesson time becomes the sheer enjoyment of playing and the shared musical experience that results. These stimulating performances contribute to a student's feeling of self efficacy, and Blickenstaff desires for his students to leave lessons saying, "I can play a piano" and "I am a pianist."<sup>55</sup>

Blickenstaff insisted that his piano pedagogy students try to incite magical musical moments during their lessons with young beginners through frequent performances and teacher-student duets. Blickenstaff reminded a pedagogy student in a written critique of her teaching to focus on the music during lessons, modifying the written plan to suit the child's need for performing. Blickenstaff wrote to this student teacher:

If she [the young beginner] comes to the lesson so eager to play (remember Chronister's comment: "students come to us for one reason only: to make exciting sound at the keyboard") it may be a clue to you about the order of your lesson plan -- after some initial warm-ups -- quick -- have her play pieces. You could even go back to Engine #9 and Ebenezer. Play along with her -- make up some duets. Do Kum Bah Yah. And coach them so that the pieces are even more expressive or challenging. She would love it. Then you could go to NEW PIECES and/or REVIEW PIECES.<sup>56</sup>

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54. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Passing the Baton: The Language of Basic Skills*, Workshop Lecture Notes.

55. Hallquist, 11.

56. Blickenstaff, *Piano Pedagogy*, Lesson Evaluations.



As Blickenstaff suggested, performances of well-learned music during lessons satisfy a student's desire to play and balance the new, recently-assigned repertoire. Furthermore, he insisted that teacher duets were played accurately and musically, to heighten the musicality and the gratification of completing the piece. He gave pinpointed criticism to a different pedagogy student who poorly performed duets during the lesson of a child. Blickenstaff boldly wrote to this young teacher regarding the teacher duet to the song "Star Light:"

Your accompaniment was highly inaccurate, and you left the piece with little enhancement of the musical experience. Your goal is to lift his performance to a much higher level. Your accompaniments are to make the experience quite breathtaking. As you prepare your lessons, play over the pieces and ask yourself what is the most expressive interpretation possible on each piece. The students need for you to play for them, to help them know how the piece is to go. If we allow the students to think their only obligation to these pieces is to get the hand coordination and rhythm correct, we give them an incorrect message of music study. The goal is to play convincingly, expressively. Your performances for the student and work with the student must take on an aura of "bigger than life."<sup>57</sup>

Blickenstaff's high standard of performance was upheld through his honest critique of this pedagogy student's subpar preparation. For Blickenstaff, having profound musical experiences through performances of beginning repertoire is vital to student success, whether the teacher performs the complimentary duet or coaches the solo performance.

This desire for the student and teacher to enjoy music together is a tangible feature of Blickenstaff's routine in lessons. With transfer students who are new to

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57. Ibid.

his studio, Blickenstaff embraces the motto that students and teachers must enjoy musical expression together. He summarized his methodology:

But the very first thing that I really try to do is find some easy repertoire that makes the student feel successful because . . . success breeds success. And if we can have some fun with music in the beginning, and not necessarily talk about all the things that you don't do well, but can make some music and be expressive. . . . [I] may have to bite my lip a little bit . . . when I look down and see that they're playing like this [makes a collapsed wrist and poor hand shape]. But we're making music together, [and] that may be getting off to the very best start that we could. . . . If I were to look back on some of those lessons, I would hope that the student would report, those beginning lessons were such fun, I enjoyed that. And what they would mean, is that's lovely music.<sup>58</sup>

Student's parents, as observers of Blickenstaff's lessons, appreciate how enjoyment of musical experience occurs in Blickenstaff's lesson. Maggie Yang, a first generation Chinese-American mother of one of Blickenstaff's former piano students, expressed how the music comes "alive." When asked to describe his teaching style, Yang replied:

I think he, Mr. Blickenstaff, makes the music alive. He's not only teaching the skills. . . . The first time he introduce[s] [the] waltz, he will dance with you. Like the Polish dance, the mazurka, he will do something like that. It's fun, even for me [as an observing parent], it's fun. Sometimes he [will be] singing with the music and humming with the music. And so [it's] not only teach[ing] you, your hands must be like this or that. . . . I think that makes students more interested in music. . . . The difference I think, the way he explains the music is different with Marvin. Marvin makes the music alive. He play[s] the piece and let[s] the student listen, and that's the way he teaches.<sup>59</sup>

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58. Blickenstaff, *Questions and Answers*.

59. Maggie Yang, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, November 15, 2010).

Through sharing musical performances, creative musical activities, and playing together in duets, Blickenstaff provides activities through which students can enjoy music at each lesson.

Blickenstaff believes that it is important at times to set aside curricular goals in favor of having fun with music. Blickenstaff wrote that playing for and with students “is most effective when we relinquish some of the distracting urgency of the many skills we must develop and the course material we must cover, and instead find our primary focus in the joy of sharing music with our students.”<sup>60</sup> For instance, Phoebe’s lesson concluded with her performance of a piano arrangement of the hymn “El Shaddai.”<sup>61</sup> After they clarified the tempo, Phoebe played and Blickenstaff sang the lyrics. Soon after Blickenstaff joined her, Phoebe began singing too. A similar moment occurred with Zach, an elementary student who gave a memorized performance of “Deck the Halls.”<sup>62</sup> Blickenstaff sang along, and the student spontaneously joined in the singing. These lessons were touching and memorable for the principal investigator because they were

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60. Marvin Blickenstaff and others, “Teacher Training for the Pianist in Preparation for the 21st Century: Summary and Integration,” *American Music Teacher* 49, no. 6 (June/July 2000): 39.

61. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Phoebe, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff’s Home Studio, November 19, 2009).

62. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Zach, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff’s Home Studio, November 19, 2009).

lesson time spent in pursuit of pure musical enjoyment, lacking any other educational objective.

A direct extension of Blickenstaff's outlook on teachers and students sharing musical experiences is that music is to be shared with others in live performances. For his students, he advocates playing for an audience and provides a variety of performance opportunities for students' families and friends and at retirement homes, churches, and schools.<sup>63</sup> He summarized:

I basically feel that what I want to communicate to my students is that music is for sharing and if all you do is play the piece for yourself, that's only a certain aspect of music. And it's wonderful that you will have the music for all your life, but think of how much more wonderful it'd be if more people heard this. And so we share, and we share through performances.<sup>64</sup>

Concerned about the continuation of a live performance tradition, Blickenstaff cautioned that the prevalence of technology and recordings may cause a shift in modern culture's mentality. He wrote, "Are we not witnessing at least a footnote, if not another whole chapter, in the developing saga of our time called 'Ascendancy of the Spectator; Fall of the Participator'?"<sup>65</sup> When working with students who are hesitant to perform, Blickenstaff suggests using student-teacher duets to help the fearful student gain comfort during performance rather than acquiesce to the

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63. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Coaching Repertoire to Performance*, Workshop Lecture Notes.

64. Blickenstaff, *Questions and Answers*.

65. Blickenstaff, *Are We Really Teaching Music?*

student's desire to not participate.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, all of Blickenstaff's students, at the New School and his home studio, are frequently asked to perform and are given ample and varied opportunities for performance. His students participate in biweekly or monthly group classes where they perform amongst their piano peers, his students participate in yearly recitals and other formal performances, and many of his students participate in festivals, competitions, and auditions.

#### A Process of Personal Growth

Music is not only intrinsically rewarding and motivating; music provides teachers and students with an opportunity to grow and discover more about themselves. Although Blickenstaff demands expressive musical performances from his students, he chooses to focus on the process of growth and learning that occurs through piano study. He stated, "Together, in our music study, we will both grow in our love and understanding of the music, in our fascination about how we learn, and in our relationship."<sup>67</sup> Blickenstaff feels similarly about the art of teaching, that it is a process of personal development and experience. He said, "My experience in 'the old days' as a pedagogy teacher was that effective teaching does not happen just as a result of what I presented in the lectures. Nor does it happen overnight. It is a process of experience and growth. . ."<sup>68</sup> He often jokes, with an air of

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66. Blickenstaff, *Questions and Answers*.

67. Marvin Blickenstaff, *The Transfer Student*, Workshop Lecture Notes.

68. Blickenstaff, *Effective Teaching*.

seriousness, about his own development as both a teacher and a pianist, how he strives to improve: “I really mean this quite sincerely, that before I die, I wish I’d really learn how to teach the piano. [laughing] . . . I feel quite a bit the same way about playing. . . . but I have felt really all my life, this *desire* [emphasis his] to be such a much better pianist.”<sup>69</sup> This process of learning and self-discovery that occurs through music-making is, as Blickenstaff models, truly a life-long endeavor, and he desires to instill a love of this process within his students.

A student’s personal growth is important to Blickenstaff, and he feels a sincere responsibility for it. In an interview-style article in the Goshen College Bulletin, Blickenstaff was asked to compare music with other academic disciplines. He expressed that “The relationship between student and teacher [in music studies] is much closer. . . . When you’re dealing with one person for three or four years, you feel responsible for their personal growth.”<sup>70</sup> His students, as revealed in the surveys of the researcher, were acutely aware of Blickenstaff’s concern for their personal well-being and growth:

“His students’ personal and spiritual well-being were as important to him as their musical development.” Judy Cole (MacLellan), 1973–77, UNC-CH

“As I would expect many of his students will say, I felt closer to Marvin than to any other teacher. Each of us will have several reasons for saying this, but I think all of us felt his deep concern and support for our growth musically and otherwise.” Anonymous graduate student, unknown years, UNC-CH

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69. Blickenstaff, Interview 4 of 6.

70. Wayne Steffen, “Styles differ – commitment to students same,” *Goshen College Bulletin* (March 1992): 10.

“Marvin was a formative influence for me, not just with regard to piano and music, but in life lessons.” Anonymous student, 1982–86, Goshen

“He wasn’t teaching me piano, he was helping me be a better learner.”  
Bradley Kauffman, 1994, Goshen

“[L]essons with him were musical studies but also a chance for philosophical and spiritual discussion. I now have a doctorate in piano and I’ve never since had a teacher who taught the entire person like he did.”  
Anne Waltner, 1996–99, Goshen

Growing from their individual piano lessons, these students had close relationships with Blickenstaff, in which they grew as pianists, explored personal insights and the learning process, and felt supported as individuals.

Even with his youngest pre-college students, Blickenstaff fosters their development as individuals. Mary Rose Jordan explained how she, as a young girl, learned a significant life skill in a piano lesson:

I came one lesson—I think I was in third grade—and I had had a teacher [at school] who was kind of mean, and she yelled a lot, and she made me cry one day. . . . I was still a little emotional when I got to my lesson; my mom told him I had had a hard day at school. And before we got to the piano he said, “Mary Rose, as musicians, we have to leave our emotions at the door and we have to sit down and basically make the best of it.” I feel like that was his advice for life, and his advice for performing and getting the most done, and getting the most out of life.<sup>71</sup>

Blickenstaff described his approach to helping students through tough situations such as this one with Jordan:

The relationship IS important, BUT... our job, our focus is to learn about music. After a rough day at school, the S [student] may feel best if we focus on the music instead of the school trauma. Focus on the musical accomplishment, send the S away from the lesson feeling musical success

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71. Jordan, Interview.

and good about their growing musical skills. Pull out all of your positive, affirming stops.<sup>72</sup>

Through his role as their piano teacher, Blickenstaff's aim is to affirm the student through a positive lesson experience and guide his students through growth as an individual.

The process of learning is never complete, according to Blickenstaff, regardless of how much expertise or experience one has accumulated. In a simple demonstration of this belief, Blickenstaff frequently asked the researcher to comment on his teaching, asking pointed questions about his work, hoping to gain from the experience of being observed. Additionally, despite Blickenstaff's countless presentations to teachers nationally and internationally, he prepares for each one. He types notes for each session, often modifying them when he represents the same topic at a new locale. He explained:

I've also heard from teachers in workshops, that my workshops are so easy to take notes from. And I think—well, first of all, I would never give a workshop without almost every word being [pause], I type them out! And, I've always admired people who could just stand up and do it, sort of from memory, and I can't do that. I don't trust myself to do that.<sup>73</sup>

Furthermore, even with his long list of performance and pedagogy topics for presentations (see Appendix E), Blickenstaff continues to expand his listing. In December of 2010, Blickenstaff presented a new session on "Teaching Edward

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72. Marvin Blickenstaff, Studio Efficiency, Workshop Lecture Notes.

73. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by author, Interview 5 of 6 (Collegeville, PA, November 20, 2009).



MacDowell's Piano Music" at a MacDowell Symposium at Elizabethtown College.<sup>74</sup>

Blickenstaff continues to expand himself professionally, striving to make progress as a teacher, presenter, and performer.

Even after a fifty-year career as a teacher and professor, Blickenstaff aspires to hone his teaching in order to provide the best instruction possible to all of his students. Blickenstaff voiced his commitment to becoming a better teacher in an interview with the researcher:

I really am not satisfied with so much of what I do and that is sort of one of the things that keeps me at it . . . I really'd like to be able to close out life feeling that I was good. . . . I get these awards [gesturing to honorary diploma from the Royal Conservatory of Music] and things like that, and that's just really wonderful, and it tells me that it's not been all bad [laughing], but I feel that it's not good [laughing]. . .

Many individuals interviewed by the researcher commented on the genuine humility of Blickenstaff as did Scott Donald, a colleague of Blickenstaff's at the New School. Donald summarized Blickenstaff's strong reputation:

[The reason] everyone [talks of him] with very warm regards, is because he is so unassuming, and he still questions every day what he does in a lesson. . . . When we meet together as a faculty, and we discuss problems or issues, he will say things like, "You know, I just went away from that lesson just thinking why do I think I can teach?" He still questions to this day everything that he does; it is not, he just assumes that he's got it all under his hat, that it's something that is an ongoing process.<sup>75</sup>

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74. Elizabethtown College, News, "MacDowell Symposium at Elizabethtown College," <http://www2.etown.edu/news.aspx?newsid=3076&dept=29> (accessed August 17, 2011).

75. Scott Donald, interviewed by author (The New School for Music Study, Kingston, NJ, November 18, 2009).

Blickenstaff does not assume that he is the best teacher, desires self-improvement, and pursues excellence in his teaching.

Two ways in which Blickenstaff has recently expanded and improved his teaching are continual lesson planning and augmenting his course offerings. Referring to his years at Goshen College, Blickenstaff recounted, “My wife has always wondered why I rush in on Sunday night to work up new lesson plans for the week, given that I’ve been doing this for so long. It’s because I continue to hope that I can teach a little better each year.”<sup>76</sup> The researcher noted Blickenstaff’s persistent commitment to lesson planning; the researcher arrived at Blickenstaff’s home on a Sunday afternoon, and Blickenstaff spent much of his evening in his office creating lesson plans and assignment sheets for his coming lessons. Frequent planning times were squeezed into Blickenstaff’s full schedule during the researcher’s visit; all lessons or classes during the four days of observation were prepared in advance. Blickenstaff explained in November of 2009 that he was frustrated with himself for not offering group classes to his students in his home studio, and by July of 2010, Blickenstaff had arranged group classes on Sunday afternoons:

This year I finally got my rear end in gear and had repertoire classes for my home studio. I have been chastising myself for all these years that we do it at the New School all the time with rigor. . . . And I’ve always begged off and said I don’t have time. So this year, the first Sunday afternoon of every

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76. Hallquist, 13.

month, all my kids came together. . . . And, so that I felt was a big step in the right direction.<sup>77</sup>

A tireless teacher, Blickenstaff continues to hone his craft ensuring that all of his students receive the best training he can provide.

As a performer and pianist, Blickenstaff has maintained a regular practice and performance schedule throughout his career and continues his growth as a musician. Tom Lohr summarized how Blickenstaff's philosophy of practice and performance was meaningful to him as a student at UNC-CH: "Each of us is our own best teacher, and so we are to be digging and probing and thinking, so that we take ourselves down that path. And though we might reach some important points in that path, the process is never quite over, is never quite fulfilled, there are always additional steps we can take."<sup>78</sup> Karen Zorn recalled how crucial it was for her to see Blickenstaff's continual self-improvement because she realized how the study of a musical instrument can become a life-long process of growth and development. She explained how candid he was with her:

One of things I learned from him is that as a teacher it's really important to show your students that you're not a finished product and that you're never done. And it's really important to show your students how you got to where you are. . . . As a teacher then you'd show them the steps along the way. . . . He was really willing to show what he didn't know, in a very authentic way, in a very real way. . . . I actually knew the things about his performance that he was insecure about because he told me. And I think he told me because he figured it would help my performance because if I could see that he

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77. Blickenstaff, *Questions and Answers*.

78. Lohr, Interview.

didn't feel like everything was [pause], that performance was unpredictable, that it would actually help me.<sup>79</sup>

Personal growth as a musician and performer is a continuing process, one that

Blickenstaff has maintained through his career and modeled to his students.

His strong work ethic and dedicated attitude to seeking continual personal development are personality traits that Blickenstaff attributes to his parents and seeks to pass on to students. As discussed in the biography (see Chapter III), Blickenstaff's parents required dedicated work at school, in chores, and in summer jobs. Blickenstaff raved about this legacy from his parents:

I think one of the most valuable lessons I was ever taught in life was just a general message that came from me from my parents at home, who just made it very clear that if you want to accomplish something in life, you're gonna have to work for it, you know. And as a musician that has just been one of the most wonderful legacies that my parents could ever, ever have handed on to me. They made it very clear, although you may have a talent, you will have to work for whatever you want to accomplish. And so I've been able to accept the hard work of teaching and performing, as a given fact. That's what life is all about.<sup>80</sup>

Blickenstaff professed that the importance of perseverance and this type of dedication can be taught to students, especially when challenged by difficult repertoire:

But, it doesn't bother me if a student has to stay on a piece for quite a while because I think they're learning something from that also, and the basic lesson is, if you stick with something long enough, you can conquer it. And I don't want that to be the only thing we do, because I don't like this business of just, the uphill battle all the way. But I think there is some value in that

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79. Karen Zorn, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, March 16, 2010).

80. Blickenstaff, Interview, ca. 1983.

because they realize a very important lesson in life; . . . if I discipline myself and work with a plan, I will accomplish and I will overcome. And then I think they are very proud of themselves when they learn the *Fantasia Impromptu* [laughing].<sup>81</sup>

The value of music study exists beyond learning repertoire, as students can learn the importance of dedication and self-betterment, both of which are important to Blickenstaff as an individual, musician, and a teacher.

### The Teacher as Role Model

Teachers are role models for students, and Blickenstaff deems that teachers consider themselves not only a professional model but also a life model for students. Even though he had a high-quality piano at his home in Goshen, he practiced on campus to show a dedicated routine to his students. To further understand his philosophy, the researcher asked Blickenstaff during their final interview, “How important is it that your students see you as someone who continues to learn and grow?” Blickenstaff responded that being music teachers reaches far beyond music and the piano:

Very. . . . At Goshen and North Carolina, I played a recital every year, and that was part of that whole thing, that the students hear you working and hear you performing. I think that a teacher is a model for a student in sort of every [way]: the way the studio looks and what you do with your time and what they know about your personal life. . . . That becomes sort of an image of what it is to be a professional teacher. I hope I was a good model for my students; I think that’s what you’re there for.<sup>82</sup>

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81. Blickenstaff, Interview 6 of 6.

82. Ibid.

Joel Harrison, who was a college student at UNC-CH, echoed these sentiments exactly:

Marvin's greatest influence on me was just Marvin. [chuckling] Marvin being a role model in that he was a wonderful and caring teacher, a fine pianist, and performer, he was gracious and extroverted in the way he dealt with everyone. As far as I was concerned, he was fair and just in his dealings with people and honest. That's a *pretty good* role model. [emphasis his]<sup>83</sup>

Not only was this felt by college students, but also by parents of pre-college students. Yang, a parent of one of Blickenstaff's former pre-college students, explained how he was a profound influence on their whole family, not just their daughter:

I really think in this ten years we have [had] Marvin in our life . . . we [have] learn[ed] so much from him, and not only his teaching and his personality, that [he as a] human being is so wonderful. I think the impact for, not only for Grace [but] for us, is a life time. . . . He is 75 years old, and nobody believes that. [laughing] It is amazing. I don't think he [has] changed a bit since we [have known] him. I think that's remarkable. I guess because of this, music make[s] him so young and so wonderful.<sup>84</sup>

Blickenstaff's integrity, enthusiasm, and kindness have provided students and their families with a valuable model, and Blickenstaff is aware of the potential impact he can have on those within his circle of students.

Two of Blickenstaff's pre-college students who have developed professional aspirations to become piano teachers indicated that Blickenstaff was a significant figure in choosing that goal. Kelly Marquis Frieje said:

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83. Joel Harrison, interviewed by author (Music Teachers National Association Conference in Albuquerque, NM, March 28, 2010).

84. Yang, Interview.

It was always the goal [to continue studies beyond high school]. I think though, just going into school is one thing, but then what do you want to do with it when you're done with school is another thing. . . . The kind of teacher that he was, and how important he was to me in my development as a musician, really inspired me not to only want to major in music; I had a small desire to be a college professor. But, that really inspired to want to do that for other people, and that is what my goal is still. And I always think back to him for sure, as the example of what I want, of the kind of teacher I want to be. So I would say, more than just preparing me for being a music major, it was more of a life work, kind of thing.<sup>85</sup>

Jeffery Weaver said, reflecting on his work with Blickenstaff at the Goshen College Piano Workshops and as a private student:

I have a great amount of respect for Mr. Blickenstaff. From those two very formative [years], and even before and after that . . . working with him . . . has really encouraged me to be a piano teacher. I go back to him. I say he's been my role model, and he continues to be my role model. He is a big part of the reason why I wanted to be piano teacher and continue to do so.<sup>86</sup>

Both of these individuals expressed how Blickenstaff has been a mentor for them professionally; in addition to Blickenstaff encouraging their goals, they wished to emulate his teaching approach.

This theme of a teacher acting as a role model also emerged throughout the surveys of Blickenstaff's former students. Many students commented upon how Blickenstaff's career exemplified a tireless work ethic, the importance of continual learning, and the value of performing. The following statements were drawn from surveys of former students, representing each decade of his professorships:

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85. Kelly Marquis Frieje, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, March 5, 2010).

86. Jeffery Weaver, interviewed by author (Interlochen, MI, July 25, 2010).

"I have found in him a significant role model in the following areas: generous giving of his time in teaching, encouragement of the highest musical standards, and personal caring of his students." Carol lei Breckenridge, 1970–72, UNC-CH

"His example as both a teacher and performer, keeping his own skills top notch. . . continually reading and studying." Judy Cole (MacLellan), 1973–77, UNC-CH

"A great teacher because he himself was always learning – he was always speaking of some workshop or conference he had just attended and what he had learned there from other piano teachers." Anonymous student, 1984–85, Goshen

"His complete commitment to his own practicing and performing along with his teaching load. . . His energy and commitment to his own development as a musician, even as he gave complete attention to others' learning and development." Rebecca Martin, 1984–87, Goshen

"Extremely hard worker – he was the first person on the music floor in the mornings. . . He is dedicated to learning new works and expanding his repertoire." Anonymous student, 1990–92, Goshen

"Marvin is one of my earliest and most profound models for how a musical artist thinks, prepares, performs, and teaches." Bradley Kauffman, 1994, Goshen

"He was consistent in doing what he asked his students also to do." Anonymous student, 1996–98, Goshen

"I can't think of anyone that logged more hours there [at Goshen] than he did--his car was there before 7am and didn't leave until it was dark outside." Anne Waltner, 1996–99, Goshen

"Exercise, practice, and sheer love of music were what he modeled for me." Anonymous student, 1998–99, Goshen



Blickenstaff himself wrote that “Everything we do and are, everything the students see in our studios – they become a model for the students.”<sup>87</sup> These words resound true through the comments of his former students.

### **The Student-Teacher Relationship**

Piano studies most often occur in a one-on-one setting with the piano student and teacher working together once a week. For many young students, this is the only situation in which they develop a close relationship with an adult who is not a family member. Unlike teachers from schools and classrooms, the piano teacher interacts with each student individually, causing the piano teacher to be a unique elder in the child’s life. Blickenstaff considers this dynamic carefully and approaches his students with utmost care and concern for their well-being. Blickenstaff becomes both a friend to and respected collaborator with his students while maintaining the authority of a teacher. His students are treated with respect, out of his admiration of their potential and intellect, and his philosophy of teaching is built upon the tenet that a healthy student-teacher relationship grows out of the teacher’s affirmation of the student. All of Blickenstaff’s students are given frequent verbal praise; Blickenstaff sustains honest communication, through stating achievements and clarifying objectives. He upholds his responsibility to guide students regarding their practice and when applicable, their potential to have a career in music and their professional lives as musicians. Lastly, Blickenstaff

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87. Blickenstaff, *How Children Learn*.

is adamant that students deserve special recognition from their teachers when goals are achieved.

### Collaborative Learning as a Mutual Goal

Blickenstaff balances the need to be a friend and supporter of his students with the need to be a teacher who is listened to and respected. He does not believe that teachers need to be domineering figures who teach through intimidation; he believes in fostering a relationship with his students in which both parties are mutually interested in growth and learning. Blickenstaff emotionally described his desire to explore music and learn alongside students:

I suppose that when I die the thing that I would hope that most of my students would say about our lessons is that I enjoyed our lessons so much because we were good friends. Something like that, rather than saying, I hated my lessons because I was so afraid. . . . I feel in many ways that my role as a teacher is to be a music advocate, that I help the student, that I help ease the student's path into musical enjoyment, and facilitate that and plant some flowers along the way. . . . And sometimes the communication is not all warm-fuzzies because you are responsible for evaluating and assessment.<sup>88</sup>

Blickenstaff uses the word "friend" when describing his relationship with his students; he is not indicating that they are friends in a social sense, but rather he is stating that he wants his students to feel liked by him. Blickenstaff discussed this in an interview with Jane Magrath:

Magrath: You know, I think we forget, we know that we're teachers.

MB: Yeah.

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88. Blickenstaff, *Questions and Answers*.

Magrath: But we forget that we're friends to our students. And I think unless we think about that, there are problems. . . .

MB: I think of that in two ways. I think it is possible to overdo the friendship business to the point that our job, which is learning to make music, becomes a secondary issue. On the other hand, I think it is possible to not look at the fact that piano teaching and piano study is a relationship and any psychologist will tell you that it takes several things to make a good relationship. And one of these things is that you really like the other person, and so being a friend is part of this relationship; you cannot really teach effectively a student that you do not like personally. Really!<sup>89</sup>

Nonetheless, a clear distinction between friend and teacher needs to exist, as he further clarified that there needs to be “differentiation between my friend and my teacher, and the person I can really cry on her shoulder and the person that makes me go home and really try to achieve.”<sup>90</sup>

The collaborative relationship, in Blickenstaff's philosophy, must remain focused on the music and achieving goals while the student feels secure and respects the teacher. Blickenstaff explained the necessity of cultivating a cooperative relationship in his lecture notes for his presentation *The Transfer Student*:

In the long run, I find it best to foster the attitude that I am pleased, even privileged, to spend time with the student focusing on music. . . . “Togetherness” and “cooperation” are important attitudes to foster. The tough teacher image who always stands in judgment is withering to the psyches of most younger students. Of course we have standards and

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89. Blickenstaff, Interview, ca. 1983.

90. Blickenstaff, Interview 4 of 6.

expectations. But they can be communicated gradually rather than in one fell swoop.<sup>91</sup>

Harrison remarked that he had this type of relationship with Blickenstaff during his years as an undergraduate student at UNC-CH:

I . . . needed some background. I needed to work hard, which was fine, but that in and of itself was not an issue, but Marvin was basically never negative in lessons. He was a cheerleader so to speak. A serious man and a serious teacher. There was never any sense that, you go to the lesson, that you're gonna get beat up or something like that. It was always this, come, a quiet sense that we're all in this, and we're working together. This is what I think we need to do to improve this situation.<sup>92</sup>

As Harrison indicated, Blickenstaff assumed the role of teacher during lessons, such that their attention remained on learning and the music. Mary Rose Jordan, a pre-college student of Blickenstaff's, expressed that her relationship with Blickenstaff during lessons was focused on her and the music, in a "collegial" environment, despite her young age. She explained, through an anecdote, how Blickenstaff delineated their roles of teacher and student and insisted upon mutual respect:

I think there was one time where he had to discipline me. He must have said something that was wrong or just mis-spoke, and I corrected him. And he said, "Mary Rose, I'm your teacher," and . . . "Even if I was wrong, you shouldn't correct your teacher." . . . It stuck with me, and I have to admit I have used that very comment with my students. . . . He was in control.<sup>93</sup>

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91. Blickenstaff, *The Transfer Student*.

92. Harrison, Interview.

93. Jordan, Interview.

This mentality of mutual respect and collaboration is enriched with Blickenstaff's love and passion for learning and music making, allowing him to act as an authority figure without being threatening.

*Respect of Students and Their Intellect*

Blickenstaff respects students for who they are as human beings and believes that as their teacher, he can have a profound impact on their development. Arlene Steffen recalled Blickenstaff stating, "You must always hold them [students] with unconditional high regard," and she confirmed, "he does that."<sup>94</sup> Although his goal is to educate the student, helping them to further their abilities as a pianist, he is humbled by his responsibility to care and nurture each individual. Blickenstaff conveyed with emotional gravity, in a serious tone:

I am not in the business of damaging human personalities. I just don't believe in that. And, I think that as an authority figure in their lives, I have the potential of doing that; if I were really mean, I could really *hurt these kids* [emphasis his]. And I am much more eager to build them up as human beings and therefore opening them up to the possibility of what a wonderful role music can play in their lives. If they're open to my relationship with them, then they're open to the subject matter, and on and on it goes.<sup>95</sup>

Harrison continued to explain his relationship with Blickenstaff, detailing the impact of this respect and support upon him as a student:

There is this tacit understanding between the teacher and the student that they believe in you and you can do all of this. It's not that everybody's happy

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94. Arlene Steffen, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, January 18, 2010).

95. Blickenstaff, Interview 4 of 6.

and smiling and fluffy all the time. Just the sense that there is worth and respect, and that's what comes through. I've had other teachers where they were far more animated in a lesson, and I didn't feel the same kind of respect and sense of worth flowing between teacher and student. To me that's one of the reasons why I would call Marvin a very gifted teacher.<sup>96</sup>

In a presentation on being an efficient teacher, Blickenstaff cautioned: "It is possible to be so 'professional' and 'efficient' that we run a 'music factory' rather than a studio in which young human beings experience music and grow in their musical skill. The human element must never be lost, but the subject matter must always be our focus."<sup>97</sup> With a continual respect for students and a strong desire to help them further their pianistic abilities, Blickenstaff is able to build strong, effective, learning relationships with his piano students.

In the surveys conducted by the researcher, many of Blickenstaff's former students indicated how this master teacher believed in their potential and personally respected them. Several students wrote:

"As a graduate student I felt that he respected my creativity and individuality and used his understanding of my potential to inspire and guide me to reach the highest level possible. It was definitely a teacher/student relationship but he encouraged me to become a more independent pianist and expertly directed me towards my ultimate goal of becoming a good teacher myself." Donna Hughes Sanders, 1973–74, UNC-CH

"As I began to focus more on singing, he remained demanding, yet generous in support of my other interests. When I returned to Goshen to give a recital 5 years after graduating, he was extremely supportive and enthusiastic, never giving me the feeling that I had 'let him down' by not focussing [sic] on piano." Rebecca Martin, 1984–87, Goshen

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96. Harrison, Interview.

97. Blickenstaff, Studio Efficiency.

“He was a good listener, he could make you feel good about yourself, and see that you can be good at playing the piano.” Anonymous student, 1988–89, Goshen

“He was approachable, respectful, and challenging, all at once. . . . His respect for me also influenced the respect I try to show all the nursing students I work with. He was never belittling or demeaning, always encouraging and pushing for high standards, which is what I try to do as a nursing professor.” Anonymous student, 1995–96, Goshen

“Not being a professional musician, I’d say that one of the big life-related take-aways I got from being his student was that I am indeed capable of performing at a high level and working hard to achieve goals.” Anonymous student, 1996–97, Goshen<sup>98</sup>

Regardless of the growth of his professional profile throughout his career, students continued to feel his respect for them as individuals. Blickenstaff encouraged their growth as musicians while their interactions confirmed his authority as a teacher.

Teachers who have heard Blickenstaff’s masterclasses commented on his concern for the student and ability to make students feel comfortable on stage.

Gerald Fischbach, director of the International Workshops, aptly described how Blickenstaff’s approach affected his masterclasses:

His masterclasses with young students can be particularly inspiring. The proven attention and personal concern that he had for students just shined through so strongly, and I’ve seen that happen at big MTNA events where there might have been a thousand or more people in the audience, and then I’ve also seen it in our event [International Workshops] when there might have been more like a hundred. At some point, it just would seem so much like, as far as Marvin and that student were concerned, there were only two people in that room. Magic can happen.<sup>99</sup>

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98. Ernst, “Survey of Students.”

99. Gerald Fischbach, interviewed by author (Phone Interview, February 5, 2010).

In her account of an NCKP masterclass in 2001, Nancy Bachus described Blickenstaff's sensitivity to the student's vulnerability, being watched by hundreds: "When C.J. did not know the meaning of the word *cantabile*, this could have been awkward and embarrassing, but Mr. Blickenstaff quickly said, 'You don't know? But you're doing it so beautifully!'"<sup>100</sup> According to teachers who have observed his masterclasses, Blickenstaff:

- treats each student with such respect and kindness
- keeps his focus on the student, so for the student it feels like a one-on-one event
- communicate[s] with the students on their level
- makes the student feel at ease
- guides the student along without ever telling them that they are doing it wrong
- helps the student relax and enjoy the experience

Some of the adjectives and phrases teachers used to describe Blickenstaff behavior were "caring, kind, encouraging, warm, gentle, and positive," and he demonstrated "thorough attention to the needs of the student, . . . sincere concern for the student, . . . and consideration for the young students."<sup>101</sup> This tenet of his philosophy, that students must be respected at all times, is tangible in his teaching even during

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100. Nancy Bachus, "Teaching Demonstration by Marvin Blickenstaff," National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy, (Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy, 2001) (<http://www.francesclarkcenter.org/NationalConferencePages/2001/blickdemo.pdf> accessed March 4, 2009).

101. Ernst, "Survey of Teachers."



masterclasses when isolated teaching occurs to students that are not previously known to the teacher.

In addition, Blickenstaff has strong opinions regarding the potential abilities and the intellect of even his youngest students. He does not limit the potential of his six- and seven-year-old students simply because of their size and age. The researcher asked Blickenstaff how he views the intellect of a child. He responded quickly, without hesitation:

As having infinite potential. I am staggered with the minds of my kids, and I know there are certain things within their growth development—words that they don't use and maybe some concepts that they're not prepared to have presented to them—but I am staggered with the brightness of my kids. I have *infinite* [emphasis his] respect for their minds. I've got some kids that are just kind of scary. How quickly they absorb and how well they retain and what fun they have in learning. But, I find it sinful to think that a child's mind is limited. That's just not the way God made us.<sup>102</sup>

In Blickenstaff's philosophy of teaching, he does not confine the intelligence of children but rather allows himself to be amazed and awed by their capabilities.

Beverly Lapp observed how respecting children's intellects inspired the children to adhere to Blickenstaff's instruction. She explained: "He—one of the over-riding things I would be so struck by—he treated them like little adults, with such respect. He never talked down to them, and so they were just with him. He really respected their intellect."<sup>103</sup> Jordan was the student from among all interviewees who had studied with Blickenstaff from the youngest age, from the age of five (she

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102. Blickenstaff, Interview 6 of 6.

103. Beverly Lapp, interviewed by author (Goshen, IN, January 15, 2010).

was the only five year old that Blickenstaff allowed in his classes at Goshen). She reflected upon her training as a child:

I think just mostly that he made me feel like a musician and an adult and he treated me as such. When I think back to being a kid, I don't think I realized I was a kid most of the time. I read very early; I loved thinking big thoughts. And so he was so perfect for me because he helped me develop as a kid needs to develop, but he didn't ever treat me like I didn't know what I was doing. . . . He never treated me like a little kid, except for a couple comments where he was really teaching me about growing up.<sup>104</sup>

For Jordan, she felt the respect of her teacher and now believes this allowed her to maximize her learning.

During his piano lessons Blickenstaff frequently showed genuine amazement at the accomplishments of his youngest students. His lessons were filled with comments documenting how much learning had occurred. For example, in his lesson with seven-year-old Zach, Blickenstaff had him sight read portions of a new piece, an arrangement of "Joy to the World."<sup>105</sup> At the end of this lesson segment, Blickenstaff said to Zach, "It is wonderful that you are reading so well and you have learned so much music that you can just about do anything! It's just great!" In Faye's lesson, Blickenstaff affirmed her progress after a practice session: "You have learned so much! Can you imagine a year ago, trying to play this piece? You're all over the keyboard, . . . and 6/8 is as hard as it gets with rhythm, and

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104. Jordan, Interview.

105. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Zach.

you've mastered it. . ."106 Blickenstaff's students are encouraged to feel mastery at the piano, and he accomplishes this by telling his students that he is amazed by their progress and sees limitless potential in their pianism.

The researcher observed in Blickenstaff's lessons that students were asked to demonstrate their knowledge and abilities frequently and were challenged to answer questions and explore complex concepts and techniques. In the lesson previously mentioned, Zach performed a recently-learned piece, "Morning Greeting" by Gurlitt, and played with exaggerated, extraneous arm movements. Blickenstaff modified Zach's technical approach through an interesting dialogue, allowing Zach to demonstrate his knowledge rather than Blickenstaff overtly correcting his technique:

MB: I have a problem. What would you tell me to do if you saw me play like this? Now I want you to watch my arm. [MB plays with bouncing his arm on each note.] What advice would you give me?

Zach: I would say don't move your arm.

MB: Well how do you play that if you don't use your arm? Isn't that how you play that?

[Zach plays with a legato tone and fluid arm motion, until the last two notes.]

MB: That's supposed to be legato though, and so the fingers pull on the key. [MB plays with a bouncing arm again.] Do I need my arm?

Zach: No.

MB: Would you show me how to do it? You don't have to get very loud.

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106. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Faye, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff's Home Studio, November 16, 2009).

[They play together.]

MB: I am so pleased. Your legato sound is so beautiful . . . and I was not even aware that you could do that because I always saw you doing that. [MB plays with a bouncing arm.]

The lesson continued with them refining the shaping and balance of the passage.

Rather than Blickenstaff focusing on how Zach's technique was incorrect, Blickenstaff helped Zach apply a known technical skill to the piece. This young, elementary student became engaged as a thinking musician who has the potential to refine his technique and sound.

An additional trait of Blickenstaff's teaching style is that students learn concepts and techniques through observation and discovery (see Chapter VI, *Observation and Discovery*, for a detailed account). Students are asked to observe and think critically rather than being told by the teacher what to do. An example of this approach occurred in Janette's lesson when Blickenstaff explored a challenging fast octave passage with her. Janette played Ernesto Lecuona's "Malagueña" fluently by memory, except for a singular section comprised of the melody in octaves in the right hand; during this section, she struggled with the right hand, lost fluency, and slowed the tempo. Blickenstaff helped her learn the technique through discovery:

MB: Since I'm the perfect pianist and the only model [laughing], would you please observe [laughing] what I do with my hand when I do [MB plays the RH octaves]? Who's playing here, the hand, or is it the arm?

Janette: It's the hand. [MB plays again.]

MB: Does my wrist stay at the same height? Watch it.

Janette: No.

MB: No, it doesn't. I think you'll find that I throw my hand. If we could go for the big outline of wrist height, the wrist starts low so that the hand can throw. Then the wrist starts to lift. [MB sings while demonstrating] Throw and then you lift. [MB plays again.] . . . How many notes are in [the figure]?

Janette: Five.

MB: That's right. I want you to play five C-sharps in that rhythm. [MB demos.]

During this segment, Blickenstaff always looked at Janette to ensure that she was watching him before he demonstrated. The lesson continued in this back-and forth fashion, having Janette discover how her wrist needs to feel and look to execute the difficult octave figures. This discovery process is indicative of Blickenstaff's admiration of his students' intellect because he trusts in their ability to think critically and form their own judgments.

With his older, more advanced students, Blickenstaff encourages independent thinking and readily responds to concerns that they voice, respecting their thoughts as pianists (see Chapter VII, Communication and Interaction, for more detail). For example, Blickenstaff's student Tim was preparing for a competition in which he was performing Chopin's Polonaise in A Major. Following his performance of the work in the lesson, Tim voiced concern regarding a section of the music, and they addressed it collaboratively:

MB: If I were the judge you'd win. That's really good.

Tim: I feel like the trills, when I go [Tim plays the trill] . . . into the 32nds, then I go straight to here [Tim plays the chord following the 32nd notes]. I don't feel—is that OK? I feel like I go fast and then I hold this note longer.

MB: Well let's count. [MB demonstrates the trill and counting out loud.] Try it.

[Tim plays incorrectly while MB counts.]

MB: Count with me. [They both count while MB plays two times.] Try it.

[Tim plays and counts correctly through the entire section. MB joins in the playing and counting out loud at times.]

MB: That's right. Now, that's good.

Tim unabashedly voiced the concern to Blickenstaff; Tim knew that his teacher would respect his question and help him deal with the issue. Similar scenarios occurred numerous times in other student's lessons during which students freely asked questions and voiced concerns; Blickenstaff always addressed these immediately and positively until he and the student were satisfied.

### *The Expectation for Undivided Attention*

An additional precept of Blickenstaff's teaching philosophy is that he must, at every moment, give students his undivided attention. During lessons and classes he is present and immersed and gives tremendous energy to the student or class. He maintains that the "teacher never has the permission to lose interest."<sup>107</sup> Blickenstaff expressed how he thinks from the perspective of the student: "I kind of put myself—I think—in the student's seat and realize they're hearing this for the first time, they're seeing this music for the first time."<sup>108</sup> Even though he may have

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107. Blickenstaff, *The Transfer Student*.

108. Blickenstaff, *Interview 6 of 6*.

encountered the same music or taught the same skill a hundred times, Blickenstaff remains engaged by the musical ideas in order to enthuse the student. As Peggy Williams Lupton, his former student at UNC-CH, stated, “He was completely focused on my playing—technique, memory, and interpretation of the pieces—during lessons and never seemed distracted or distant.”<sup>109</sup> His pre-college student Frieje also remarked: “He was always accepting and always patient, and you always got his full attention. He never stopped to answer the phone or do anything outside; once I was there, it was all me, the whole time.”<sup>110</sup> His high regard for his students manifests in his unwavering focus during lessons on his students and the experiences at hand.

Blickenstaff requires that students reciprocate, and he communicates his expectation that they fully apply themselves. This pertains to time spent during lessons, completing their assignments, and achieving their goals during practice. In his presentation notes for *The Role of the Parent in the Success of the Student*, Blickenstaff defines the responsibilities for each of the parties in the parent-teacher-student triangle. He lists the following responsibilities for students:

try your best -- get it right  
 work with care -- work for perfection  
 make beautiful (appropriate) sounds  
 cover the assignment daily  
 write practice discoveries in the score (pencil at every practice)  
 cut your nails

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109. Ernst, “Survey of Students.”

110. Frieje, Interview.

bring all assigned materials to the lesson (including notebook, [audio] tape, etc.)<sup>111</sup>

It is the teacher's prerogative to hold the student accountable for these responsibilities, and Blickenstaff believes that student accountability is one of the top "time savers" in managing a studio of piano students. He wrote:

Many of our Ss [students] are highly motivated and want to do things correctly. Others do not have that same sense of accountability and do not seem to care about errors in their preparation. We all have our own tactics with which we approach the topic, but slowly and surely we need to build a sense on the part of the S [student] of their responsibility -- accurate reading of the score -- notes, rhythm, fingerings, dynamics, sense of interpretation. [emphasis from original]<sup>112</sup>

Making students accountable for their assignments is a time saver because the lesson can then be devoted to learning new material and exploring higher artistry in pieces already learned autonomously by the student.

Even when teaching students who are not attentive or who have become negligent during practice, Blickenstaff does not become angry but informs students of his expectations. He stated:

I don't find lots of occasions where I need to be sort of hard-nosed about something. The thing that probably upsets me the most is when mistakes are not corrected week after week; I'm forgiving for one week, you know, and then after awhile, I think, "Now wait a second, there's really a lack of attention in that, and my marking and my comments are *not* [emphasis his] being taken seriously at home." And, so, I talk to the students a little bit

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111. Marvin Blickenstaff, The Role of the Parent in the Success of the Student, Workshop Lecture Notes.

112. Blickenstaff, Studio Efficiency.



about that, but I can't tell you how infrequently I get upset in a lesson; it's just not my style . . .<sup>113</sup>

LeAnn House, a graduate student at UNC-CH, recalled when she had failed to take the care in her practice to really work out fingering for a passage. She remembered:

He really takes you where you are. At the same time, you don't get away with *anything* with him [emphasis hers]. One time I was playing something for him, and he just stopped and laughed, and he said, "LeAnn, I can't believe you're doing that fingering [laughter]. You kind of know in your soul that you didn't work that out very well." And I mean, he just nailed me, on a very kind level, embarrassed that way out of me.<sup>114</sup>

In a similar situation, Jeffery Weaver, one of Blickenstaff's high-school students, recalled how Blickenstaff forced him to take the responsibility of learning music seriously. Weaver participated in an ensemble piece (eight hands at two pianos) at the Goshen College Piano Workshop and had been assigned to learn the primo part of the first piano. He neglected to use his scheduled individual practice hours to complete this assignment. Weaver recalled:

I specifically remember the day before . . . during the free time, I had practiced four hours; that was the most I had ever practiced, and it was all on my own repertoire. I hadn't even looked at this ensemble piece. With my sight-reading being fairly weak at that point, I went in [to the rehearsal] not playing well at all. And, he asked me in front of this group of other three pianists, "How much time did you spend on this yesterday?" I was like, "Not much at all." [Blickenstaff said,] "Okay, go practice it, right now." He actually sent me out of the room to go practice. It was very surprising, so I went, I practiced, I learned it. At that point he put me on primo second piano. He came to me and said, "I'm sorry to be harsh to you in front of the other

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113. Blickenstaff, Interview 4 of 6.

114. LeAnn House, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, January 28, 2010).

pianists, but you've got to take this seriously." That's basically what he said. That was it. After that, I was like, "I'm taking this guy seriously."<sup>115</sup>

As in both of these experiences told by House and Weaver, Blickenstaff does not demean students but rather requires them, in a straight forward manner, to apply themselves and learn to the best of their abilities.

### Affirmation and Honesty

A fundamental tenet of Blickenstaff's philosophy is that the teacher must begin the teacher-student relationship by conspicuously affirming the student as a human being and pianist and that the teacher must continue the relationship through benevolent honesty. Blickenstaff states that affirmation "nourishes the child;" as a music educator, he believes that "Testing is not [the] goal -- fostering the growth and development of a young person is [the] professional calling."<sup>116</sup> Affirmation of the student's abilities, according to Blickenstaff, creates a trusting relationship in which the teacher can encourage a student to excel and give critical feedback. Blickenstaff explained:

I try to build with my students a very trusting relationship. They get lots of praise and affirmation from me, and the flip side of that coin is that I then also have the right to say, "This is wrong," if I want to, or "That's not a good sound." . . . And they know that that comment will just as likely be followed up with, but I thought this was just terrific.<sup>117</sup>

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115. Weaver, Interview.

116. Blickenstaff, How Children Learn.

117. Blickenstaff, Interview at Shenandoah College Conservatory of Music in Winchester, MA.

I feel that if I affirm my student, and they know that I like them as a human being, that then I've earned the right to get pretty strict sometimes and say, but you are *not* meeting your potential or you're *not* practicing [emphasis his]. And I can be critical about a certain section of a piece, if I need to be.<sup>118</sup>

Two of his students reflected on this dynamic between affirmation and honesty.

Jordan, working with him through her pre-college training, said:

I feel like he was so honest. He was always encouraging, again not [as] a teacher to a young student . . . but in a very collegial way. . . . He would say compliments in an admiring way, instead of . . . patting me on the head. . . . But his honesty, if I wasn't up to par on something, he was definitely like, "Well Mary Rose, this just isn't acceptable." . . . Because he wasn't harsh and partly because I respected him so much, so when he'd say things like that, they really stuck with me.<sup>119</sup>

Even though Blickenstaff's spoken words and writings refer to affirming children, this same method was used for his collegiate students. House, studying with

Blickenstaff as a graduate student, said:

[He] has the wonderful knack of making each student feel like they are special and that you are really important to him and that he has a lot of faith and confidence in you—maybe he had more in me than some of his other students. . . . But, it's been my impression from talking to his other students, that we all felt that way. . . . You may have felt that he really liked you and all that, but there was no mercy, in terms of honesty about what we owe to the music or to the composer.<sup>120</sup>

According to both of these students, affirmation occurred and a trusting student-teacher relationship developed; they did not feel personally diminished when Blickenstaff was honest with them regarding any deficiencies. It is an indispensable

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118. Blickenstaff, Interview 4 of 6.

119. Jordan, Interview.

120. House, Interview.

tenet of Blickenstaff's philosophy that a teacher must be honest with the students regarding their growth and achievement in order for learning to continue.

*Building the Relationship through Affirmation*

Blickenstaff's desire to affirm his students manifests from his immediate respect of each and every student. When the researcher asked him how he builds relationships with his students, his simple and profound response was that he admires every student. He explained:

It has been rather easy for me to regard every student as a precious human being. Little kids come in, and I think at first they're children, and then rather readily, they turn into be human beings, that have small heads [laughing]. You know! I think that's how, I really think it's a relationship issue, and as you have seen, I go way out of my way to affirm and tell them it was good. And, that's how you build a relationship.<sup>121</sup>

The opposite of Blickenstaff's approach would be a lesson that is grounded in criticism of the student's work and focused on what has not been accomplished (rather than affirmation of what has been learned). Blickenstaff personally understands the importance of affirmation and extends this non-critical approach to his students:

I think the relationship basically is built on affirmation. I know as a human being that I thrive on affirmation, and I know that that is true for most everybody else. And, if a student comes to a lesson and all they get is criticism and a list of things that they haven't done correctly, that's not a very healthy relationship.<sup>122</sup>

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121. Blickenstaff, Interview 4 of 6.

122. Ibid.

The techniques that Blickenstaff uses to affirm his students are verbally praising his student's playing, documenting how pleased he is to work with his students, and celebrating successes when a larger landmark has been reached (see Celebrating Success later in this chapter).

When Blickenstaff compliments a student's preparation and playing, he uses exaggerated, descriptive language. Instead of exclaiming "Your scales sound great!," he would say "Those are the best scales I have heard all year." Blickenstaff explained the importance of exaggerated speech to a college student enrolled in his pedagogy class. On this student's teaching evaluation, he quoted her effective affirmation of the young student: "'You have the strongest fingers this side of the Mississippi.' Those kinds of statements are very encouraging to the child. It is an example of exaggerated speech which underscores affirmation. Think how he must feel when he hears that, vs. 'That's good' or 'OK.'"<sup>123</sup> Students easily recall these moments from lessons, remembering how empowered they felt. Beverly Lapp reflected upon Blickenstaff's compliments, how special she felt under his instruction and how she began to sense her own potential:

One thing I would say he did very well, is he made me feel very special. He, early on, made me feel that I had a gift that mattered; and it'd be little things like [his saying], "I have not had a student play Alberti bass this well in you know, five years." He'd throw something like that out, which may have been

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123. Marvin Blickenstaff, 1994, Piano Pedagogy, Lesson Evaluations, Class and Lecture Files from Goshen College.

an exaggeration, but something that would just make you feel, I've got something here.<sup>124</sup>

This effusive verbal praise is affirming to Blickenstaff's students and helps him to establish a trusting and open relationship with his students, in which his students feel successful and liked.

Blickenstaff also extends his profuse affirmation to his colleagues. The faculty at the New School for Music Study have a close working environment and collaborate on classes, school projects, and recitals. Amy Glennon, Educational Director, described how Blickenstaff's presence impacts the atmosphere at the school:

It's little things. He'll send out an email after a recital and say how proud he is of the school and how much he enjoys working with everybody. He does that on a regular basis. It doesn't seem like a big thing, but it can change the whole tone of a place, when somebody does that. He's free with his verbal praise of what you're doing. . . . He'll say, "We have a first rate faculty and terrific people, and I love working with each one. What a great faculty recital, what great performances." He's that type where it comes very naturally to him to affirm us, and what we're doing. . . . Yet it doesn't feel phony.<sup>125</sup>

Scott Donald, Administrative Director, relayed on a personal level, how Blickenstaff affirmed Donald's role as a performer. Donald had presented a recital and was not pleased with the result, and Blickenstaff helped him through this frustrating time:

And I mentioned something to him [Blickenstaff], and he had emailed [me] and asked a question about how I felt [the recital] went . . . and I was like, I

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124. Lapp, Interview.

125. Glennon, Interview.

am just kind of done and really disappointed in my performances. . . . He emailed me back—in fact, I printed it out and kept it—that he had played a recital . . . [and] was just really disappointed in how it went as well. And if Marvin Blickenstaff would do that, as beautifully as he plays. . . because I know he’s going to play again. And if he questions that about himself, wow, you know, there’s hope for me too [laughing]. I think, you know, I can play again.<sup>126</sup>

Regular affirmation of those around him, whether it be his students or colleagues, is a remarkable aspect of Blickenstaff’s personality, as he shares in the joy of the successes of those around him and encourages others in their pursuits.

Blickenstaff’s predilection for affirmation developed from key experiences in his life. Fern Nolte Davidson, his formative teacher during his youth, had a similar teaching style as Blickenstaff. Davidson commended a student’s accomplishments while requiring high standards, and Blickenstaff suggested during an interview with the principal investigator that was a likely influence upon his own teaching style:

I think the genius of Fern was that she affirmed and she had very high standards. And maybe that’s a little bit where I get that because Fern never told us that we were the greatest thing that hit the keyboard, but she also let us know—I’m not the only one—that she was really proud of us, and thought our accomplishment was significant and this kind of thing. But she had these *very* [emphasis his] high standards.<sup>127</sup>

Later in the interview, he reflected on the affirmation he received from his parents and how he intends to pass this on to those around him:

There was a lot affirmation at home. . . . When I was living in Chapel Hill . . . it was also in New York . . . my parents would write to me every week, and I

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126. Donald, Interview.

127. Blickenstaff, Interview 4 of 6.

would write to them every week. We didn't phone; we wrote. And, every letter that they wrote ended, "We're so proud of you." And, [becoming emotional, with tears in his eyes] that just has to impact you, "We're so proud of you." . . . That's fuel for your life. . . . I think that affirmation is something I believe in so much and it comes naturally to me because I received it. . . . I have gotten a lot of affirmation in my life, maybe I just feel like I need to pass that on.<sup>128</sup>

The desire to acknowledge the successes of those around him is an integral aspect to Blickenstaff's teaching style and personality, and has grown from his inclination to pass on the good fortune he has received.

#### *The Indispensability of Honesty*

Being honest is an essential teacher trait in Blickenstaff's philosophy because a trusting teacher-student relationship can develop only if benevolent honesty exists. When the researcher asked what role honesty has in the student-teacher relationship, Blickenstaff quickly retorted, "Everything. Everything. Everything." Blickenstaff sincerely communicates to his students that he enjoys them as individuals and honestly reports on their achievement and what needs improvement. He elucidated his viewpoint on honesty:

But honesty. The first thing is that I want to communicate honestly to my students that I really like them. And then the other thing—I don't think [pause] that I can accomplish what I need to with my students if I'm dishonest by telling them that something is good when it wasn't. . . . I think that it's very important to be honest with the student about, "Well, you've arrived at this point, and now we've got to work on this." To present a clear

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128. Ibid.



picture of what has been accomplished and what yet needs to be accomplished, and those are issues of honesty I think.<sup>129</sup>

Blickenstaff does not limit his understanding of honesty to telling students critical feedback but globally understands honesty as an issue of acknowledging achievements and setting new goals for improvement. Therefore, Blickenstaff's lessons are engrained with constructive feedback, allowing students to feel positively about their progress while also clarifying what needs to be accomplished.

In several of the surveys of his former students, the effective balance of positive and negative feedback in Blickenstaff's teaching emerged. Students indicated:

"It was important to give praise and encouragement, yet always to see the next (higher) goal as well." Rebecca Martin, 1984–87, Goshen College

"It was comfortable and honest. I held him in high esteem, received affirmations when warranted, and was motivated to do my best for him." Anonymous student, unknown years, Goshen College

"I remember that he was direct and called me out on things and was one of the most significant influences in my first year of college. . . . I felt that he was supportive in feedback and pushed toward new learning goals." Anonymous student, 1996–99, Goshen College

"I struggled with issues of self-esteem and he was consistently reassuring and empowering. He gave honest feedback and would give concrete suggestions to improve my playing." Anne Waltner, 1996–99, Goshen College

"He was never mean, petty, or condescending, but he also never coddled or spared feelings at the price of the music." Anonymous student, 1998–99, Goshen College

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129. Blickenstaff, Interview 6 of 6.

Honesty is thus an issue of articulating successes and setting new goals for the student, always with the backdrop that the student feels liked by the teacher and knows that the teacher believes in their potential as a pianist.

Several people intimately aware of his teaching expanded upon the ubiquity of honesty during Blickenstaff's instruction. Freije, a high-school student of Blickenstaff's, described the process of receiving critiques during her lessons:

Actually what I remember from his feedback, first and foremost, he was always honest. If it didn't go well, he didn't sugar coat it. . . . He was kind about it. He wasn't rude or brass or anything like that, but he was always very honest with me, which I think gave me . . . respect of him and trust. But he always tried to say something positive after I played, even it was a disaster. There was always something he could pull out something he could say that was positive, then he would be honest, and then he would be encouraging, and he would help to make it better.<sup>130</sup>

House summarized how she tries to emulate the positive and honest learning environment that she had in her graduate study with Blickenstaff:

Always trying to think of ways to be positive. Always the music being more important than you or me. Always a kind of honesty, an intellectual honesty and an emotional honesty. . . . The standards were very high. I never felt he minced words with me. If I was doing something that wasn't good, it wasn't good, and I needed to deal with that. It was kind, but it was brutally honest, at the same time. And of course, when you have that with a teacher, you develop a level of trust. All of this has influenced my teaching vitally. That sense of honesty, and yet, an honesty that's constructive and challenging and never unkind. I guess a lot of that just goes back to the warmth of his soul and the human being and the richness of the experience.<sup>131</sup>

Maggie Yang, a parent of one of Blickenstaff's pre-college students, grew up in China and has raised her daughter in the United States. Yang provided a unique

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130. Frieje, Interview.

131. House, Interview.

perspective on Blickenstaff's teaching style because she explained how this encouragement helped her daughter advance, as a contrast to the style used in Chinese educational systems. Yang said:

In Chinese culture, the teacher hardly praise[s]. . . [and you hardly] praise your own children. Not like here; "You did great," or "You were wonderful." In Chinese culture, no way! Even like from my parents. Even now, we never say, "Oh, you did something wonderful." They think that once they praise you, you will not improve. You just think, "Oh, I'm okay, I don't need to do any more." But from Marvin, he—even though you have problems, everybody has problems—when Grace made a mistake, the way he [talks] is different. He praise[s] you and you can do this to improve. So it's very easy to let students improve, and they don't feel bad about themselves. I think that part is very, totally different from my culture.<sup>132</sup>

As Yang aptly described, the learning process inevitably includes situations when the student has difficulties or has to correct errors; yet, when a teacher tells a student authentically where growth has occurred and what the next goal is, learning can occur without negative feelings.

In Blickenstaff's lessons, the researcher observed countless examples of this approach, that is to spur further growth through being honest with students about their progress. Affirmation of progress was detailed and often verbose, whereas the constructive criticism was typically concise. After he stated that an element needed improvement, Blickenstaff attended to the issue, helping the student to master or practice the new concept. During Danielle's lesson at Blickenstaff's home

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132. Yang, Interview.

studio, she performed Beethoven's Rondo in C Major, Op. 51, No. 1.<sup>133</sup> Upon reaching a scalar sequence in the right hand, her fluency declined and she stumbled frequently. Blickenstaff stopped her and concisely stated, "You're doing very well, but it's obvious to both of us that the issue here is fingering. You don't have trouble with the notes, but getting all those thumbs correct. Play the right hand." Her lesson progressed with the two of them solving the fingering difficulties. Danielle was not attacked nor scolded for her oversight during practice, but Blickenstaff simply and honestly stated the issue. Throughout the coaching session on this rondo, Danielle received affirming feedback on her pulse and rhythm, her accuracy of reading, and on her dramatic pacing of the dynamics; she received critical feedback on creating a "childlike" tone quality in the main theme, playing with clarity in her pedaling, and good fingering choices. As a result of Blickenstaff's honest approach, Danielle knew what she had accomplished and what needed betterment.

Because studying piano requires a regular practice routine, teachers commonly need to address a student's faltering practice regime, and Blickenstaff maintains that it is his responsibility to communicate with students about practice. In his different professional roles as a pre-collegiate and collegiate instructor, his viewpoints on practice are specific to the type of student. Regarding the regularity and effectiveness of the practice of pre-college students, Blickenstaff explained:

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133. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Danielle, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff's Home Studio, November 16, 2009).

I think that we work together for months and years, and that I have not only the right but the responsibility to communicate those things to the student. My students are busy, and I find it really difficult . . . to think that I have the right to think that piano is more important in their lives than anything else. I just cannot go there, and I know there are some teachers who are so demanding. . . . I am disappointed when my students get so thinly spread with all their extracurriculars that they can't spend any time at the piano or not spend enough time at the piano. And I can talk with them very frankly about the fact that I—I say, "I think the piano has to have a higher priority in your list of activities. You are not spending enough time, and you are not getting the work done." . . . There are those of kinds of conversations that I have occasionally with my students. I think I should be more demanding about practice time, but I just am kind of grateful with anything I can get out of my kids, you know [laughing].<sup>134</sup>

His answer changed when he considered a specific high-school student: "I have a very, very talented rising senior next year, and I have told her that if she's going to give a senior recital and apply for piano scholarships, she has to make time for two hours of practice a day. She's lucky now if she almost gets two hours a week; she's so busy. She is so talented. It is scary what she could do on two hours."<sup>135</sup> His answer, as one would expect, expanded when he considered the role of practice in the routine of a college student:

I know that undergraduate majors at Goshen are probably getting their last lessons of their lives there. And I tell them that, and I also tell them that you will never have more time. . . . I would put the screws on them, because we're working on demanding repertoire. They had recitals that they had to do and concertos to play. . . . They would hear from me that they had to practice more.<sup>136</sup>

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134. Blickenstaff, Interview 6 of 6.

135. *Ibid.*

136. *Ibid.*

Ultimately, Blickenstaff feels it is his responsibility to be forthright with his students regarding the kind and amount of practice that is necessary for them to achieve the goals at hand.

Blickenstaff's students recalled getting "the screws on them" to be consistent in the practice room, and how he gave honest feedback to them if they were not meeting his requirements. Julie (Albrect) Gensmer, a student from Goshen, wrote in her survey:

His high expectations made me work harder, after realizing that I wasn't really working hard at all. He let me know that I was "not acting like a music major" when my time was spent at the intramural volleyball courts instead of an orchestra concert or not in the practice rooms! It took me awhile, but I eventually got it!<sup>137</sup>

Cathy Albergo, who became a college faculty member herself, recalled the transition she had to make into practicing regularly and working diligently at UNC-CH:

... I don't think I had ever practiced all that much or all that efficiently. And I think Marvin had to keep on me about practicing, which he did. He did not give me high grades all the time. He graded me where I should have been. I did not get straight A's, and I will laugh about that. I got my share of C's from Marvin, and what, I have to work? He was right, he was absolutely right. I wasn't producing what I should have been.<sup>138</sup>

Yang explained how her daughter needed to be reminded of consistent practice, and Blickenstaff did not hesitate to make these expectations known:

I trust him totally, and I know Grace is in good hands. Of course I know sometimes she didn't practice and I know the teacher will talk to her and

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137. Ernst, "Survey of Students."

138. Albergo, Interview.

she listens to what the teacher says and not me. [laughing]. . . Mr. Blickenstaff will blame her for not practicing, I think, and it's very serious because usually Marvin doesn't do that. It is so obvious. Even though I don't understand music, I can hear that she didn't practice at all. . . . [O]nce a year Marvin will say, "You didn't practice!" She will walk out of the room and I can see from her face. And she says, "Mr. Blickenstaff's face is red!" Then, I know what happened. [laughing]<sup>139</sup>

These frank discussions Blickenstaff has with his students regarding practice are a component of honesty; from his experience, he knows what is required to be successful as a pianist and views it as his duty to express this to his students.

Blickenstaff uses honesty to compassionately address difficult situations that commonly arise during a student's piano study. Many students, once they reach the end of junior high or enter high school, have to decide which extracurricular activities they will continue, and sometimes students are unable to continue piano lessons because of the obligatory practice commitment.

Blickenstaff explained how to approach this situation in a presentation titled *Piano Study's Magic Triangle: Parents, Students, Teachers*. In his studio, he keeps schedule grids that divide the week into seven days filled by half-hour slots. He charts out a weekly schedule with the student to see if there is enough opportunities for practice:

Lot of times intermediate-level students are already fighting with parents about the practice time. And when mom calls and says, "Hey Mr. Blickenstaff, we're really having a time about when to practice." I say, "Okay, ease off, I'll take over." And we sit down, and we try to map this out. I have had intermediate-level students really well up with tears in their eyes, when they hear me say, "It's obvious from what we have seen here on the

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139. Yang, Interview.

schedule that you cannot practice on Wednesday.” They are so relieved that an adult understands the problem, and then we start to find times where they can make up for that day in their practice routine.<sup>140</sup>

Rather than defensively accuse students and parents for a lack of consistent practice, Blickenstaff works with students as their ally, thoroughly understanding the circumstances and suggesting appropriate solutions. Susan See, an independent piano teacher from Iowa, described how Blickenstaff addressed this situation with one of her former students. See had taught this student prior to college, and Blickenstaff worked with her at Goshen College. This student was unable to continue lessons throughout her college career due to the heavy work load of her major (which was not music). See explained:

She was having a hard time getting the practice in with everything else, and instead of making her feel bad, which is easy to do as a teacher, he asked her to write out—he had a big blackboard—and he wrote out what she did every day from the time she got up and the time she went to bed. And when he got done, he looked at it and looked at her and said, “You’re right, you don’t have any time to practice.” . . . It’s a positive way to do things.<sup>141</sup>

Rather than make students feel guilty for their circumstances and decisions, Blickenstaff talks openly with students, understands the situation, and guides students towards a decision, whether it is to modify the practice routine or discontinue lessons.

While the principal investigator did not observe any direct discussions regarding regular practice, a conversation occurred in which Blickenstaff had to

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140. Blickenstaff, *Piano Study's Magic Triangle*, VHS.

141. See, Interview.



clearly articulate expectations to a high school student. Blickenstaff's student Greg, who was a senior in high school, was preparing for a scholarship audition that needed be mailed as a CD recording to his prospective college.<sup>142</sup> Blickenstaff and Greg discussed his progress and goals, with Blickenstaff voicing honest concern for his practicing:

MB: Now tell me a little bit about time table.

Greg: We're half way through November. The audition CD. . . has to be in by December 15.

MB: A month!

Greg: Yeah. I want to ideally send it five days to a week before the 15th.

MB: What do you have to play?

. . . [after some discussion]

Greg: So, the first movement of the Pathetique, the Etude, and the Nocturne.

MB: You've got a lot of work left to do before the first of December.

Greg: We have Thanksgiving break for a week and a half. . . .

MB: Aren't you fortunate! That is coming at a really very helpful time.

Greg: It really is.

MB: Don't you dare crowd up your schedule with a lot of other stuff. We're talking about thousands of dollars of potential scholarship that could be the result of that. We're talking four or five hours of practice a day. Really.

Blickenstaff invited Greg to use his studio to record his audition CD and suggested that Greg use his prior recordings of the etude rather than to re-record the piece

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142. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Greg, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff's Home Studio, November 16, 2009).

again. This frank conversation between Greg and Blickenstaff is an example of how Blickenstaff is forthright with his students regarding their goals and their practice.

The students enrolled in Blickenstaff's pedagogy courses received regular assessments of their teaching through submitting tapes of lessons, and his memos were infused with truthful affirmations of successes and critiques of poor teaching.

As Karen Zorn, a pedagogy student at Goshen, explained:

[He] Had his comments. . . all the positive stuff, and the stuff that was so true it hurt. That's another lesson that I learned from Marvin, which is often times, the kindest thing you do for someone is give them the truth, and to not sugar coat it, to not be mean—he was never mean—but to go right in and be really direct. And you know, the truth is really important. That was really bad, when you did that, that really confused your student and here's why. And you need to understand, some of it's your student's own brain power and ability to pay attention, and some of it's you, it's your ability to actually be clear.<sup>143</sup>

In a specific lesson evaluation, Blickenstaff offered constructive criticism for a student teacher and how the teacher handled a young beginner who had not completed the composition assignment for the second week in a row. Blickenstaff wrote to the teacher:

The Y/C [You the Composer] segment started in a very confrontive [sic] manner. "Second week in a row. Why can't you think of anything?" Not everyone has the same creative skills, and she may, indeed, have difficulty thinking of some ideas. It is very helpful if you give her some options. In this case, you could focus on the rhythm (the assignment). Then, as was suggested on the HPS [home practice sheet], associate some words with that rhythm. Present her with some options as to notes she could use, e.g. one set in the RH, one set in the LH. Or all FGABs [referring to the group of four white keys on the keyboard]. Maybe even black key clusters. Help her solve the problem rather than blame her for not making up something. My

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143. Zorn, Interview.

guess is that, with your helpful suggestions she will, in a few weeks, start to come up with more solutions of her own.<sup>144</sup>

The student teacher was given a clear description of how her actions were ineffective, and Blickenstaff provided detailed suggestions on how to approach this in future lessons. Blickenstaff insisted that it is the teacher's responsibility to help the student and identified the major flaw in the instruction, that the teacher blamed the child.

For another student teacher, Blickenstaff was frank in his assessment that her instruction confused the student. The teacher did not clarify the student's assignment or prepare the sound ideal for "Moonlight," an early piece from *Music Pathways* that is typically taught by rote (rather than through reading).

Blickenstaff assessed:

Your goal is that she learns it accurately, and the lesson must proceed with that in mind. If you ask her to play it for you, she will only illustrate her mistakes -- then you must re-work and correct (criticize). So you play it as beautifully as you possibly can for her. She could play along in the air, or with her hands atop of yours. But let the correct sound be the sound which guides the lesson. She has such a good ear that you can insist on a very high level of performance (control of sound) for the beginning. Even as you were re-working the piece, you played with her instead of for her. She could learn faster from your sound. You noticed how difficult it was for her to match your *longs*. And you left *Moonlight* with a question still in her ear about the sound. For this part of the lesson, you needed to be more in charge, and be more of a model for her. [emphasis from original]<sup>145</sup>

Blickenstaff's words are not harsh but honest; he did not personally attack this student teacher but rather identified the problems within the instructional

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144. Blickenstaff, Piano Pedagogy, Lesson Evaluations.

145. Ibid.

sequence. The student teacher was given a clear description of what occurred, why it was ineffective, how it can be improved, and why his alternative approach is superior. Motivated from a strong desire to produce good teachers from his pedagogy courses, Blickenstaff spent countless hours reviewing lesson tapes, and his pedagogy students received honest feedback with needed instructional adjustments.

Being honest with students extends beyond the week-to-week matters, as Blickenstaff is forthright and shares his opinions regarding his students' future paths and careers. If he has a student who has the ability to have a career in piano and be a music major in college, Blickenstaff explains that he must let them know their potential:

I feel free to tell my students that they have the potential to be a piano major, but never that they must be a piano major. . . . If they're interested in music, I will help them all the way with college applications and advice on college and where they could go to get good training and this kind of thing, but I do not push my kids to be piano majors. Nope. I don't feel that's my right in a way; it is their life. . . . And even a guy like [Greg], that was his decision. And even his family, I think, pretty much left it up to him. I made it very clear to him that he could major in music. And now here's he accepted into four different schools, and this girl whose gonna practice two hours a day next year, she is so insanely talented on both saxophone and piano. . . . Her fingers know no limits, speed wise and flexibility wise. She knows good and well that she can go anywhere.<sup>146</sup>

While he openly states his opinion, he does not assert his desires regarding life decisions. With his college students, Blickenstaff was outspoken about their need to enroll in piano pedagogy as piano majors. He was passionately committed to the

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146. Blickenstaff, Interview 6 of 6.

importance of pedagogy in the pianist's education, such that scarcely a major could pass through Goshen College without taking piano pedagogy. Lapp recalled only one student who did not take pedagogy, stating: "it was part of his force of nature. . . [I]f you were a pianist here, you took the pedagogy courses, and you were swept up into that. . . . There was no ambiguity there."<sup>147</sup> Kathryn Sherer, his faculty colleague at Goshen, stated that Blickenstaff had a "commitment to produce piano teachers" and "encouraged" the piano students to take pedagogy, acknowledging that there was often pressure from him.<sup>148</sup> Steffen remembered how Blickenstaff advised her to enroll in pedagogy:

He looked at my schedule, and he said, "Arlene, you haven't signed up for Intro to Piano Pedagogy," and I said, "I don't want to be a piano teacher." And he said, "Oh, but you really need to sign up for Piano Pedagogy," and I said, "Marvin, I'm not going to teach piano." And he said, "You play the piano and someone at some point is going to ask you to teach their child, you need to know what to do." So I signed up for the class, . . . and so now, I'm a piano teacher! [laughter]<sup>149</sup>

Blickenstaff communicates his observations on a student's potential for a musical career, and if a student has elected to become a professional pianist, he feels an even stronger duty to ensure they will be prepared as teachers.

Even the presentations he gives to piano teachers are infused with Blickenstaff's honest assessments. In many of his presentations, Blickenstaff clearly states what the issues are with piano teaching in the United States. He

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147. Lapp, Interview.

148. Sherer and Sherer, Interview.

149. Steffen, Interview.

states them without accusing or demeaning the teachers in the audience, establishes the reasons for the problems, and provides numerous concrete strategies to overcoming these. In his presentation on preparation-presentation-reinforcement, the teaching cycle by which new concepts are effectively introduced to young students, Blickenstaff began his workshop by aptly summarizing how method books create a false sense of good teaching through the curriculum:

But still -- the books do the job. The books plan the curriculum, make the presentations, create the pieces which incorporate the new concept, and all we have to do is turn the pages. (*Isn't teaching easy?! -- poor teaching is easy* (and perhaps cannot be labeled "teaching") -- **good teaching is very hard work**). [emphasis from original]<sup>150</sup>

This workshop contains numerous examples of how to adequately prepare students for learning new concepts, giving teachers tools for teaching in this manner. He further pinpointed another common teaching error, failing to plan lessons before the student arrives. Some teachers hand-write assignments during lessons rather than preparing the "home practice sheet" before the lesson.

Blickenstaff disagrees with this common teaching practice and explained this in his presentation *Pedagogy 101*:

Let me step way out on a limb here. Do you write the lesson assignment in a notebook during the lesson? Throw that notebook away. (Now, how's that for impertinence?!)  
You ask: *Send a student home without a lesson assignment?*  
Oh no! I didn't say that.

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150. Marvin Blickenstaff, Building on a Firm Foundation: Preparation-Presentation-Reinforcement, Workshop Lecture Notes.

But the result of the notebook is that most of us do not plan our lessons, and without a lesson plan, little is accomplished. (Teaching poorly is very easy! Teaching a good lesson and directing the long-term instruction of our students is hard work!) [emphasis and spacing from original]<sup>151</sup>

Blickenstaff suggests if teaching is thought of as “easy” then it is likely poor instruction, and planning lessons is “hard work” and essential for effective teaching. Both of these workshops exemplify Blickenstaff’s candid style.

### Celebrating Success

When a student has mastered a large goal, such as performing a piece artistically or giving a formal performance, Blickenstaff celebrates this success. In a year-end summary given to his students in a Goshen Piano Pedagogy course, Blickenstaff’s fourth item on his “Christmas wish-list for all teachers” was that “we take time to celebrate and enjoy accomplishment.”<sup>152</sup> Teachers can celebrate all types of accomplishments, from the week-to-week goals to the larger and broader

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151. Blickenstaff, Pedagogy 101.

152. Blickenstaff, Piano Pedagogy, Final Session. Blickenstaff’s Christmas Wish-List for all teachers of young students had the following eleven items: “That we take time to celebrate and enjoy accomplishment. That lessons focus on the musical rather than the mechanical. That we talk more expressively about the music to our students. That lessons be more creative in structure and content. That lessons be student-oriented rather than teacher-oriented. That lessons focus on building correct responses rather than correcting the mistakes. That the focus be on “why” and “how” of practice, rather than the number of minutes. That we look for the musical highlight in every lesson -- celebrate it and name it. That we talk less and illustrate (play) more. That we instill the joy of practice/accomplishment in our students. That students become fluent sight-readers.”

growth of skills over time. Blickenstaff commented on celebrating weekly goals when describing his approach to assigning repertoire:

I don't mind it at all if my students tell me, "That was really an easy piece," and we sort of celebrate. If they get a piece done in a week, we celebrate. . . . "You have really accomplished something. Just think, how much you know and what skill you have developed to take this piece and *really* [emphasis his] perfect that in a week." And so we celebrate those kinds of things.<sup>153</sup>

Providing closure by celebrating the completion of a repertoire selection is an essential component of good instruction. As previously discussed, Blickenstaff insists that effective lessons have "thrill" moments where the student has performed to a high level. He described these occurrences:

And I would hope that every lesson has some moment of thrill, where the student really feels like this is wonderful, and if I don't document that and get excited about something, that will sort of by pass them. They may feel that they have done well, but if I don't react to that, then that kind of gives the impression as to whether or not they've done that.<sup>154</sup>

Blickenstaff salutes the progress and music made because without a teacher's approval, students may not realize the significance of their weekly accomplishments.

Students are also congratulated by Blickenstaff when they have reached larger goals, which have taken many weeks and lessons to accomplish. In his curriculum for technical skills, Blickenstaff awards certificates of accomplishment to his students. For each of the five levels of Technical Skills, students work for approximately one year to complete each level, and to reward such an

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153. Blickenstaff, Interview 6 of 6.

154. Blickenstaff, Interview 4 of 6.



achievement, a certificate is given. Furthermore, to track each student's progress, Blickenstaff includes a section on each assignment sheet that lists which categories within a level have been passed. The researcher observed Olivia passing a category of scales (the five major scales that begin from a black key) during her lesson.<sup>155</sup> Blickenstaff asked her to demonstrate her progress, having her play all five scales in a pattern that spanned from two to four octaves. Olivia began each scale by announcing the scale; she announced, for instance, "I am going to play B-flat major. It has two flats, E-flat and B-flat. My right-hand fourth finger goes on B-flat and my left-hand fourth finger goes on E-flat." Blickenstaff watched and listened to her, smiling at her frequently, as she completed each of the five scales. The only correction he made was to slow down her pulse, ensuring that she could perform all subdivisions (eighth, triplet, and sixteenth notes). After she finished, Blickenstaff said to Olivia: "I have moved this category up to the ones that say passed, because that is beautiful playing. That is really good." After passing her black key scales, Blickenstaff prepared her for the next higher-level goal which was scales in two-octave segments (a pattern of parallel and contrary motion). Taking time to articulate this student's success was important to Blickenstaff because it encouraged her further learning and continued their positive teacher-student relationship.

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155. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Lesson of Olivia*, DVD created by author (Kingston, NJ: The New School for Music Study, November 18, 2009).

Even with his adult students, Blickenstaff profusely celebrates the completion of a piece. His student Megan had just performed in adult repertoire class at the New School, and the first portion of their lesson was devoted to this accomplishment. Megan expressed remorse with her playing because she had made note errors in her favorite part of the piece (Schubert, Sonata in A Major, D. 664, 2nd movement, Andante). Blickenstaff insisted that she perform the piece for him one last time. She stated, "I want to redeem myself" and Blickenstaff insisted, "That's not quite the word. We're bringing closure." Following her expressive performance, Blickenstaff congratulated her and forced her, through his affirmation, to look beyond the error upon which she was fixated. After she performed, he said, "That is beautiful." She stated again: "This is the measure I messed up in class. My favorite part." Blickenstaff followed by specifically explaining the numerous expressive moments: "There are some things that are so beautiful about what you are doing. The timing of certain things. . . ." He continued by pointing out these places in the score. By the end of the segment, Megan concluded that she wanted to keep this piece on her list for review. Blickenstaff stated, "Oh you must, it is such a gift to your family."<sup>156</sup>

This priority of Blickenstaff's is felt by his students and their families, as many remembered specific moments of affirmation. Yang recalled how her

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156. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Megan, DVD created by author (Kingston, NJ: The New School for Music Study, November 18, 2009).

daughter Grace was commended for a fine performance during her pre-college study:

The one thing I remember is when we were at Marvin's house, Grace played a short Jazz piece, and he said, "Oh you play so well." And he even called his wife to come to the piano room and listen to Grace play. And that was very encouraging. . . . I think he just wants to share beautiful music with everybody because he loves music very much. For students, that is so encouraging and so much fun, when Marvin do [sic] that. That's not only once, when we were at his house, that happened many times.<sup>157</sup>

Two students at Goshen College recalled how Blickenstaff supported students' performances and was elated by their successes. These students wrote:

"One of his students was accompanied by the GC [Goshen College] orchestra. She nailed her part on the piano. Just as she played her last note, Blickenstaff shouted, 'yes!' and I could tell that he was incredibly proud of the work of his student. It was a really neat moment." Alison Charbeneau Bryant, Goshen

"Marvin has an elusive way of championing the cause of student & faculty successes around him. I remember his sighs of approval in recitals or workshops. His audible response to a great performance taught me to love listening and to savor and celebrate those great moments." Bradley Kaufmann, Goshen

The warmth and support Blickenstaff gives his students is a memorable trait of his teaching. Ultimately, he is effusive with congratulatory remarks and takes upon himself the responsibility for his students realizing their accomplishments.

### Summary

The belief system espoused by Blickenstaff is molded by his love of music and learning and his respect of his students. Blickenstaff is committed to music as

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157. Yang, Interview.

an artistic form that must be passed on to future generations; the piano teacher is a vital link between students and the continuance of Classical music. Composers and their music are treated reverently, such that all expressive and interpretative decisions result from detailed score study. Students are motivated to study music because of the intrinsic qualities inherent to the music, specifically, the ability to express through music making. Blickenstaff's lessons are imbued with the thrill of making music and the enjoyment of learning. Blickenstaff is not only concerned with his students' growth as musicians, but he also helps his students mature as human beings. He has modeled throughout his career how learning is a life-long process of growth, as he continues to explore music and improve his own teaching, performances, and presentations.

The student-teacher relationship Blickenstaff cultivates is collaborative with a goal of learning, and he maintains utmost respect for his students' potential and the immense capabilities of each student's intellect. The relationship is built from Blickenstaff's affirmation of the student as an individual. He continually affirms all progress made during and in between lessons and also celebrates larger accomplishments with the student. At the same time, Blickenstaff's high standards are maintained through his ability to be honest with the student regarding what needs improvement. Each of these principles regarding why musical studies are important and what contributes to an effective student-teacher relationship are evident throughout Blickenstaff's entire pedagogical oeuvre, from his lessons, masterclasses, writings, and presentations.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **THE LEARNING PROCESS**

Marvin Blickenstaff has taught piano lessons for over fifty years, establishing a unique teaching style that is nationally recognized. His personal philosophy of piano teaching is documented in his numerous presentations and articles and in his former courses on piano pedagogy, and is witnessed through his instruction of students in lessons, classes, and masterclasses. The basic tenets of his philosophy were detailed in Chapters IV and V. The current chapter addresses his philosophy on the learning process, the traits of a constructive learning environment, and effective instructional methodology. Blickenstaff's philosophy is discerned through his interviews and writings and is corroborated through interviews of his former students and individuals who know his work. Transcripts of his piano lessons and classes substantiate these philosophical ideas. The learning environment of Blickenstaff's lessons and classes will be described and Blickenstaff's perspective on how humans learn will be examined.

#### **The Learning Environment**

Blickenstaff's instruction generates a learning environment that is musically-centered and conducive to student growth. Both teacher and student enjoy the lesson, smiling and laughing frequently, even when mistakes have been made. Lesson time is used carefully, as Blickenstaff provides varied activities that

stimulate the student's mind and encourage concentration from the student. Students are challenged to excel, and Blickenstaff facilitates student growth through carefully-placed challenges in the learning sequence. An environment that fosters learning, Blickenstaff believes, must also be structured by the teacher, who must diligently prepare for all lessons and classes. Furthermore, a teacher must provide guidance to students and their parents (in the case of pre-college students) regarding how to practice and approach their musical studies.

### Enjoyable, Stimulating, and Challenging

Learning is central in lessons with Blickenstaff. The atmosphere is pleasurable for both teacher and student, and students are encouraged to explore and excel. As Blickenstaff capsulated, "When we learn, we have fun."<sup>1</sup> He posits that in order to learn, students must have fun, be challenged, and work hard. Yet, the lesson atmosphere must remain positive and light-hearted, in order for students to enjoy the learning process. According to Blickenstaff, the environment needs to stimulate students to think and engage with the material: "[Teachers] must create learning environments that will open the students' minds, ears, and imaginations. Teachers need to stimulate students to explore, experiment, and dare to express new insights."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Marvin Blickenstaff, Games Children Play... Workshop Lecture Notes.

2. Barbara English Maris, "What Is the Relationship between Piano Performance and Piano Teaching?," *The Piano Quarterly* 37, no. 146 (1989): 27.

Lesson time is precious and Blickenstaff challenges teachers to use time assiduously. As Blickenstaff expressed in his workshop entitled *Studio Efficiency*, “there is never enough time with our students.” He concluded that if every lesson is a musical experience: “Time is on our side. The subject matter will be covered and the students will learn.”<sup>3</sup> In the piano lessons and classes of Blickenstaff, all individuals are engrossed in the study of piano through a constructive learning environment. Students are stimulated by the music and concepts, and time is used wisely in the pursuit of learning.

The efficient pace and the genial learning atmosphere was a result of Blickenstaff’s instruction. Time was never wasted; a lesson routine was apparent in each student’s lesson. Each lesson began with the student placing their music and notebook on the piano and positioning the bench. The playing began with a routine of warm-ups, and if the student was of advanced level, it began with a series of finger stretches. While the student began, Blickenstaff arranged the assignment sheets, and then he quickly turned his attention to the student’s exercises. Following the warm-ups, they worked on repertoire, most often beginning with review pieces. Blickenstaff summarized goals before moving on to the next piece and also notated details for practice on the assignment sheet and/or in the music. At the end of the lesson, Blickenstaff gave the student the assignment sheet and the next student was welcomed to the bench.

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3. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Studio Efficiency*, Workshop Lecture Notes.

This ease and quickness was engrained in the habits of the students, as they moved effortlessly between topics and did not dawdle. Therefore, they covered a large portion of the student's assignment, and numerous detailed goals for the next week of practice were given. Students remained focused and alert, and the researcher did not observe any issues with attentiveness. Furthermore, students appeared at ease, even in the presence of the researcher (Blickenstaff had alerted the students in advance and asked for permission to participate in the research study via consent and assent forms). The students and Blickenstaff smiled and laughed frequently during lessons. The students were engaged, following Blickenstaff's suggestions and lesson plan with interest. Many of Blickenstaff's suggestions challenged the students such that they needed to try several times; students readily attempted and repeated new ideas often without Blickenstaff's request, suggesting that repetition was frequently required during lessons. The lessons were musically oriented with only passing mention of extraneous topics. Although the lessons were formal, brief diversions occurred between lessons when Blickenstaff asked students or parents questions about other activities in their lives. These personal conversations were brief and kept to a minimum.

#### *Enjoyment of Lesson Activities*

In order to maintain an enjoyable learning environment for young beginners, Blickenstaff encourages the use of varied activities. He has named an important lesson planning tool and teaching tactic with the acronym "OTB," which



stands for “off the bench.” OTB activities are conducted away from the piano and are reinforcement activities such as working with flash cards or doing rhythm games. “Change of pace is vital to an interesting, creative lesson; therefore, we all savor (and perhaps repeat too often) our favorite off-the-bench drills,” wrote Blickenstaff in his opening statement to an article devoted to these activities.<sup>4</sup> Off-the-bench activities utilized by Blickenstaff in lesson plans for young beginners include: marching and movement activities for developing rhythmic ability, listening to music and responding to a series of guided questions, note reading and rhythm drills using flash cards, finger games for strengthening the mind-hand connection, and melodic dictation using staff boards. Ultimately, lessons in which a young, beginning student plays piece after piece, staying on the bench for the whole lesson, lack the variety needed to create an invigorating learning environment, and hence, Blickenstaff values OTB activities.

Blickenstaff’s beginning piano classes for groups of young students were highly interactive. During Blickenstaff’s many years of teaching groups of beginners at UNC-CH and Goshen, countless individuals observed his classes and recalled these during interviews and in surveys. Beverly Lapp at Goshen College explained how dynamic these classes were and how Blickenstaff kept the students’ attention: “Those kids, they never knew what was going to happen next; it was just

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4. Marvin Blickenstaff, “What Off-the-Bench Activities Have You Found Most Useful with Elementary Students?,” *Keyboard Companion* 1, no. 4 (Winter 1990): 28.

this element of surprise and fun. . . . He would do these very extensive workouts of new pieces. . . . He did it in such a way that it was kind of game-like.”<sup>5</sup> Some of the memorable activities mentioned by observers and participators were: kids jumping around on an oversized piano keyboard, playing with a large paper keyboard, stepping “Ebenezer Sneezer” out on the big keyboard, swinging to the beat, the process of “being” an eighth-note, remembering the pitch middle C and singing “this is the sound of middle C,” marching around the room, learning on wooden keyboards at the tables, gathering around the keyboard and watching Blickenstaff play a new piece, a class with Halloween costumes, and learning how to bow by counting.<sup>6</sup> His students described that “he made learning fun” in the beginner classes through a “joyful” and “interactive” environment, during which they participated in many activities that were often “kinesthetic” and of “short duration.”<sup>7</sup> As Blickenstaff described these classes, he “planned an hour in which everyone has fun and everyone learns” and “worked to prepare them for what they need to know.”<sup>8</sup>

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5. Beverly Lapp, interviewed by author (Goshen, IN, January 15, 2010).

6. Sara M. Ernst, “Survey for Students of Marvin Blickenstaff,” (Online survey conducted via SurveyMonkey™, <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Blickenstaff2>, 2010–2011).

7. Ibid.

8. Rob Hallquist, “Learning Music Together: An Interview with Marvin Blickenstaff,” *Early Childhood Connections* 8 (Winter 2002): 11.

An interactive environment in which students value learning is equally evident during Blickenstaff's repertoire classes and lessons of older students. His assignments are varied and contrasting, equipping each student to enjoy their practice week on numerous pieces; his intermediate and advanced students were all practicing four to six pieces (in a variety of styles) and a technical etude. In addition, students had pieces at the bottom of their assignment sheet that were already well-learned; these remained in part for the gratification of the student. As Amy Glennon, a colleague of Blickenstaff's at the New School, observed, Blickenstaff is a master at energizing students:

In the group classes, he creates a really exciting environment for the students, and I've gotten to tape those classes . . . and just listened. It almost brings back another era where kids are really excited about learning and he's very dignified in a way, but he's very approachable, and the kids are just really excited about what they're doing.

These repertoire classes are infused with numerous activities: teacher-led coaching of performances, composition projects, keyboard theory, technical drills, and learning about historical styles, composers, and famous pianists.<sup>9</sup>

Blickenstaff never wants his students to feel badly about lessons and is pleased when they express fulfillment from learning about music. He has witnessed with transfer students how detrimental the contrary philosophy can become and explained:

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9. Sara M. Ernst, 2009, Field Notes, The New School for Music Study, Kingston, NJ.

I have a little girl at the New School who changed to me from a Chinese teacher who made her cry at every lesson because she was so demanding. She said [to me], “Oh, I just love our lessons because I have such fun.” . . . I think it’s horrible. . . . That teacher had her playing such advanced repertoire. You just would weep because you know that she’d spend a whole year on a movement of a Mozart sonata that she had no business playing for the next five years. And what damage is done because music is such drudgery at that point, and all the repertoire that could be learned in that amount of time.<sup>10</sup>

This young student’s lessons, as observed by the researcher, were exuberant.

Olivia laughed and smiled frequently, performed many pieces and technical skills with mastery, and thrived due to his high artistic standards.

#### *Correcting Errors with Ease*

When inaccuracies need to be corrected in a student’s playing, Blickenstaff is proactive with students and preserves the positive learning environment.

Blickenstaff summarized his viewpoint:

**Unfortunately, student mistakes are costly**  
 they take precious time from the lesson  
 they interrupt the flow of the lesson plan  
 they upset us, which is usually communicated nonverbally to the student...  
 and therefore...  
 they are psychological “downers” for the student  
     students feel that we do not appreciate their efforts  
         that we pick at meaningless details  
         that we are impossible to please ... (so why try?)

Where do those mistakes come from? (I think it is safe to say that none of our students deliberately chooses to make mistakes.) If we could locate the source or reasons behind the errors, perhaps we would have a handle on

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10. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by author, Interview 6 of 6 (Music Teachers National Association Conference in Albuquerque, NM, March 27, 2010).

the solution. I once heard the statement . . . that “*mistakes reveal a lack of understanding.*”<sup>11</sup> [spacing, punctuation, and emphasis from original]

According to Blickenstaff’s teaching philosophy, mistakes must be treated with care for they can be detrimental to a student’s motivation and receptiveness.

Blickenstaff explained how problem solving allows for the student to guide the corrections during the lesson:

I really think that we’ve learned very little when people just say, “Do this, do that, this is wrong, this is right.” . . . We learn the most when we work the problems out for ourselves. And, more than likely, if a rhythm were wrong in a measure, I would use that phrase, prove the rhythm. Can you count and can you tap this, so that you are sure that you’ve got all four beats lined in? Hand the young child a pencil and say, “Write in where the first beat starts, and second beat,” until they work that out and find their own solution. I think that there’s a lot more learning that takes place in a situation like that then when I say the dot was not the right length.<sup>12</sup>

The student is guided to be self-sufficient through correcting the mistake and is not made to feel embarrassed by the teacher. Therefore, students learn techniques that will be applicable to their future practice sessions. Furthermore, mistakes become an opportunity for what is gleaned in the process of correction addresses fundamental deficiencies in a student’s skills and knowledge.

During lessons with Blickenstaff, mistakes were corrected efficiently and insouciantly by focusing upon new goals and improving the music. Blickenstaff and his students often spontaneously chuckled at a mistake. The laughter was not in a

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11. Marvin Blickenstaff, Preventive (Proactive) Teaching: Solving the Problem before It Happens, Workshop Lecture Notes.

12. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by Robert Dumm, Interview at Shenandoah College Conservatory of Music in Winchester, MA (Audio Cassette held at Stetson University’s duPont-Ball Library, 1989).

spirit of mockery or nonchalance; rather, the laughter was good-humored, as an exclamation of difficulty and enjoyment in learning. For example, Wendy performed in her lesson with Blickenstaff the chorale-like section of Claude Debussy's *Reverie*.<sup>13</sup> This section, comprised of blocked chords in the right hand, was difficult for Wendy to read because of the key signature. Both she and Blickenstaff chuckled and smiled at each other when wrong notes were played. She corrected each chord, and by the end of the learning sequence, performed these phrases easily and accurately.

#### *Stimulating Lesson Time Leads to Practice*

Blickenstaff's students from UNC-CH and Goshen College reflected on the learning environment and how the lessons were focused and required concentration. LeAnn House, a student at UNC-CH, explained the intensity of the lesson environment, "Well, it was positive and happy, and it was also intense, very intense. I mean, we worked hard."<sup>14</sup> Anne Waltner, a student at Goshen College, described how there was an urgency to getting the lesson started: "He made me feel like he couldn't WAIT [sic] for me to get in the door and have a seat at the piano so he could hear what I'd been practicing for the past week."<sup>15</sup> Karen Zorn, a

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13. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Wendy, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff's Home Studio, November 19, 2009).

14. LeAnn House, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, January 28, 2010).

15. Ernst, "Survey for Students."

student at Goshen College, clarified that the lessons did not feel overbearing, but were intense because of the unremitting attention of both her and Blickenstaff: “It was a relaxed intensity. . . . That was a part of the intensity, and that you paid attention. But it was relaxed and there was a lot of humor. . . . For me that made for a relaxed atmosphere where I could really learn, where I felt like I could take risks.”<sup>16</sup>

The intensity these students described resulted from the myopic focus on the music and the hard work that Blickenstaff required. The student was expected to assiduously focus on the music in active pursuit of learning and improvement. Beverly Lapp, a college student at Goshen College, and Jeffery Weaver, a high school student in Goshen, both indicated how surprised they were in their first lessons. Lapp recalled:

But what I remember being so amazing at first especially—I think the first semester . . . he assigned me a Haydn sonata and I learned music pretty quickly—so I came back with it, and we spent the whole lesson on the first two opening phrases. And I was so shocked . . . and yet, the effect of that on the sound, was very obvious. So I liked it, and I never got bored. I felt tired because it was really intense work.<sup>17</sup>

Lapp was amazed at how much rigor was given to a short passage of music and how challenged she felt to change her sound. Weaver expressed that even though he knew Blickenstaff prior to his first lesson, he was surprised by Blickenstaff’s

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16. Karen Zorn, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, March 16, 2010).

17. Lapp, Interview.

distinctive approach to focusing upon the music. “I have to say that very first lesson with him I played a couple Brahms waltzes, and I was bowled over with the intensity of the lessons,” exclaimed Weaver. He summarized that he “had never had a lesson like that where he was very much in the music. . . . It was constantly very engaging, almost took me by surprise.”<sup>18</sup>

Because the lesson environment was acutely focused on the music and betterment of the student’s performance, students finished their lessons with an urgent desire to practice. “Lessons were so inspirational that I never scheduled a class immediately afterwards so I could have time to reflect on what I had learned at the lesson or practice,” Donna Hughes Sanders expressed about her lessons at UNC-CH.<sup>19</sup> The lesson provided students with, as Anne Waltner from Goshen described, a “structured mandate of things to work on for the forthcoming week.”

Tom Lohr, a student from UNC-CH, recounted:

I always went to each lesson, especially I am thinking about freshman/sophomore years, with a real feeling of excitement, for really trying to demonstrate what I had done each week because I knew that we both had in our minds, we were measuring things by . . . the accomplishment factor. What have I accomplished this week with the ideas we discussed last week? And during my lessons I always felt a sense of excitement, and after my lessons, a sense of excitement to go and start practicing immediately, and start putting those new ideas to work, and I usually did go right out of the studio and go straight to a practice room right then.<sup>20</sup>

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18. Jeffery Weaver, Interview.ed by author (Interlochen, MI, July 25, 2010).

19. Ernst, “Survey for Students.”

20. Lohr, Interview.



Other former Goshen College students corroborated, explaining that directly after lessons with Blickenstaff they felt:

- driven to do more
- I would be ready to practice!
- usually quite inspired to go practice more!
- usually I felt like I need to do more and do better
- motivated after
- relieved and ready to start practicing with the new ideas I got during lessons
- elated and motivated
- I always knew what I needed to work on
- I remember leaving and wanting to go straight to the practice studio
- always challenged to do more and do it better
- I definitely was motivated to practice and considered my weekly lessons like a performance – was nervous about meeting his expectations as a teacher.<sup>21</sup>

These college students finished lessons with Blickenstaff inspired to practice and equipped with new ideas and goals.

In addition to leaving lessons ready to practice, many of Blickenstaff's former college students indicated they felt a responsibility to arrive at lessons fully practiced. Zorn explained how Blickenstaff's presence as a teacher made her prepare carefully:

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21. Ernst, "Survey for Students."

I knew from a variety of signals over time, you just didn't come to a lesson unprepared. You didn't waste his time, and that didn't mean that he kicked me out of a lesson, or did anything threatening, you just knew. And I would say it probably was this benevolent sort of presence that—like the parent who says they're disappointed when you do something stupid, and their disappointment kills you—there was a sense that you didn't come to a lesson unprepared.<sup>22</sup>

In the surveys administered by the researcher, numerous students attested to a similar feeling of responsibility for their preparation.<sup>23</sup> They wrote of the nervousness and excitement they felt, in connection to their readiness for the lesson:

- I tried hard to prepare and was inspired to practice to prepare for each lesson.
- [I was] Often nervous going in to show him how much work I had done, or to hide how little I had done that week.
- There was always some stress going into a lesson, mainly because I didn't want to disappoint Marvin.
- [I was] Exited (or nervous, depending on my preparation).
- Sometimes I felt nervous before a lesson because I never felt like I practiced enough or made enough progress.
- [I was] Confident or apprehensive. . . These extremes were entirely due to whether or not I had prepared adequately.

An additional eleven survey respondents used the adjective “nervous” and two used the word “anticipation” to describe their mood going into lessons with Blickenstaff. An overwhelming sense emerged from his former students that they

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22. Zorn, Interview.

23. Ernst, “Survey for Students.”

wanted to feel prepared for lessons because of the desire to take advantage of the lesson time and to avoid disappointing Blickenstaff.

*Reaching Potential through Challenges*

A fundamental belief within Blickenstaff's philosophy is that challenges are essential to growth and teachers are responsible for propelling students into greater mastery. Glennon observed how Blickenstaff challenges every student, focusing on the musical goals and ensuring a high standard is achieved:

He just knows exactly what needs to happen, and then he goes at it until it happens, what he's looking for. You know it's never personal; there is never a personal attack on the student, ever. Also, there's never an allowance. Like, oh, maybe this isn't as good of a student as that student so I'm going to lower my standards; there's never that either. It's all about the music.<sup>24</sup>

As Lapp, a former student and colleague at Goshen College, described, his tenacity towards the musical goal led students to achieve:

I think that, I identify now, as the tenacity that good teachers have. They don't let go . . . And that's what a tenacious teacher does, is they stick with it, just to the point—they kind of have a natural sense of where the frustration point would be, and they make sure they don't get there, but they push it further—then the break through comes. So, he was very good at that.<sup>25</sup>

Lapp, as previously quoted, had experienced this persistence in her first lesson with Blickenstaff, during which Blickenstaff used the whole hour to improve just two phrases of a lengthy piece. Tenacity in reaching artistic excellence is a pillar of Blickenstaff's teaching philosophy.

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24. Amy Glennon, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, March 18, 2010).

25. Lapp, Interview.

These high standards were motivational for Blickenstaff's college students. When working with him as his student, Lapp recalled how Blickenstaff occasionally assigned a massive goal. She explained: "He'd throw things at you like memorize this movement for next week. . . . [H]e was very good about erring on the side of over-challenging, and seeing if you could rise to that, . . . and then of course, you wanted to go do it."<sup>26</sup> Arlene Steffen was also given an enormous goal by Blickenstaff, to rework her entire technical approach to the piano. She recalled how she felt after her first lessons at Goshen College:

I remember making the phone call home to my mother after the first week of lessons, and he gave me three lessons that first week of the semester, and they were all about technique. And I was never so excited to practice technique. Marvin really completely changed the way I approached the piano. . . . I really learned all over again how to play the piano, and that the focus primarily of that first semester was complete technical overhaul. . . .<sup>27</sup>

Steffen, rather than feeling overwhelmed, was motivated by Blickenstaff's intensive work with her. Blickenstaff challenges students to expand their abilities at the piano, never limiting their potential, and he believes that students will be compelled to work hard and rise to his standard.

The primary vehicle for stimulating growth in students is the repertoire they will practice to perform, and Blickenstaff's students consistently described how his repertoire choices expanded their abilities as pianists. Blickenstaff selects

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26. Ibid.

27. Arlene Steffen, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, January 18, 2010).

Western European classical music for his advanced students, and during his years as a college professor, oversaw numerous students' preparation for concert performances and degree recitals. Joel Harrison, who earned a Bachelor's degree at UNC-CH, described the process of learning large concert works for recitals.

Harrison said:

There are two pieces I learned there and actually played on a recital that, oddly enough, I don't hear played a lot. It was Beethoven Sonata in E-flat No. 7. That's a thorny piece and a long sonata, over thirty minutes. . . . It's a great and intriguing sonata. The other is Brahms' Variations on a Theme of Schumann, Op. 9. I've never heard that performed. . . . I played both of these on my junior recital. I had to work really hard, the better part of my Junior year. Those were the biggest pieces I had learned. That was a moment in my musical life and development [to] take works of that size and perform them. It was fun.<sup>28</sup>

Zorn expressed how she developed as a pianist through the repertoire in his studio at Goshen:

Basically I became a pianist when I studied with him. . . . How that happened was is that he had a very intelligent sense of repertoire at the right time for the right student. I can't think . . . of a time when I thought that Marvin had a student playing a piece that there wasn't a real purpose for; it was either a stretch or a real culminating event for the person. . . . For me personally I feel like he always was pushing me to develop something new, and he did that really through the repertoire.<sup>29</sup>

Even with high school students, Blickenstaff introduces them to the great works of the fine art tradition; many students at this age would be gaining their first exposure to lengthy masterworks. Weaver explained how he had learned his first

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28. Joel Harrison, interviewed by author (Music Teachers National Association Conference in Albuquerque, NM, March 28, 2010).

29. Zorn, Interview.

multi-movement pieces, one of J.S. Bach's French Suites, and a Sonata by Franz Joseph Haydn. Blickenstaff also guided Weaver through his first large concert work, and Weaver recalled how motivated he was by this challenge: "And then for my college auditions, he had me learn a Scherzo [by Chopin], which was a huge project for me. I had never done anything that big, and again, I think that was one of those motivating things, was to learn a really big piece."<sup>30</sup>

Students from Goshen College, regardless of their age or degree program, mentioned how Blickenstaff motivated learning through demanding repertoire. Amy Thut, who had Blickenstaff as a group and individual teacher in second and third grade, said she felt challenged by the music and enjoyed the flexibility to challenge herself:

I felt encouraged to challenge myself with music that was challenging for my level. . . . He gave appropriate challenges that motivated me. . . . Being assigned "adventures of an african boy" [sic] as a child. We were told to choose one of the pieces (of the series) to learn, which was good because we could choose how much to challenge ourselves.<sup>31</sup>

Kelly Marquis Frieje, one of Blickenstaff's high school students, aptly summarized her assignments: "Repertoire choices always suited me and challenged me a lot."<sup>32</sup> A college student who enrolled in piano as an elective described how the music stretched her abilities: "He had me working on pieces that I wouldn't have initially

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30. Weaver, Interview.

31. Ernst, "Survey for Students."

32. Kelly Marquis Frieje, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, March 5, 2010).

tried working on because I would have thought they were too difficult for me---in that way he pushed me.”<sup>33</sup> Lara Troyer, a music major, also found the repertoire to be both appropriate and challenging. Troyer wrote, “Goals and assignments were always within my reach but I was challenged.”<sup>34</sup> Regardless of their ability level and degree program, Blickenstaff challenged his students to expand their abilities through assigning difficult repertoire, and these students were motivated to expand themselves under his guidance.

Blickenstaff acknowledged the importance of choosing repertoire carefully to expand each student’s pianism, considering their current technical level and his goals for their growth. As he explained, teachers must be sensitive to the difficulty of student’s pieces, assigning both easy pieces to be learned quickly and more difficult repertoire to be studied for a longer period of time. While students can perfect some repertoire within a week, longer pieces provide an added incentive and opportunity for growth. At the same time, Blickenstaff advocates dropping any repertoire that was poorly selected by the teacher and has become burdensome for a student. He explained, “I do chastise myself sometimes for not picking repertoire that’s exactly right for a student at a given level. And every now and then—it doesn’t happen very frequently—but every now and then, we’ll drop a

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33. Ernst, “Survey for Students.”

34. *Ibid.*

piece because it was just a bad choice.”<sup>35</sup> Out of the thirty-seven students surveyed, only one student expressed concern over Blickenstaff’s repertoire selections for students. This anonymous student from Goshen College wrote: “He sometimes oversteps the level of difficulty in repertoire, mostly (I think) because he believes a student really can do what they need to do, with his help.” The repertoire not only motivates learning (see Chapter V, *The Value of Music Study*), it also, when selected carefully, will provide appropriate challenges for students.

It is through the repertoire that Blickenstaff ultimately helps students reach their potential and perform to the best of their abilities. Susan See, independent teacher from Iowa, commented on how Blickenstaff has been able to get students to perform music beautifully. See had one of her students who had graduated from high school continue piano study with Blickenstaff at Goshen College, and See traveled to hear this student’s collegiate recital. She shared her amazement at the impressive recital and stated, “Wow, he has gotten everything out of her there is to get.”<sup>36</sup> This trait was described by many students in each decade of Blickenstaff’s college positions:

“He had a realistic view of what I could accomplish but at the same time set goals and assigned repertoire that forced me to develop as a pianist, a teacher, and a person.” Peggy W. Lupton, 1969–73, UNC-CH

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35. Blickenstaff, Interview 6 of 6.

36. Susan See, interviewed by author (Telephone interview, January 8, 2010).



"[His strength is] His ability to relate to every student and know how to work with different personalities and ways of learning. [He] Also knows what each individual is capable of and pushed them to achieve it!" Julie Gensmer, 1982–86, Goshen College

"Marvin helps to go as far as you can musically. He challenges his students!" Iris Zoe Thimm-Netenjakob, 1988–91, Goshen College

"He was able to motivate me to push myself and believe I could play pieces that I previously would have assumed were too challenging. . . . I felt honored to get him as my teacher and learned more in my semester with him than I did in many years prior. He was very effective and brought out the best without being threatening. Somehow he was kindly demanding." Lara Hall Blosser, 1989–90, Goshen College

"Marvin could teach a rock how to play piano with real musicality. Even if the repertoire coming out of his studio was not difficult, each pianist continually deepened his or her own ability to communicate through a musical medium." Anne Waltner, 1996–99, Goshen College

"He had a unique way of combining critique with encouragement. It's a fine balance to find but he did it well and thus pushed people to places they had not gone before." Anonymous student, 1998–99, Goshen College

"He was demanding and required much. He also had a fatherly presence about him. I had great respect for him and what he was able to draw out of me." Anonymous student, 1998–99, Goshen College<sup>37</sup>

These individuals articulated how Blickenstaff senses a student's potential, motivates learning, and ultimately educes successful musical performances from all. Blickenstaff's inspiring ideas and demanding presence provided sufficient incentive for students to accept his uncompromising standards.

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37. Ernst, "Survey for Students."

### *Summary of Student Viewpoints*

Students described the lesson environment as being serious and professional, while being inspiring and exciting, and students expressed a complex mixture of feelings regarding the hour lesson with Blickenstaff.<sup>38</sup> In the surveys conducted for this study, students described the environment as (number of duplications indicated here parenthetically): serious (6), professional (3), businesslike, and collegial. Students described how they felt during lessons: excitement /exciting/excited (5), we worked hard, focused, concentrated, busy, alert, attentive and enthusiastic, engaged/engaging (2), overwhelmed, inspirational, enlightened, frustrated (with myself for not studying harder). At the same time, students reported leaving their lessons feeling inspired and excited by Blickenstaff. They described their mood at the end of lessons as: inspired (8), positive (3), great (2), happy (2), motivated (2), uplifted, exhausted, relaxed, relieved, elated, really good. At the same time, several students mentioned that they did not feel good when the lesson did not go well, out of their lack of preparation. These students reported the following negative sentiments:

- positive or depressed. . . due to whether or not I had prepared adequately
- At times I was a little frustrated. Not so much with Mr. Blickenstaff as I was with myself for not studying harder, hence making the piano lessons more enjoyable.

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38. Ibid.

- If I left a lesson feeling bad it wasn't because of Marvin but because of my disappointment with myself.
- If I had a lesson that didn't go well, I would be in a foul mood for a while following.

Blickenstaff required his students to prepare, focus, and travail, and his students felt this responsibility. Lapp eloquently summarized this feeling that the others described: "The lesson was—I would literally come of the lessons exhausted and exhilarated. I would just want to go celebrate, but then I'd want to get back to the piano as soon as I could. So, it was just what you'd want from a teacher."<sup>39</sup>

### Structure is Essential

Structuring the lesson and practice, according to Blickenstaff, is the responsibility of the piano teacher, and to establish structure for pre-college students, Blickenstaff integrates the parents into the child's piano study. Jane Magrath and Blickenstaff discussed students' need for the teacher's and parents' guidance during an interview in the 1980s:

Magrath: I find that students want a teacher to tell them what to do. They want you to think for them, and if we can mold the process, whereby students learn to think, that's the important thing.

MB: All of us human beings need structure. Child psychologists will tell you that the reason that some kids get so messed up in their lives is that parents do not provide structure for them. And I think you're absolutely right that a piano teacher could perhaps be overly structured, but basically, the kids really need our structuring. That we show them how to practice, that we articulate goals very well for them. That kind of structure is absolutely invaluable. We can't expect them as inexperienced students to progress

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39. Lapp, Interview.

very much, determining their own goals and practice methods and things like that.<sup>40</sup>

Further structure at home must be provided by parents for piano study to be successful. He explained that given today's societal norms and pressures, parents often have an ignorant attitude: "In our particular society, we are dealing with families that are too busy, . . . parents who are extremely well intentioned. But lots of the parents we deal with say, 'I'll pay the bill but you have to do everything else.' . . . I find that that's an almost impossible attitude to work with if I'm going to really have a successful program."<sup>41</sup> Blickenstaff accepts that it is the teacher's responsibility to set goals and structure practice, and declares that parents must contribute to their child's piano study by arranging a practice structure. When working with adults and college students, he places the onus for a regular practice routine upon the student and openly discusses their practice schedule with them.

#### *Supportive Parents and Communications*

Blickenstaff speaks of the "Magic Triangle" when discussing successful pre-college piano study and the three-sided relationship between the teacher, the student, and the parent. He said the triangle provides "the strongest shape via

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40. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by Jane Magrath, VHS (The University of Oklahoma, ca. 1983).

41. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Piano Study's Magic Triangle: Parents, Teachers, Students*, VHS (Elizabethtown, PA, Elizabethtown College, 1992).

which we engage in meaningful music instruction.”<sup>42</sup> Blickenstaff explained: “It’s true -- successful piano study is not one-sided, or even two-sided. It takes a very good **teacher**, an interested and industrious **student**, and supportive **parents** to make success of piano study [emphasis from original].”<sup>43</sup>

In order to effectively utilize the parent-student-teacher triangle, Blickenstaff has a clear vision of what constitutes parental responsibilities. While he does not expect parents to be expert musicians, he expects parents to express interest in their child’s piano study:

Parents do not need to be professional musicians, but parents do need to be positive in their affirmation of what the child is experiencing and what’s transpiring in this process of learning about music. Parent’s need to show interest. We cannot expect the child to flourish in a situation where the parents do not show an interest. Children are desperate for parental approval, and children desperately want their parents to be involved and be proud of what they’re doing.<sup>44</sup>

As he further explained in his workshop, *The Role of the Parent in the Success of the Student*, the crucial parental responsibilities are: scheduling daily practice, assuring the assignment is understood (this may require practicing with young students), monitoring practice to ensure the assignment is covered each day, and

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42. Ibid.

43. Marvin Blickenstaff, Meeting with Parents and Students and Teachers, Workshop Lecture Notes.

44. Blickenstaff, *Piano Study’s Magic Triangle*, VHS.

providing an adequate practice space free of distraction.<sup>45</sup> Additional responsibilities are those that are “obvious” such as: prompt arrival to lessons, payment of tuition, communication regarding schedules, maintenance of the home piano, and providing a bench with the proper height and a foot rest. Blickenstaff defines other “not so obvious” responsibilities for parents including: student dress for lessons and recitals, ensuring the students nails are clipped, listening to lesson tapes and auditing lessons at the request of the teacher, listening to Classical music in the home, and attending recitals and concerts.

The teacher has reciprocal responsibilities to the parent: to communicate with them frequently, provide a clear practice assignment, and offer lesson visitation at least once a term to model effective practice and affirm progress. Blickenstaff explained the importance of open and regular communication with parents to a group of piano teachers:

Our main job is to communicate to parents what we want from them. If you want parents in the lesson, tell them that. If you don't want parents in the lesson, you tell them that. If you want parents to supervise the practice, you tell them that. If you don't watch out, and you don't inform the parents what you want out of it, they'll go crazy and take over. And then they'll really get in your way. Or they'll say, he never told me to do anything and so they won't experience any interest in what's going on. So, I think that's for us to determine what we want out of the parents. Parents can be incredibly helpful and supportive.<sup>46</sup>

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45. Marvin Blickenstaff, *The Role of the Parent in the Success of the Student*, Workshop Lecture Notes.

46. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Questions and Answers*, MP3 created by author (Interlochen, MI, Interlochen Center for the Arts, 2010).

Ultimately Blickenstaff maintains that the teacher must articulate to parents what is expected for support at home, otherwise risk that parents become complacent or overzealous.

In order to establish a strong triangular relationship, Blickenstaff scheduled a parent's meeting to inaugurate the group classes for beginners at Goshen College. Parents and student teachers attended this meeting and Blickenstaff elucidated the responsibilities of the parents and outlined the goals of his curriculum. Blickenstaff summarized the significance of this meeting:

As I look back at the parent's meeting, it is probably the hour that contributes most obviously to the success of the first year program than any other hour we spend during the whole [first year]. Bringing parents together and trying to communicate to the parents what it is that we are trying to accomplish and how we're going to go about it. . . . But I find it really impossible to expect support of my program from the parent's at home if they don't know what the program is. . . . Parents cannot be expected to support something that they do not understand.<sup>47</sup>

This meeting consisted of, as outlined in his planning notes, the following activities. Blickenstaff:

- Discussed the "Magic Triangle" and explained the parents' responsibilities at home.
- Performed piano pieces and discussed the performer's goals and processes. (One year he performed Schumann's *Romance* and Chopin's *Fantasia-Impromptu*).
- Taught the parents a series of warm-ups, games, rhythmic activities, and songs, from the first year of study.
- Explained the entire first-year curriculum.

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47. Blickenstaff, *Piano Study's Magic Triangle*, VHS.

- Outlined what constitutes effective practice and compared this to performance.
- Lectured on the necessity of affirmation, the importance of the arts, the role of music, and the unique qualities of piano study.<sup>48</sup>

Beyond establishing the parent-teacher relationship and the first-year goals of study, Blickenstaff performed for parents and educated them in the significance of arts education and how piano study will benefit their children.

When students enrolled in this beginner class at Goshen College, Blickenstaff asked one parent of each student to become the practice parent and observe each of the weekly classes taught by Blickenstaff. He explained:

In most group settings, the room is large enough for parents to sit in the back and observe the lesson. Parents are much more capable of assisting with practice if they have observed the kinds of reinforcement activities that can be done at home. I don't have parents helping with each detail, but parents can certainly reinforce what we are doing in class.<sup>49</sup>

As Mary Rose Jordan recalled, her mother was an active participant in her classes and lessons at Goshen College in her youth: "When I was seven or eight, [my mom] asked him if she should still sit in on the lessons, and he said, 'Oh, you must sit in.' . . . He was trying to create an atmosphere. My mom being there helped me."<sup>50</sup>

Blickenstaff gave the non-attending parent a weekly task to affirm the child. This

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48. Blickenstaff, Meeting with Parents and Students and Teachers; Blickenstaff, *Piano Study's Magic Triangle*, VHS.

49. Hallquist, 12.

50. Mary Rose Jordan, interviewed by author (Skype Interview, February 1, 2010).



parent was to ask the child about piano, listen to performances each week, and congratulate the child's progress and playing.

In addition to informal weekly communications with parents, Blickenstaff and his piano pedagogy students gave parents formal, end-of-term progress reports for each student enrolled in the weekly beginner class at Goshen College. Blickenstaff stressed the importance of formal evaluations: "I think a kind of report card is very, very helpful for communication among the triangle. It's another way we are trying to strengthen the triangle. We try to do a lot of affirmation on our little reports. We also try to focus a lot on how practice might be improved."<sup>51</sup> The young students were graded (excellent, good, fair, or poor) on their music reading, rhythm, technique, aural awareness, expression, and preparation for weekly lessons, and both Blickenstaff (the group teacher) and the student teacher (the private teacher) composed a detailed summary of the child's progress. These evaluations served in part as an assignment for the student teachers, and Blickenstaff indicated to these college students what constituted an effective evaluation. The evaluations included statements:

- applauding the student's good work
- outlining the areas in which you think the student has made progress
- outlining areas in which you feel the student should direct special attention

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51. Blickenstaff, *Piano Study's Magic Triangle: Parents, Teachers, Students*.

-- commenting on the parents' involvement and support (usually can be very positive -- we need to encourage their involvement in the program and their constant supervision of the student's work at home)

-- general suggestions or comments.<sup>52</sup>

Blickenstaff also issued reports for more advanced students (not in the group classes). These written evaluations demonstrate Blickenstaff's desire to communicate with parents, informing them of progress and encouraging continued support at home.

Regarding his students at the New School and in his home studio, parents were well-informed and often observed lessons. The principal investigator noted that Blickenstaff had cultivated amicable relationships with his student's parents, knowing personal details about their family life (such as family interests and activities) and the parent's occupations. As Blickenstaff described, the relationship needs "warmth" and is mutually supportive but is "not social."<sup>53</sup> At his home studio in Pennsylvania, most parents were present during their child's piano lesson. The few students whose parents did not attend lessons were in late junior high or high school. At the New School, parents did not observe the weekly lessons (all students were late intermediate or advanced pianists), but Blickenstaff spoke with them, if needed, in the waiting room before and after lessons. Maggie Yang, a parent whose daughter began lessons at Blickenstaff's home studio, explained that she observed

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52. Marvin Blickenstaff, 1994, Piano Pedagogy, Assignment #11, Class and Lecture Files from Goshen College.

53. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by author, Interview 4 of 6 (Collegeville, PA, November 19, 2009).

all lessons during the beginning years of study with Blickenstaff. Once the family transferred to the New School, Yang explained that observations ceased and that Blickenstaff communicated with her through conversations in the waiting room and through email.<sup>54</sup>

### *A Teacher's Preparation for Lessons*

Blickenstaff believes that a piano teacher must prepare for lessons and classes, planning each lesson and the larger curriculum. In his workshop on the "Magic Triangle," Blickenstaff listed the teacher's responsibilities, which includes giving weekly assignments and planning the curriculum.<sup>55</sup> To balance the weekly goals and larger curriculum, Blickenstaff indicated that he assesses students' command of the material and quells his desire to move too fast. Blickenstaff discovered in his own teaching how planning and preparation is transformative:

Preparation of teaching and curriculum planning—especially crucial in the first few years of study when everything is so new—has, more than anything else, changed my teaching over the years. What I fear is that many teachers simply flip the page and begin introducing the quarter note, for example, without having prepared for the introduction of this idea.<sup>56</sup>

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54. Maggie Yang, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, November 15, 2010).

55. Blickenstaff, *The Role of the Parent*. The list of teacher responsibilities also includes: hear examples of practice in each lesson, provide efficient practice models, communicate how to learn, use the teaching cycle of preparation-presentation-reinforcement, plan varied performance opportunities, build a collection of pieces that the student can perform well, provide challenge, and affirm achievement.

56. Hallquist, 13.

With a plan, Blickenstaff believes teachers will use the lesson time effectively, improve their methods of instruction, and create an environment where the student can succeed and learn.

To structure his student's learning, Blickenstaff prepares students to learn new concepts, carefully introduces new repertoire, and has an overarching curriculum planned. In lessons with young students who are learning the rudiments of reading and playing, the teaching cycle of preparation-presentation-reinforcement is paramount and requires the teacher to plan the course of study far into the future. Blickenstaff wrote in *Keyboard Companion* how the method books guide only the presentation of the concept and the teacher is responsible for preparation and adequate reinforcement:

The method books you use will dictate the moment in your curriculum at which 6/8 is introduced. Those method books will not indicate the point at which 6/8 should be *prepared* [emphasis from original], and how thoroughly that preparation must be done to facilitate a successful experience with the new meter. Furthermore, we teachers are responsible for the amount and variety of reinforcement for the new meter – the method books will provide some repertoire pieces (maybe not enough), but little else.<sup>57</sup>

Teachers must also plan how to introduce and assign new repertoire. In a lecture on coaching, Blickenstaff asserted that the success of the teacher's presentation will directly impact the student's motivation and the quality of the student's final performance:

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57. Marvin Blickenstaff, "How Do You Teach 6/8 Meter?," *Keyboard Companion* 3, no. 4 (1992): 26.

It seems obvious to point out that the final performance of a piece starts well before the piece is assigned to the student. In **our** [emphasis from original] (the teacher's) planning, we analyze, strategize, practice, interpret. . . . [We] Cannot repair our student's first impression. First experiences are the ones that last. If it is a wonderful exciting introduction, we cannot erase that.<sup>58</sup>

Beyond preparing for new concepts and pieces, Blickenstaff's overarching curriculum for students is comprehensive, summarized in the acronym TERRAC. Each letter of TERRAC represents an area of musical development: technique, expression, reading, rhythm, aural skills, and creativity. (For a detailed account of preparation-presentation-reinforcement, introducing new repertoire, and TERRAC, see Chapter IV, In Service of Musical Sound).

At Goshen College, Blickenstaff structured each class meeting of the beginning class of young children through detailed lesson plans. Because his pedagogy students observed this class, Blickenstaff felt additional pressure to diligently prepare the beginners for success; not only concerned with correct first impressions for the children, his instruction was modeling effective teaching practices to his pedagogy students. Blickenstaff's lesson plans consisted of a numbered list of activities. For example, his plan for the ninth class in 1996 was:

1. As they gather, work with the interval reading sheet (last week's assignment).

Can move into flashcards using both skips and steps.

Talk about intervallic fingerings.

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58. Marvin Blickenstaff, *The End Is the Beginning: Coaching a Piece to Perfection*, VHS (Goshen, IN, Goshen College, 2003).

2. Warm-ups
  - usual
  - “head-head”
  - “finger chin-ups” on 2s 3s 4s
    - NEW TWIST: have 234 pull 15 into position
    - have 24 pull 135 into position
3. REVIEW PIECES from last assignment were --
  - Steeple Bells
  - Birthday
  - Shoo-fly Pie
  - Gazelle
  - Moonlight

Have singles or pairs perform the pieces. Work on:

  - hands into position accurately and in spirit of piece
  - thinking about the mood before playing
  - play without mistakes
  - hands return to lap after final sound is released
4. CDE review
  - standing, using their bodies from foot to head “A B C D E F G”
  - on their keyboards
  - practice a “rote version” of Ski Lift p. 20 with hands crossing on CDE
  - observe Ski Lift p. 20
5. You the Composer -- Elevator Ride using CDE
6. “This is the sound of Middle C”
7. Introduce FGAB
  - fast recognition (they call it screaming!) of CDE vs. FGAB from paper keyboard
  - divide FG (LH) and AB (RH) and drill in style of The Engine p. 21
8. On floor -- focus sounds to prepare for RH motive of My View p. 19
  - Sight-read at piano, dividing parts between hands.
9. Discuss and hear Little Pony, Solos p. 5
10. “This is the sound of Middle C”<sup>59</sup>

This lesson plan covers each element of TERRAC; Technique, #2; Expression #3; Rhythm, #2 (head-head is a game for developing steady pulse); Reading, #1, 4, 7, and 8; Aural Awareness, #6 and #10, and Creativity, #5. He introduced the new

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59. Marvin Blickenstaff, Piano Pedagogy, Class and Lecture Files from Goshen College.

pieces (#4, 8, and 9), reinforced prior concepts (#1), and prepared new concepts for future music (#7). Countless plans for each year of classes are scattered throughout his personal files from his Goshen College years. Plans were not reused from year to year; he planned each class carefully, modifying his approach to suit each year's class. Every lesson plan had a correlating assignment sheet given to the students to guide their week of practice.

#### *Providing Weekly Assignments*

Blickenstaff provides his students a weekly assignment sheet, which he views as crucial for directing practice time. Created prior to the lesson during his planning time, these "home practice sheets" are given in his group classes and individual lessons with pre-college and hobbyist students (not including college students). For beginner classes at Goshen College, the assignment sheets contained exercises and warm-ups, new and review pieces, written work, composition projects, and other miscellaneous activities (see fig. 6.1). New and review pieces numbered between three and six pieces each; students usually had ten or more pieces on each weekly assignment. Blickenstaff included a daily practice check-box for each item on the assignment in order to track the number of days practiced and to quickly ascertain which items had been learned. Students were expected to play all items on the assignment sheet for five days a week. In this group instruction, Blickenstaff introduced the new assignment in each weekly class, and the student reviewed this same assignment during their individual lesson later in the week.

I AB 1 12

HOME PRACTICE

ARM AND HAND EXERCISES MTWTFSS

1. 10 stretch-grabs \_\_\_\_\_
2. 0's between tips and thumbs  
(Are your finger tips strong and curved?) \_\_\_\_\_
3. "chin-ups" on 2, 3, 4 \_\_\_\_\_
4. Finger Twister of the Week  
RH: 1 5 2 4 3 4 5 1 5 2 4 3 2 1  
LH: 5 1 4 2 3 2 1 5 1 4 2 3 4 5 \_\_\_\_\_

NEW PIECES

p. 35 INDIAN ECHOES  
make the last note of each line the quietest \_\_\_\_\_

p. 36 ROCKING BOAT  
before playing, circle the first C in each hand.  
What is the Official Name of the first note in each hand?  
DRIFTING  
circle the first C in each hand  
Give Official Name of each hand's first note \_\_\_\_\_

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

p. 4 JOLLY OLD SAINT NICHOLAS \_\_\_\_\_  
THE CHRISTMAS TREE \_\_\_\_\_

p. 3 GOOD KING WENCESLAS \_\_\_\_\_

REVIEW PIECES

p. 33 BIRTHDAY SONG \_\_\_\_\_

p. 34 ONE COLOR \_\_\_\_\_  
GOOD ADVICE \_\_\_\_\_  
COLD WIND \_\_\_\_\_

HAPPY HOLIDAYS! p. 2 JINGLE BELLS \_\_\_\_\_

SOLOS p. 8 CHINESE PAINTING \_\_\_\_\_

MEMORIZE...

two pieces of your choice from the HAPPY HOLIDAYS sheet  
or ...  
from pages 28, 29, 30, 33, or 34 \_\_\_\_\_

ACTIVITIES p. 18 \_\_\_\_\_

YOU THE COMPOSER, p. 38  
Add the title of your choice ....  
but be sure to follow directions for the beginning notes.

Figure 6.1. Sample Student Assignment Sheet, Beginning Group Class, Goshen College, used between 1978 and 1999. Taken from the pedagogy notebook (ca. 1988) of Beverly Lapp.



The young beginners were required to follow the assignment closely; otherwise they fell behind the learning curve of the class.

For individual lessons of students not in beginner groups, Blickenstaff's assignment sheets contained similar items: warm-ups and technical exercises, repertoire, and other activities such as written work and composition activities (see fig. 6.2). After the student's name and lesson date, upcoming performance and class dates are identified for easy reference. Next, technical skills are listed, often grouped into those skills that have been tested and passed and those that are the new focus. The central and largest portion of the assignment is the repertoire list, which contains each piece's composer, title, book, and page number. Pieces that are ready for performance are listed at the bottom of the assignment, and the student is expected to review these weekly in order to have one or two pieces polished at all times. During lessons, Blickenstaff tailors the assignment sheet to reflect the student's completion of the prior assignment, writing in detailed guidance and freely adding or removing repertoire or technical skills. Blickenstaff keeps a personal copy of each student's assignment using carbon paper to transfer hand-written notes to his copy.

These practice sheets outline what a student is to accomplish before the next lesson or class, and they establish a frame-work for student responsibility during practice. Jeffery Weaver, who worked with Blickenstaff during high school in the 1990s, expressed how the practice sheet made him accountable for his weekly progress:

Student Name	<i>Lesson #10</i>	11/18/09
<u>Date:</u> November 18, 6:30	<u>PEPS Class</u>	<u>Perform:</u> Kölling: <i>Fluttering Leaves</i>
<hr/>		
<u>Warm-Ups and Technique</u>		
<i>Technical Skills Level 3</i>		
<i>passed:</i>		
Hanon #11 (white keys)		
ONSCE chord exercise (white keys)		
Scales 2s 3s 4s (white keys)		
 <i>focus for your next lessons</i>		
Scales in 2s 3s 4s (black keys)		
Scales in two-octave segments		
Jane Allen		
 <u>Repertoire -</u>		
<i>Masterpieces with Flair! Book 2</i>		
p. 50 Kölling: <i>Fluttering Leaves in A Minor</i> for Parents' Class 12/9		
 p. 8 WFBach: <i>Allegro</i>		
 <i>Sonatina Masterworks, Book 3</i>		
p. 4 Benda: <i>Sonatina in A Minor</i>		
 <i>Debussy: An Album</i>		
p. 15 <i>Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum</i>		
 <i>Chopin: An Album</i>		
p. 9 <i>Prelude in E Minor</i>		
p. 14 <i>Prelude in B Minor</i>		
 <u>Review three times each week</u>		
Chopin: <i>Polonaise in G Minor</i>		
Kabalevsky: <i>Sonatina in A Minor</i>		

Figure 6.2. Sample Assignment Sheet, Individual Lesson, The New School for Music Study, from November 18, 2009. Taken from the personal files of Marvin Blickenstaff.

He definitely held us very accountable for that sort of thing [practice goals]. The practicing always had to be very—well, early on, he had his little chart, [where you] mark off each day. When we started off, he actually had practice assignments that he had for me, which was a very new thing for me as well. Basically I knew, he had taken the time to prepare for the lesson, which means I better get through everything because next week he's going to have something more for me. I would make sure I got through all of the technique and everything.<sup>60</sup>

As Weaver indicated, these individualized assignment sheets compelled him to accomplish weekly goals and tracked his weekly practice through a practice chart.

For his pre-college performance classes at the New School, the assignment sheet includes a technical routine, drills for keyboard theory, written exercises, composition activities, and other enrichment activities (see fig. 6.3). These “PEPS” classes are for students enrolled in the Program for Excellence in Piano Study. It is select program that identifies and nurtures students with advanced potential. In addition to their weekly hour lesson with another faculty member at the New School, these students are expected to practice at least one hour daily and participate in biweekly repertoire classes and monthly small-group lessons with Blickenstaff. During PEPS classes, Blickenstaff introduces the new assignment and coaches student performances. The assigned technical drills and theory exercises are learned in numerous keys and are reviewed at the start of each class. The projects for one meeting of PEPS C in October of 2010 (see fig. 6.3) included studying repertoire collections such as Bartok's *Mikrokosmos*, composing in the style of Bartok, and listening to recordings of famous pianists such as Lang Lang.

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60. Weaver, Interview.

*PEPS C*

## Assignment #2

10/6/10

Warm-Ups and Technique

1. Stretch the webbing between each finger before practicing
2. Major-minor-diminished five-finger patterns  
one hand twice as fast as the other
3. Rotations (rocking the hand from the elbow) in various five-finger patterns  
5 1 4 1 3 1 2 1 3 1 4 1 5    and  
1 5 2 5 3 5 4 5 3 5 2 5 1
- 4 Hanon #1 in the keys of C, G, D, F (see handout)

Keyboard Theory1. *I is Major*

Play all of the chords in a given key, moving up and down as you say

*I is Major; ii is minor; iii is minor, IV is Major; V is Major; vi is minor; vii is diminished; I is Major.*

Play the chords a second time and name the chords you play.

Assignment: play in the keys of C, G, D, A, E, F, and Bb

2. *C's the root of...*

Play and name all of the major and minor chords that contain a given note.

Example:

C's the root of	C Major	C's the root of C minor
C's the 3 <sup>rd</sup> of	A-flat Major	C's the 3 <sup>rd</sup> of    A minor
C's the 5 <sup>th</sup> of	F Major	C's the 5 <sup>th</sup> of    F minor

Practice this routine for the notes D, F, and G.

Projects1. *Bartók Mikrokosmos*

You now have ...

- 1) copies of all of the Bartók pieces performed in class
- 2) a sheet describing some of the elements used by the composer in creating each piece.

Your assignment is two-fold:

- 1) after studying over the musical concepts Bartók used in writing your piece (or any other piece played in class), compose your own "Bartók" piece using some of Bartók's ideas on intervals (he loved 4ths!), rhythms, accompaniment patterns, etc. Notate your piece on manuscript paper. Your piece does not need to be entirely finished by next class, but you should have a substantial start on it. As you are working on your composition, be thinking of a title.
- 2) learn another piece from the set which interests you.

2. *Pianist of the Month: Lang Lang*

You are to listen to at least three pieces performed by the young Chinese artist Lang Lang (who attended the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia). You can hear and see those on YouTube. For your notebook report, write down the names and composers of the pieces, and your impressions of the pieces and the performances. Also, do some biographical research on Lang Lang. How old is he? Where does he now live? When did he come to the USA?

Date due: **October 20.**

Next class: October 20

Figure 6.3. Sample Assignment Sheet, PEPS Class, The New School for Music Study, from October 10, 2010. Taken from the personal files of Marvin Blickenstaff.

Blickenstaff gives detailed instructions on these sheets and has student's build a large reference notebook of all their materials. All assignments are filed in their notebooks, along with other students' compositions and projects and their weekly class notes. Blickenstaff upholds the practice standard by requiring students to fill-out weekly practice charts and provides them with a biweekly class assignment that requires considerable practice and study time to complete.

Throughout his career, Blickenstaff has asked students to tape record lessons to augment any verbal or hand-written assignments. The recording provides students with an opportunity to readily review lesson content without relying solely upon memory or the written assignment sheet. He advises students to listen to the tapes and takes notes in a lesson journal. An undergraduate student at Goshen College in 1982 summarized the expectation: "We tape recorded the sessions and I was expected to listen to each one, take notes, and practice the things we covered."<sup>61</sup> Another student at Goshen College in 1998 wrote, "We recorded every lesson so that I could study it later, which was great -- no worries about notes or half-remembering something."<sup>62</sup> In a formal assignment given to Beverly Lapp in 1988 at Goshen College, Blickenstaff wrote, "In the past, students who have taken the most careful notes from the tapes seem to benefit most from

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61. Ernst, "Survey for Students."

62. Ibid.

their week's practice, and make the quickest progress."<sup>63</sup> In this assignment, he recommended arranging these notebooks in sections, devoting a section to each piece being practiced and a section to general notes and principles. The researcher observed that Blickenstaff encourages routine taping but does not require it for every lesson. In his current teaching of pre-college students and adult hobbyists, many students, but not all, brought in a compact audio cassette to record their lessons on Blickenstaff's tape recorder; one student recorded the entire lesson on a digital video recorder.

When weekly lessons are not scheduled over the summer months, Blickenstaff believes the teacher should provide an assignment to avoid students taking a complete break from the piano. In an article on summer repertoire, Blickenstaff wrote: "I wish to communicate to them that a piano student may not take a three-month 'leave-of-absence' from the piano. Too much skill is lost during that length of time."<sup>64</sup> He explained that his students in the Preparatory Department at Goshen College received special materials to learn on their own over the summer, and he instructed his college students to begin their repertoire for the upcoming fall semester. In the preface to the 1998 summer assignment for his students (ages 7 to 9) in the Goshen Preparatory Department, Blickenstaff

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63. Beverly Lapp, 1988–1989, Lessons with Marvin Blickenstaff at Goshen College, Personal Journal.

64. Marvin Blickenstaff, "Do You Assign Special Repertoire During the Summer?," *Keyboard Companion* 14, 2003): 36.

affirmed the yearly progress and suggested how to structure the summer practice routine:

It's time for a "piano vacation" .....  
 you have all done very well in your piano study this year, and we are very proud of you and of your accomplishments.

There are two important things to keep in mind about the summer:

- that you should take some vacation from your regular, daily practice
- that you do some practice so that you will not lose the skills you have learned

You and your parents can decide on a reasonable schedule. Some suggestions:  
 one week of regular practice, followed by one week off practice every other day rather than every day<sup>65</sup>  
 [spacing from original]

To further direct the summer routine, Blickenstaff provided the parents and students with a list of suggested repertoire, all of which could be learned by the children on their own.

In addition to your warm-ups, follow this schedule:

**During the month of June, learn these pieces:**

Sheet: *Early in the Morning* from the same sheet as *Faraway Drums*

One tricky place: on line four, the LH crosses over to play Treble C.

*Near the Beginning*

*Circus Camels*, p. 4

*White Key Polka*, p. 10

**During the month of July, learn these pieces:**

Sheet: *The Bear Went Over the Mountain*

Watch especially carefully for changes of position.

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65. Marvin Blickenstaff, 1997, Goshen College Preparatory Department, Summer Assignment, Class and Lecture Files from Goshen College.

*Near the Beginning*

*One Two Wheels*, p. 2

*Remembered Song*, p. 12

*When Daytime Ends*, p. 6

**During the month of August, learn these pieces:**

Sheet: *In the Moonlight*

Which notes (usually LH) need to be played quietly because they are not the melody? -- they are the accompaniment.

*Near the Beginning*

*Japanese Moon*, p. 8

*On the Waves*, p. 14 [spacing and emphasis from original]<sup>66</sup>

On this specific assignment, the summer repertoire pieces were listed by each

month of the summer, providing each student and parent with a simple and

contained outline to follow. His young students were not left to wonder what to do

throughout the summer months.

Blickenstaff gave this type of detailed guidance to college students as well.

In Lapp's notebook from piano lessons at Goshen College, she had taken lesson

notes on her summer music. Her repertoire was part of her forthcoming junior

project, which was to perform a solo recital.<sup>67</sup> Her assignment included a

Beethoven sonata (Op. 31, No. 1, or Op. 10, No. 3), *Italian Concerto* by Bach, a

concerto by Schumann or the Grieg, and Chopin's etude (Op. 25, No. 12). In the

ensuing notes, Lapp wrote down the scores and editions she was to purchase, and

during her last lesson of the Spring term, they discussed practice guidance for

learning the Chopin etude. For all levels of students, Blickenstaff provides detailed

66. Ibid.

67. Lapp, Personal Journal.



assignments and goals for the summer months of study, in order to avoid regression and stimulate independent learning.

*Directing a Student's Practice*

Blickenstaff regards practicing as one of the chief skills piano teachers must develop in their students, at all stages of development. Blickenstaff emphasized the importance of practice to a student: "I am absolutely a firm believer that pianistically, we are what we practice. It's like we are what we eat; we are what we practice."<sup>68</sup> To help students develop good habits, practice needs to be addressed continually, as he declared to teachers in a workshop:

Illustrate **in each lesson** how smart practice gets the job done efficiently. On the assignment sheet, devise some way for students (and parents) to monitor their work. . . . Every lesson .... Repeat, EVERY LESSON must devote some time to the most efficient and effective ways to practice. [emphasis from original]<sup>69</sup>

His former student Arlene Steffen recalled how the cynosure of her studies with Blickenstaff as a college student was practicing: "Our lessons in large part were simply demonstrations of what he expected us to do in the practice room. He was teaching about how to practice because so many of us had never learned that skill."<sup>70</sup>

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68. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Rose, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff's Home Studio, November 19, 2009).

69. Marvin Blickenstaff, Pedagogy 101: Reviewing the Basics, Workshop Lecture Notes.

70. Steffen, Interview.

Practice, from Blickenstaff's perspective, must change as pianists mature and advance, and therefore, a student needs continual instruction on practicing. During a question-and-answer session with Blickenstaff in a workshop, a teacher asked what to do with a student whose major deficiency was polishing and refining repertoire for performance. Blickenstaff pinpointed the probable source, ineffective practice, and he described the role of practicing to this teacher:

I think that teaching practice skills is almost a lifelong process with all of our students because as they grow the practice methods and skills change. But it is probably one of the main obligations of any piano teacher, to try and bring your student to efficient and effective practicing. One of the first things that I would suggest is that you practice in the lesson.<sup>71</sup>

He further described his philosophy on practicing when he suggested how to approach a student who has failed to prepare for a lesson:

In fact sometimes I almost welcome lessons where the student comes in with their tail between their legs and they say, "I'm so sorry but I have had no time to practice this week." I basically respond, "Well you owe me one, but let's use this time as if this were a practice at home during the week." We get the assignment out and we ask, what shall we go for first. . . . If you want technique to get dealt with first, you do that in the lessons first . . . and then there's a half a chance that that will happen at home. And then you start practicing. One of the things . . . I would try to drive home to my student is the worst place to start practicing a piece is with the first note. You ask them, "Where's the toughest place?" . . . I would really try to drill home that practice entails correct repetitions. Without that you will never make any progress. . . . They think that's torture. Appeal to their logic. What transpires during practice? You're training muscle response. You cannot learn correct muscle response with once.<sup>72</sup>

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71. Blickenstaff, *Questions and Answers*.

72. *Ibid.*

The basic tenets of practice are taught and modeled to Blickenstaff's students through practice that occurs during the lesson time. Although practice is the student's responsibility, Blickenstaff concludes that the skill must be led by the teacher and developed during the piano lesson.

The researcher observed Blickenstaff directing practice in all his lessons at his home studio and the New School. In his lesson with Wendy, a pre-college student in her intermediate years of study, Blickenstaff guided her practice on learning the chords in Claude Debussy's *Reverie*.<sup>73</sup> After practicing the section with Wendy, Blickenstaff encapsulated their practice approach. He appealed to her rationality and described the traits of successful practice, providing reasons why the "fingers" need to practice in this way:

It is fine with me if you practice on a couple lines a day. Just say, "I'm really going to get the notes down on these lines." Please know that the best way to learn some new chords is: a) get the fingering, b) play it loudly, and c) repeat like crazy [Wendy smiles]. Repeat, repeat, repeat. And the fingers say, "I think I really know that." But if you don't get the fingering *always* the same, [emphasis his] then the fingers say, "Hey man! I don't know what you want me to do!" If you don't play loudly, the fingers say, "Was that the C-sharp or the D-sharp?" [Wendy smiles and nods her head.] They gotta know that. If you don't repeat, they'll say, "Well I kind of think we did that yesterday, but I don't really remember what we're supposed to do."

Prior to this briefing in the lesson, Blickenstaff coached Wendy through this style of practicing, ensuring that she used correct fingering, played loudly, and repeated each section several times.

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73. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Wendy.

To further solidify a student's practice, Blickenstaff summarizes goals to connect what occurred in the lesson to what needs to happen during practice. Most often, Blickenstaff recapped objectives after practicing each piece on the assignment, and occasionally at the end of the lesson, he recounted the large targets for the week. He explained the importance of this in-lesson reflection:

Summary can be done also as you go through a lesson, after you've worked on a piece, and then say, "Now let's think about what we've done and how that's going to impact your practice this week." . . . But, I really like the idea of sitting back at the end of a lesson and saying, "Okay, that was fun. Now what did we do and how are you going to practice that?"<sup>74</sup>

Blickenstaff's summaries were both teacher-directed and student-directed; during some lessons, he asked students to state the goals in their own words.

During the lessons observed by the researcher, Blickenstaff summarized lesson content frequently. In a lesson with an advanced high school student, Janette, Blickenstaff outlined the next step for her Mozart sonata: "One of your big projects right now—you have the notes well in your hand, you are playing very accurately—and one of your projects is to unify this now, as far as the tempo is concerned. That is the issue of the week."<sup>75</sup> This synopsis occurred after Blickenstaff had Janette practice through playing and counting in the lesson. The researcher noted that when practice reminders occurred at the end of the lesson, Blickenstaff referred to a significant challenge. For instance, in Sophie's lesson, this

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74. Blickenstaff, Interview 4 of 6.

75. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Janette, DVD created by author (Kingston, NJ: The New School for Music Study, November 17, 2009).

junior high student had learned the rhythms in an entire piece incorrectly.<sup>76</sup> After they had finished practicing *Morning Prayer*, Blickenstaff asked Sophie to shake hands, signifying her promise to practice and count the “ands” out loud. At the end of the lesson, Blickenstaff reminded her of this assignment; he asked her, “What did we shake on?” and Sophie replied, “Counting for the *Morning Prayer*.” When Blickenstaff recapitulated the lesson assignment, he used concise language and creative reminders to stress the new goal.

#### *Structure Results in Student Success*

With the support of parents and guidance of Blickenstaff, students mature as pianists, thriving in the constructive learning environment and growing with each completed assignment. Frieje remarked on how motivated she became as her pianistic skills improved during high school in her lessons with Blickenstaff: “I could see . . . whether I realized it or not, that he was helping to be a better musician, and success breeds success and breeds motivation, and the more successful that I . . . became and felt, and then the more I wanted to do more and more.”<sup>77</sup> Steffen, a college student, expressed a similar sentiment and indicated how Blickenstaff incrementally led her to overcome each challenge:

He never gave you anything that he didn’t think you’d be able to do. He gave it to you in the bits and pieces so that you could build it. I don’t think I ever

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76. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Sophie, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff’s Home Studio, November 19, 2009).

77. Frieje, Interview.

realized that's what he was doing. . . . He was always setting you up to be successful, and that's something that I really try to model because he told us, success breeds success. And, it's so true. If you were successful doing that, well of course you had the confidence to do the next thing.<sup>78</sup>

Ultimately, a challenging, stimulating, and enjoyable lesson environment, carefully structured by the teacher, results in students who successfully learn new skills, accomplish goals, and feel pride in their pianism.

### **How Humans Learn**

Blickenstaff holds several fundamental viewpoints on how humans learn effectively and, in turn, how teachers can best provide instruction. When students learn new skills or have specific difficulties in their repertoire, Blickenstaff gives detailed, step-by-step guidance to his students. Learning through observation and discovery, according to Blickenstaff, enables students to retain information and become critical thinkers. He speaks with exaggerated and descriptive language to capture the imagination of learners and to make his points memorable. Lastly, concisely-worded principles are frequently utilized by Blickenstaff, to impart fundamental musical and pianistic ideas to his students. Each of these teaching approaches is rooted in Blickenstaff's philosophy of teaching and is evident in his teaching and his pedagogical discourse.

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78. Steffen, Interview.

### Concrete and Sequential Guidance

Blickenstaff offers students substantial and specific guidance on how to improve their playing, and he helps students learn how to break down tasks. His stepwise approach facilitates each student's efficient practice, expressive musicality, and correct technique, whether he is addressing a piece or a new concept. Motivated to help the student improve and motivated by the ideal sound for the repertoire, Blickenstaff frequently suggests practice techniques and solves problems in the student's approach to the work. He described this process:

My mind works in . . . practical, logical ways; it has never been very difficult for me to think about the steps of a learning process, because . . . I just look in the mirror and just say, "What is the first step here? What do they need to know before they know anything else?" . . . That kind of logical approach . . . has really served me well in teaching.<sup>79</sup>

For Blickenstaff, this ability to solve problems artistically and sequentially has manifested intuitively, originating from his own piano studies.

#### *Learning and Refining Repertoire*

When students begin new repertoire, they need direction on how to learn, and Blickenstaff believes teachers must carefully plan these steps. He wrote that teachers are responsible for that initial "strategy:"

Whatever the case, it is the way we **strategize** the learning of the piece that will help make it a "honeymoon" experience. . . . Only **when we have guided them** through many (read: years of) examples of a reasonable, careful approach will they understand how to approach a piece and create a

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79. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by author, Interview 5 of 6 (Collegeville, PA, November 20, 2009).

“honeymoon” for themselves. The time soon comes when the T [teacher] can ask the S [student]: “Now, since you have heard the piece and know the sound, how will you go about learning it.” [emphasis from original]<sup>80</sup>

A “honeymoon” experience results when a student becomes motivated to learn a piece and understands how to approach the learning process. According to Blickenstaff, teachers need to spark a student’s desire to learn new repertoire and provide a student with the needed skills and steps to facilitate future independent learning.

Blickenstaff’s former students commented upon how he guided them through all aspects of learning music, including the first steps with new repertoire. Each of these students, from the various decades of Blickenstaff’s career valued his meticulous and comprehensive instruction:

“He analyzes concepts and repertoire and breaks them down into steps for his students.” Peggy Williams Lupton, 1971–73, UNC-CH

“He laid a good foundation for my thinking style which is always to question things, always go about how might I approach this, how might I tackle this, how might I break this down. . . . A very analytical approach to seeing the structure of music and seeing the structure of the practice process and the thought process, the performance process, and to pull of those kinds of things together. And that was very, very valuable for me.” Tom Lohr, 1973–77, UNC-CH

“He was very articulate in describing different ways of playing, and of creating sounds or moods needed for pieces. He was very good at giving technical advice for getting your fingers and hands to do what you wanted. . . . We covered all aspects of learning a piece, from the early stage of learning notes and fingering to later stages of continuity and polishing for performances.” Anonymous student, 1982–86, Goshen College

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80. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Honeymoon or Havoc?*, Workshop Lecture Notes.



“Marvin had a way of illuminating the minutia of learning. He breaks things down into measurable tasks.” Bradley Kauffman, 1994, Goshen College

“I would play and then we would talk through passages; he would assign exercises or practices to help with specific passages and also with larger things like memorization, performance level playing, expressive qualities, etc. The piece was often broken up—even in memorization and preparing for performance, he taught me to break it up. . . .” Anonymous student, 1998–99, Goshen College<sup>81</sup>

These former students articulated how his specific instructions were helpful to their thought processes and learning. Students received instruction on all phases of learning, were encouraged to reduce tasks into accomplishable steps, and learned how to think independently about the process.

Once a student is beyond the initial lessons with a new piece, Blickenstaff uses a recurrent coaching process to refine a student’s performance and sound quality. After a student plays an entire piece (or less commonly, a single section of a piece), he commends what progressed from last week and praises successful elements in the performance. Blickenstaff continues by introducing a new sound-based goal through a lecture or question-guided discussion. In most instances, he supports his claim through references to markings in the score or the mood (as suggested in the title or tempo indication). He then demonstrates the sound, practice strategy, or technique, and observes as the student attempts the new performance idea. Most importantly, Blickenstaff tenaciously coaches the student

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81. Lohr, Interview; Ernst, “Survey for Students.”

until he hears or sees the desired change. He explains how he wants to change a student's sound dramatically through this process:

When I teach, I listen to a performance, and most of time, I listen. I could jump right in, but I don't think that's really fair. And so I listen [to the whole piece]. . . . and then I ask myself, now, what is the most important basic thing to change? Is it rhythm, could it even be hand position, is it dynamic contrast, is it the sense of breath? What is it that the student needs most to change that piece most dramatically? So we pretty much work that way.<sup>82</sup>

Blickenstaff teaches using this process in masterclasses and lessons; he often chooses a single goal that will result in a maximal change in the student's performance.

In a masterclass in 1994, Blickenstaff utilized progressive, stepwise goals to instruct an advanced student on a specific, artistic sound. This student Matt performed Chopin's Etude in A-flat Major, Op 25, No. 1, "The Harp."<sup>83</sup> Matt learned how to use a sophisticated arm technique to create the delicate sound:

MB: We can work on a few details Matt, but you've done really an excellent job. I would like to see you up close play a little bit of the first few measures please.

[Matt plays, and MB watches.]

MB: I thought that's what I would see from what I hear. There's no question about the fact that how our fingers move is how we make the piano sound, and so if you want a more active sound, then a lot of times you have more active fingers. If you want a quieter sound, you can't get it with all of this [MB wiggles fingers]. Let's try something because there is nothing really wrong about what you're doing. But I think that when you hear a great pianist play this, you're just almost overwhelmed with the feeling of

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82. Blickenstaff, Interview 6 of 6.

83. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Masterclass II*, VHS (Montana State Music Teachers Association Convention, 1994).

quietness. And even when it gets loud, it's almost like this sort of quiet norm simply mushrooms a little bit and lets down. It's not like a lot of pieces when something erupts; this rises and swells but never really erupts. And so what I would like to try to accomplish, if we could, one thing, would be that we see if we cannot foster the quieting down of the sound. . . .

[Matt plays.]

MB: . . . Would you, in fact would all of you out in the audience, do this gesture. Start with your hands in the middle [in front of chest], and simply, draw a loop out like this [a big, almost vertical breast stroke]. Now, keep your hands on your lap stationary, and let your wrists draw a loop out like this [MB does this on the music rack, while standing. Matt does it on his lap.] That is one of the most natural gestures that we have in our arm and our hand combined, which if you want to play the piano easily, you use all the time. You have to take that with a grain of salt, but let's say in this etude, we use this all the time. Now, Matt, I'd like to have you try something like this. [MB comes to the high of register of the piano, is down on one knee, and plays while saying "out around" several times]. Would you grab my wrist, there, and my wrist there, actually on top? [To the audience] I do this in my lessons a lot because I think when students grab my wrists, they get a very tangible feeling of what's going on and direction. And I want Matt to practice an exaggerated what I would call "out around." I think Nelita [True] uses that term also. So the most out are my fifth fingers [MB does this, Matt is holding his wrists], and then I'm gonna use that gesture. When I come in, that's the high in my wrist, my thumbs start to go out. [MB does this several times after talking it through.] Now what that means Matt is that each of those is one single gesture. And also [to the audience], the law of physical gestures tell us, if something works and feels good at a slow tempo like that, when you speed up the tempo, you reduce the gesture. Matt cannot play this piece doing that faster [MB shows big circles fast]. So what he has to do is find a remnant of that and it becomes then a little bit straighter [MB shows small circles].

[Matt plays.]

MB: What you're doing that I see, is you go out and then you come in, and out and kind of in [MB shows a horizontal motion with the elbow and no circular motion]. What you want to do is come in and out [MB shows the circular motion]. Just experiment. You're bright and you're body will tell you how that feels. [Matt feels the circular motion without playing the keys]. That's right.

[Matt plays. MB says "out" while guiding his hand.]

MB: What Matt doesn't use is the high part of the gesture. Matt wants to operate low, and swing this way [shows with MB's left arm]. But that's two gestures; basically you go this and you come back. And what I'd like you to do is sort of a perpetual motion gesture, out this way.

[Matt plays.]

MB: That's right, it works, yes. [MB moves to Matt's right hand and guides his wrist.]

During this masterclass, Blickenstaff gave lengthy directions and descriptions as he instructed Matt and the teachers in the audience. He persisted until Matt was successful at the technique. Although it took a significant amount of time, numerous attempts, and several teaching approaches, Matt ultimately performed with improved artistry by integrating this technical gesture into his performance.

In a lesson with an intermediate student in 2009, Blickenstaff used incremental steps to refine the student's interpretation. He taught Kim how to use varied articulation to enhance the sound of Dmitri Kabalevsky's *Sonatina in A Minor* (Op. 13).<sup>84</sup> She played the entire movement accurately (pitches and rhythms) but overlooked most articulation marks. Blickenstaff introduced Kim to the importance of the articulation, demonstrated each phrase with proper sound, and gave Kim many opportunities to imitate his sound model. These imitative segments occurred frequently during her lesson on the *Sonatina*:

[Kim performed the entire movement]

MB: It is a great piece! You have laid such incredible ground work for this. I am really tickled for you.

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84. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Lesson of Kim*, DVD created by author (Kingston, NJ: The New School for Music Study, November 17, 2009).

After Blickenstaff affirmed her progress, he turned their attention to the next goal:

MB: One of the things—there are three or four basic touches that Kabalevsky uses in this. One is the touch of an accent [MB plays an accented section]. The other is the touch of staccato [MB plays a staccato section]. Then the other is the touch of legato. And if you play those sort of in their extreme you really have a great piece. But you’ve got to be really accented, you can’t just sort of go down. [MB sings the accented melody with intensity]. The other thing—you have to really differentiate between where Kabalevsky writes staccatos and where he doesn’t write staccatos. I hear an awful lot of kids playing [MB demos the opening chords staccato]. And that’s not what he wrote [MB plays them correctly, loudly and detached but not staccato]. That’s really important to play accented, but they’re quarter notes [MB plays.]

Upon establishing the importance of articulation and demonstrating the variety of sounds, Blickenstaff worked with Kim until her sound matched his:

MB: Would you play that please. [MB plays.]

[Kim plays. MB cues “push” while she plays.]

MB: That’s not quite accented enough. What you need to do is push in [to the key bed] faster. [MB demos, and Kim watches].

[Kim plays, making the notes short.]

MB: Now, that’s not quite a quarter note. [MB demos.]

[Kim plays.]

MB: That’s great. That’s really good, do it once again.

[Kim plays and MB cues “lift” between the quarter notes.]

MB: Interestingly enough, the first staccato note in the whole piece is this chord right here. He goes push-push-push-off-push [Accents are “push” and the staccato is “off”]. It’s yi-pah! [“Yi-pah” was a verbal imitation of the staccato note followed by the accent. MB plays].

[Kim plays.]

MB: That’s right, yi-pah! [laughing]

[Kim continues playing.]

MB: There's another one, yi-pah!

[Kim continues.]

MB: They're so short. [Kim stops playing.] I could tease you a little by saying, don't you have a staccato? And you say, "That was staccato," and I say, "Come on!" [Kim smiles.] It's like electricity in your arms. Play really staccato. Right here, you can go slower.

[Kim plays.]

MB: That's a better staccato. And then these are not staccato, push-push-push.

[Kim plays.]

MB: And then he [Kabalevsky, the composer] says, well now I have one more card in my deck and that's a legato. [MB demos.]

[Kim plays.]

MB: Okay. You're making those differentiations very, very well.

Kim learned how to achieve a variety of sounds, using different technical gestures for each type of articulation. The atmosphere remained light-hearted and playful, even when Blickenstaff indicated to Kim that she needed to improve. Kim repeated sections until he was pleased with the sound of her articulation.

Blickenstaff's skill at leading students through steps to refine performances has contributed to his reputation as an exceptional teacher. He eloquently stated in an interview with Nancy Bachus how the best teachers lead a student to effective performance: "Great teachers help students get closer and closer to what the music says and guide them to find the spiritual significance of each piece. Inspired by the music, a good teacher carefully paces and guides a student step by step to the

highest level of performance possible for him.”<sup>85</sup> Cathy Albergo, a former student and colleague of Blickenstaff, agrees with Blickenstaff that this ability is inborn in great teachers and named Blickenstaff a master of this approach. She recognizes how Blickenstaff can “distill” any piece of any style into its essential components and teach it incrementally:

For every different piece and every different [musical] style, it’s not one thing; it’s an entire approach, [a] holistic approach, seeing the whole piece, but carefully knowing how to break it down into smaller steps, and then weaving it back together. . . . He can play it beautifully, he speaks it eloquently, and he knows how to take it apart, distill it down, sequence and present it small enough blocks that you can learn it as you go along, and that is an art. Not only does he recognize what it is that makes a piece work . . . he knows how to take apart and give it to you a little bit at a time so that you can build. . . . teachers like that, they’re born and they refine it as they go along. It’s that special quality that just a very few have, I think.<sup>86</sup>

Echoing Albergo’s sentiments, Scott Donald, formerly an instructor at the New School, described how Blickenstaff can help any student progress to a higher level of playing through a well-formed instructional sequence. Donald explained:

[I]n order for them [students] to get from where they are to where he wants them to be, he’s able to break things down and lead them to that place, which is something that I really think that’s one of the ultimate tests of a teacher, in any kind of educational setting. Can they break things down to a level the student will understand, and be able to guide them to the ultimate goal, and lead them successfully through a series of steps to get to that place? . . . [H]e can do that. It doesn’t matter what level, what repertoire it is.

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85. Nancy Bachus, “With a Passion for Teaching and Music Played Beautifully: An Interview with Marvin Blickenstaff,” *Clavier* 41, no. 7 (September 2002): 10.

86. Cathy Albergo, interviewed by author (Music Teachers National Association Conference in Albuquerque, NM, March 30, 2010).

. . . [W]hen I look at what makes for expert teaching, I think that's one of those big things. . . . I think that sets him apart.

Blickenstaff's capacity to lead a student, at any ability level, to greater mastery and to improve a student's performance, of any style of music, is an outstanding trait of his teaching.

### *Growth of Technical Abilities*

To augment students' technical skills, Blickenstaff increases the difficulty of their technical warm-ups starting from the initial lessons of beginners.<sup>87</sup> The first exercises for youngsters are basic gestures for piano playing, each given a creative title; "Fly Swatters" are a forearm motion and "Knocks" are a wrist motion. As students advance through the elementary years of study, they learn numerous exercises that culminate in a "Super Drill." Each element of the Super Drill is learned incrementally until the student can perform the entire drill beginning on every key. The Super Drill is comprised of:

Five finger patterns, major and minor  
Five finger patterns, one hand playing twice as fast as the other  
Five finger patterns, with trills on adjacent notes

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87. The principle investigator has not attempted to reconstruct Blickenstaff's complete library of technical skills but is presenting an overview of how he approaches technical growth. For a comprehensive analysis of the elementary technical curriculum of Blickenstaff, refer to Julie Knerr's dissertation. Julie Knerr, "Strategies in the Formation of Piano Technique in Elementary Level Piano Students: An Exploration of Teaching Elementary Level Technical Concepts According to Authors and Teachers from 1925 to the Present" (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 2006).



A major key study<sup>88</sup>  
 Outlining cadence patterns (with open fifths and sixths)  
 Cadence patterns (with three note chords)  
 Scales  
 Diatonic chords of the key  
 Blocked and broken chords in inversions  
 Primary chords in root position, played as I IV V I<sup>89</sup>

Once students are beyond the elementary years and have learned the Super Drill, they begin Blickenstaff's formalized technical curriculum, a five-level regime of technical drills.<sup>90</sup> All of these exercises and warm-ups are taught to develop a student's facility in and knowledge of all major and minor keys. The categories of skills included are five-finger patterns, scales, arpeggios, Hanon exercises, broken and blocked chords, and chord progressions. As the level increases from one to five, the complexity and quantity of skills and keys increases. (For more information on his warm-ups, see Chapter VII, Keyboard Theory.)<sup>91</sup>

The collection of exercises and drills within Blickenstaff's curriculum is enhanced by dissecting the technical challenges in music into progressive goals

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88. Lynn Freeman Olson, Louise Bianchi, and Marvin Blickenstaff, *Music Pathways*, 2nd ed. (New York: Carl Fischer, 1983), *Piano Discoveries D*, 7. With the right hand, the student plays a five finger pattern upward and crosses the left hand over to add the sixth note of the scale above the dominant note. The student continues playing the pattern downward and crosses the left hand back to play the seventh note of the scale below the tonic note.

89. Marvin Blickenstaff, Reading: The All-Important Skill, Workshop Lecture Notes.

90. Marvin Blickenstaff, Technical Skills: Level 1–5, Teaching Files.

91. Marvin Blickenstaff, Various Student Assignment Sheets (November 16–19, 2009), Personal Files.

that enable the student's mastery. As Harrison explained, technical drills and learning to deconstruct technical challenges in the repertoire formed the core of Blickenstaff's philosophy. Harrison, in an interchange with the researcher, expressed how beneficial it was to solve technical issues within repertoire under Blickenstaff's supervision:

Ernst: Can you recall if you did specific technique items?

Harrison: We did. Obviously we did the normal scales and arpeggios and double thirds. We had some Wiehmayer and Philipp exercises. I remember he had a package of things he had put together. But, more importantly, I think the majority of my technical work with Marvin came with working out ways to conquer a difficult passage, rather than just go study all these etudes. It was well this passage isn't working right. Let's take it apart, find out where the difficulties are, isolate it, and what's the problem. Maybe it's a fingering or you're not using your musculature right.

Ernst: So, problem solving.

Harrison: Yes. For me, I would say that was his basic approach to technique. Not that we didn't have [long pause]

Ernst: the raw technique exercises.

Harrison: Exactly. But, it was how to break something down into its various components, so that you can manage it, and start to build it up. And that's pretty valuable because every passage in piano is different, so I felt that was a really good point of view, and very helpful to deal with technical development.<sup>92</sup>

Harrison aptly explained that ultimately a pianist's technique needs to serve the music. He felt it was of paramount importance to have Blickenstaff guide him through conquering difficult passages found within the repertoire.

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92. Harrison, Interview.

*Guidance in Pedagogy*

The philosophical tenet of learning through guided steps is also apparent in Blickenstaff's approach to piano pedagogy. His presentations for teachers, most often to an audience of teaching professionals (not students), are filled with sequential direction. In his workshop *How Children Learn*, Blickenstaff gives a detailed outline for teaching the initial month of piano lessons. After attending this workshop, teachers would be able to wholly adopt his curriculum for teaching beginners, leaving with a clear plan of what to include in the first lessons.<sup>93</sup> Susan See, an independent teacher in Iowa, commented on how her teaching changes after attending one of Blickenstaff's workshops. See exclaimed, "Always after I would go to a workshop with him, my teaching was better. . . . It's like you need a little shot. . . . I would find myself saying things that I knew I'd heard in the workshop!"<sup>94</sup>

Blickenstaff insists that pedagogy courses contain a structured teaching practicum, and his collegiate pedagogy students honed their teaching skills through instructing beginners in their college's preparatory programs. His

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93. Marvin Blickenstaff, *How Children Learn*, Workshop Lecture Notes. The researcher first met Blickenstaff in the fall of 2000 at a workshop sponsored by the Mid-Missouri Music Teachers Association in Jefferson City. Blickenstaff presented *How Children Learn*, and in the month following, the researcher used his sequence for teaching note reading during a class for beginners. The steps outlined in this presentation were transformative to the researcher's beginning curriculum and led to her desire to complete her doctoral research on Blickenstaff.

94. See, Interview.

pedagogy students at UNC-CH and Goshen College taught children in individual lessons, basing their lesson content on the curriculum and assignments given by Blickenstaff during the weekly beginners' group class. The student teachers, without the burden of curriculum planning, were able to first focus on developing their one-on-one teaching skills. After watching Blickenstaff instruct the group class and discussing it in their pedagogy class time, the student teachers were equipped to teach individual lessons to the children. Furthermore, Blickenstaff's frequent observations and evaluations of these lessons provided the student teachers with itemized goals for improvement. "Sitting in a pedagogy class hearing how to teach is not the same as sitting at the piano teaching a student. We learn by doing. Pedagogy students learn by teaching, but most effectively by teaching under *supervision*,"<sup>95</sup> emphasized Blickenstaff.

Through the vast majority of his career, Blickenstaff has championed the inclusion of supervised teaching in pedagogy courses, and he became frustrated when he was not able to include a practicum. In 1999–2001, Blickenstaff served as adjunct faculty at Westminster Choir College of Rider University in Princeton, New Jersey. Due to scheduling and institutional constraints, Blickenstaff was unable to include a demonstration class or a teaching practicum in his pedagogy courses for the first time in his career. He felt "crippled" without any hands-on experience with

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95. Marvin Blickenstaff, "How Has Keyboard Pedagogy Changed over the Last 20–30 Years? – Part II," *Keyboard Companion* 16, no. 3 (2005): 31.

which to frame his pedagogical discourse and vowed never to attempt this again.<sup>96</sup> In a presentation at the National Conference for Keyboard Pedagogy in 2009, Blickenstaff professed at this national venue the importance of training college students in teaching and how it is an essential service to upcoming professional pianists.<sup>97</sup>

### Observation and Discovery

Learning is most powerful, according to Blickenstaff, when students observe and discover concepts, not when teachers give copious explanations. “I’m a firm believer . . . in the idea that teaching is leading a student through discovery,” Blickenstaff stated.<sup>98</sup> He teaches through discovery because of the resultant ownership and retention of the material, and he emphasized this point by citing a fictitious, grandiose percentage: “Ninety-six and a half percent of everything I tell my students, they will forget. But the flip side of that coin is, ninety-six and a half percent of everything that I help them discover, they will retain because it was their discovery.”<sup>99</sup> This fundamental teaching philosophy is frequently discussed

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96. Sara M. Ernst, 2009, Field Notes, Blickenstaff’s Home Studio, Collegeville, PA.

97. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Effective Teaching: A View from the Other Side of the Coin*, Workshop Lecture Notes.

98. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by author, Interview 1 of 6 (Collegeville, PA, November 16, 2009).

99. Marvin Blickenstaff, *What to Do When the Magic Stops?*, VHS (Montana State Music Teachers Association Convention, 1994).

within the field of piano pedagogy, often in reference to the famous words of

Frances Clark. Blickenstaff expanded upon her famous dictum:

I really, really adopt the idea of Frances Clark . . . “Teaching is not telling.” . . . If you can lead them, and open the door, and they say, “Oh, I know this,” that’s what’s exciting. . . . I know that in my teaching there are small ways in which I do a lot of telling, but I hope that the big things are things that we gradually discover together because I really feel that’s about the only substantial learning mode that goes on. . . . If I feel like I can build up experiences and then open these doors, that’s really exciting for me as an educator to realize that I have planned that process, and then it’s exciting for the student to realize that those experiences have led them to a discovery.<sup>100</sup>

As Blickenstaff described, excitement is generated during instruction when a series of experiences lead students to a discovery. He champions discovery-based learning because it aids student’s mastery and contributes to an enthusiastic atmosphere.

#### *Discovery Learning with Beginners*

Throughout Blickenstaff’s professorship at Goshen College, he taught yearly courses to classes of beginners for which he carefully sequenced the beginning concepts through discovery learning. In these classes of six- to eight-year olds, Blickenstaff planned a series of engaging activities and games to guide their burgeoning musicianship. The children needed memorable first experiences and the pedagogy students who observed the classes needed a stellar teaching model. Thus, Blickenstaff said this teaching was complete:

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100. Blickenstaff, Interview 6 of 6.

And I think I may have done best in my teaching career when I was teaching elementary piano classes, little kids, . . . because the pedagogy students were observing me all the time. I would think through what kind of experiences do I need to provide this group of children so that they will make the discoveries basically on their own. And so, we tried to learn about reading principles on the staff, and things, through a series of games and activities. And then all of the sudden, they understood how to read because they understood the logic of how notes went on lines and spaces . . .<sup>101</sup>

The children began reading and understanding the basis of notation through learning songs by rote and through games at the keyboard and on large staff boards.

The process of discovering musical notation in Blickenstaff's beginner classes began with the song "Engine, Engine Number Nine" (*Music Pathways, Solos A*, page 2). In his workshop *Building on a Firm Foundation* as given at the Goshen College Piano Workshop in 1999, Blickenstaff shared video footage of his beginner group class in their Preparatory Department.<sup>102</sup> In these videos, he showed how he taught a class of eight children this song through a carefully-crafted sequence of questions and experiences. The students discovered how to perform the song:

MB: Now arrange yourself so you can see. [Eight children gather around Blickenstaff at an upright piano.] Terrific. A song. I'd like to have you all watch me as I play and sing this. Watch very carefully what I do. I'm interested to know from you folks how many white keys I use when I play this song. The song goes this way. [MB plays and sings "Engine, Engine Number Nine."] How many white keys? [Two students raise hands.] Evan.

Evan: None.

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101. Blickenstaff, Interview 1 of 6.

102. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Building on a Firm Foundation*, VHS (Goshen, IN, Goshen College, 1999).

MB: Very good, there were none. Okay, I stayed all on black keys. Now, was the whole song on the same key? No, I moved. Some of you will be able to answer this question without my playing, but let me play and then we'll answer. The question is this: does the piece start by going upward to the right or downward to the left? Some of you know the answer already, but watch. [MB plays again, one student raises hand]. Stephanie.

Stephanie: Up.

MB: Yes, it starts by going upward to the right. Okay. Now, we went upward to the right [MB makes big arm gestures to mimic the direction of the notes], then what did we do? Comes downward to the left, then it goes upward to the right again, then it comes down. Now is there anyone, what? [A student interrupts with an observation.]

Student 3: [says something that is inaudible]

MB: [Nodding his head] And then it stops in the middle. Did you see any place in the piece where I did play the same note? [MB sings, "stays the same."] Did you get that? [Three students raise hands.] Yes [calling on a student].

Student 4: At the end.

MB: At the end, very good. If you've got it, put it up in the air with me. If you're going to play the piece, you start here [MB moves his hand vertically, up and down, singing "upward to the right we go, sliding down. . ."] Be sure you're moving your arm upward to the right and downward to the left. [The class traces the direction of the notes with their hands and sings while MB plays.] That's right.

Blickenstaff began by having the students observe his playing and asked them a series of questions. The questions allowed for the students to discover how to play the song without being told how to play it and without reading any music. The students traced the direction of the notes with their hands, a crucial tactile experience prior to playing the song at the piano. The video continued with the students performing the song together. They were gathered at two pianos, standing up, positioned so they could play in different octaves of the keyboard. The



last portion of the video demonstrated how the students learned about notation.

All students were at their desks. Blickenstaff drew on the chalk board a simplified notation of short and long dashes, going up and down, to represent the song.

MB: Do you know that song? Those are signs for a song. What piece is that? It goes up, it goes down, it goes up, and there at the end it stays the same.

Blickenstaff traced the dashes on the board and several students raised their hands. Blickenstaff called upon a student:

Student 5: The one we just played.

MB: Would you check it out? Is there a sign for every sound? [MB points and sings the first part.] . . . [A long pause to allow for students to study the board.] Could anybody please come up and put a huge circle around the part of the song that goes “sliding down Chicago line.”

Several students raised their hands, and Blickenstaff selected a student. The student came forward and circled the correct dashes on the board.

MB: That’s terrific. You check it. Did he get it all? [MB points and sings along with the students.]

“Engine, Engine Number Nine” led the students to discover, through making music, the basic concepts of notation: music is read left to right, with direction (up and down), and duration (short and long).

The process of learning through discovery is further incorporated into the method *Music Pathways* and is discussed in the philosophical viewpoints of Blickenstaff and the other co-authors Lynn Freeman Olson and Louise Bianchi. In the method, the primary lesson book for each of the four levels (A, B, C, and D) is titled *Piano Discoveries*, emphasizing the authors’ interest in teaching students

through discovery. In a philosophical guide to *Music Pathways*, the authors described their approach to complete musicianship:

. . . [S]tudents must understand the theory of each musical discovery and be able to apply this theory, when appropriate, to analysis, harmonizing, transposition, memorization, composition, style awareness, and general music appreciation. . . . [O]ur musicianship plan is spiral—each discovery in the various element areas (rhythm, harmony, form, style, and expressive elements) grows naturally from the previous discoveries. [emphasis from original]<sup>103</sup>

In “spiral” learning, students learn new concepts and skills by augmenting their previous knowledge. Furthermore, the pacing and order of concepts is arranged to facilitate discovery learning through this curriculum. Frances Larimer, respected professor of piano pedagogy from Northwestern University, noted the effective spiral and discovery-based approach in her review of the 1983 edition:

The core book at each level in the series is the DISCOVERIES [sic] book which introduces all new concepts and information, sequenced gradually, so that each new discovery is an outgrowth of previous ones. . . . The series is comprehensive in that the basic elements of reading, rhythm, technique, and musicianship relate to each other and develop simultaneously as each new phase evolves as an outgrowth of the previous one.<sup>104</sup>

Each new discovery in *Music Pathways* is positioned within the curriculum to ensure that students can explore concepts based upon their prior abilities and knowledge. Blickenstaff has used *Music Pathways* as his exclusive core curriculum for his students since its first publication in 1974, initially in his group teaching at

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103. Lynn Freeman Olson, Louise Bianchi, and Marvin Blickenstaff, *A Descriptive Guide to Music Pathways* (New York: Carl Fischer, 1983), 33.

104. Frances Larimer and others, “The American Beginning Piano Method--View and Viewpoint: ‘Music Pathways’,” *Piano Quarterly* 32, no. 124 (1983): 46, 49.

UNC-CH and Goshen. He continues to use the series with his beginning students at his home studio in Pennsylvania. Throughout his lengthy use of this curriculum, Blickenstaff has honed his teaching approach and facilitates students' development of complete musicianship at the piano.

*From Known to Unknown*

In a lesson with Phoebe, a second-year elementary student learning from *Music Pathways*, Blickenstaff used a discovery process to introduce her to triplets through her prior knowledge. This teaching method is often described by piano pedagogues as the process of learning “from the known to the unknown.” With the piece “Lighter than Air” (*Music Pathways, Piano Discoveries C*, page 44), Blickenstaff explained and demonstrated triplets, having Phoebe experience the new rhythm:

MB: In 6/8, we learned 6/8 as ta-pi-ty ta-pi-ty ta-pi-ty [Syllabic counting for three groups of three eighth notes in 6/8]. There's another way to write that rhythm and it's called triplets. And these three's right here [pointing to the music] are not finger numbers, they're telling you that you are crowding three notes into the normal time of two. We usually go ta-tay ta ta-tay ta [Syllabic counting for duple eighth notes], but it's possible for a composer to write [MB plays the RH figure in measure 1 and 2, saying “1-2-3-1” as he plays the triplet rhythm] and we have to have a way to count that. The sound is ta-pi-ty, so that is how we count that. So there are two ways to write ta-pi-ty, and a triplet is one of those ways. So you're going to tap ta-pi-ty. Here we go!

[They tap and count together. Phoebe taps and counts perfectly.]

MB: Let's figure out how Lynn Freeman Olson wrote this piece. There's an easy little trick to this. Would you play your 2nd finger on that one note? [MB points to the first note. Phoebe plays high C.] Now bring your 2nd finger down a skip [Phoebe plays A], and down a skip [Phoebe plays F], and down a skip [Phoebe plays D. Phoebe plays them all quickly again.] Exactly.

[MB plays the RH figure in measure 1 and 2, while counting.] Play the RH please.

[Phoebe plays.]

MB: Exactly, do it again.

[Phoebe plays.]

MB: Very good. Add the LH.

[Phoebe plays with an unsteady pulse, and MB stops her.]

MB: Your RH is not saying ta-pi-ty ta.

[Phoebe plays again with correct rhythms.]

MB: That's the whole piece basically.

[They work on the last four measures. . . .]

MB: Notice that the last note he has written as a staccato, that you come off. It actually kind of sounds like, [MB sings and plays the first two measures] drop and you lift, drop and you lift, drop and you lift, lift, lift. Can you make that sound?

[They play together while MB sings].

MB: The title is "Lighter than Air," so it's got to be pretty quiet, and eventually—you'll love this —it goes [MB plays quickly and softly, and Phoebe smiles].

Blickenstaff masterfully guided her through the new rhythmic figure, while also preparing her reading, the staccato gesture, and the sound. Using the spiral approach of *Music Pathways*, he presented triplets to Phoebe through applying her knowledge of compound meter (6/8) and duple eighth notes; Phoebe was thus able to execute the triplets with ease and accuracy based upon her prior success with those related concepts.

Teaching through discovery is not limited to the students playing from the *Music Pathways* curriculum, as Blickenstaff extends this approach into his work with more advanced students. While Blickenstaff expressed doubt in his teaching advanced students through discovery,<sup>105</sup> the researcher noted instances of guided observation in every lesson. For advanced students, technique and theory are learned through observation and discovery, moving from the known to the unknown.

Blickenstaff asserts that the key to teaching students through discovery and observation is to start from what the student knows. "I think where are we now, and we may not be any place," Blickenstaff began. He summarized how he takes "a brand new student . . . [who has] life's experiences, and so you start from that, and go on from there."<sup>106</sup> In a masterclass at the Goshen College Piano Workshop in 1993, Blickenstaff worked with the student Theresa, who appeared to be in late junior high, to improve her pedaling. After she performed, he first ascertained what she understood about poor pedaling:

MB: Theresa, what's the matter with this performance? [MB plays a section of her piece, holding the damper pedal down without changing it.]

Theresa: Dynamics are all the same.

MB: Okay, I'll change my dynamics and you pick out something else that's not really quite good about this [MB plays again softly, holding the damper pedal down as before.]

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105. Blickenstaff, Interview 1 of 6.

106. Blickenstaff, Interview 6 of 6.

Theresa: The pedal and the notes are too soft. . . . It's too soft all together and the left hand.

MB: Would you like me to bring out more right hand?

Theresa: Yeah.

MB: What does the pedal have to do with it?

Theresa: It just sounded a little fuzzy.

MB: A little fuzzy in the pedal. [The audience laughs because the sound was extremely blurred.] Good. So what should I do about fuzzy pedaling?

Theresa: I'm not sure.

MB: What unfuzzes pedal? [audience laughs]

Theresa: Lift it up.

MB: Good. Are there any signals in the music as to when you should lift it up? When is my first fuzz starting? [MB plays, holding the pedal down.] Is that okay or too fuzzy?

Theresa: Sounds fine.

MB: If it's too fuzzy tell me. [MB continues to play, holding the pedal down] Would you like me to change here?

Theresa: Yes.

MB: Fine. [MB continues playing as before.] Is that fuzzy? [MB stops playing.]

Theresa: [inaudible]

MB: What created the fuzziness?

[Theresa shrugs.]

MB: Would you play your left hand, and the first place that you find [pause]. Actually, you know what would work, can you block all the notes in the LH for that measure there?

[She plays.]

MB: Good. Now leave your pedal down and play the next chord in the same way. . . .

[She plays.]

MB: Is that okay or a little fuzzy?

Theresa: It's a little fuzzy.

MB: It's a little fuzzy isn't it. . . . General rule . . . When you change chords, the change of the harmony is the thing that creates the fuzz, so you have to change your pedal. Now Beethoven [the composer] does something really terrific here, he does a new chord in each measure. So that means if you change your pedal clearly on each measure, then you don't have to worry about it. Let's do some blocking. . . .

[She plays blocked.]

MB: Wonderful. Let me add the melody to that and you can just keep blocking that and I think we'll really get rid of the fuzz.

[Theresa plays the blocked chords while MB plays the melody. MB sings and cues "change" to guide her pedaling.]

MB: Now I would encourage you to work on those.<sup>107</sup>

It is surprising that Theresa, a late-intermediate student, did not understand proper pedaling, as it relates to changes of harmony. Blickenstaff was able to teach Theresa a fundamental skill because he began by figuring out what was known. Theresa knew that the sound was "fuzzy" and Blickenstaff adopted her vocabulary for the poor sound. Blickenstaff led Theresa to the "unknown," a basic principle that the pedal must be cleared whenever the chord changes. Rather than tell her

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107. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Masterclass - June 17*, VHS (Goshen, IN, Goshen College, 1993).

what sounded poor and what to do differently, Blickenstaff addressed a basic skill, improved the performance, and led the student to a deeper understanding.

Blickenstaff utilized a similar approach to teaching theory, key signatures, and scales, always building upon a student's prior knowledge. Rose, a late-intermediate student in her lesson with Blickenstaff at his home studio in 2009, learned minor scales through a review of theoretical concepts and through her knowledge of major scale fingerings.<sup>108</sup> Blickenstaff first asked Rose a series of questions to establish the relationship between major and minor scales:

MB: Tell me about minor scales.

[Rose sheepishly smiles.]

MB: You don't want to tell me about minor scales [MB laughs]? There's nothing hard about minor scales. Sort of, sort of. Let's review a little bit about how we get started on minor scales. You tell me. What do you have to know in order to play a minor scale?

Rose: You have to start on the [pause], if you play C [Rose plays a C triad, then the pitch A]. [pause] It's [pause] umm [pause].

MB: The relative minor, yeah. There are two keys that have exactly the same notes. And a good illustration is, C major and A minor have exactly the same notes [MB plays the notes of both scales], and because of that, they call them relative keys, okay. Run me past that. If I know C and A, how does that help me know what the relative is of F?

[Rose plays three half steps down.]

MB: Down three notes, exactly. So you are telling me F major has one flat, and so does D minor. Now, so I can play D minor. [MB plays the scale, with one finger].

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108. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Rose.



Blickenstaff continued by turning Rose's attention to the fingering for these minor scales. Rose transferred her ability to perform major scales into minor scales as she discovered the identical fingering patterns:

MB: What I am going to do about fingering for D minor?

Rose: It's the fingering of the D [major] scale?

MB: Yes, exactly. And so, it's not a bad idea, to just do one octave and play D major. [MB plays.] Alright, I've got my fingering set. Now, what I'm going to do is drop the sharps and put the one flat in [MB plays]. It's really a pretty easy process. Let's try D as a model. Would you play D major?

[Rose plays D major easily and accurately.]

MB: Stop and tell yourself, I only want a B-flat.

[Rose plays with incorrect RH fingering. MB stops her by lifting her RH off the keys.]

MB: I don't think your fingering was the same.

[Rose plays just the RH.]

MB: That's right.

[Rose plays both hands.]

MB: Beautiful.

Blickenstaff asked Rose to apply this knowledge to another key signature:

MB: Let's do E minor. Now you have to think backwards a little bit to figure out what the major is.

[Rose plays down three notes.]

MB: No. The reason [Rose interrupts and plays up three notes].

MB: Thank you. So how many sharps in G major?

Rose: Three.

MB: In G major!

Rose: [laughing] Oh! One!

[The lesson continued with more application of this fingering and theoretical principle.]

In this dynamic interchange with very little “telling,” Rose observed Blickenstaff’s brief demonstrations and applied her knowledge of major key signatures to minor scales. In addition to exploring these scales, Blickenstaff provided Rose with a practice technique (first play the major scale) and clarified the importance of scale practice.

Advanced students explore technical solutions and practice strategies by observing Blickenstaff and applying his techniques to their playing. Rather than simply telling students what to do, Blickenstaff asks them to observe, scrutinize, and try his approach. During a lesson at the New School, Blickenstaff’s adult student Henry was learning the passagework in Chopin’s *Fantasia-Impromptu*, and Blickenstaff taught a proper hand position:<sup>109</sup>

MB: Would you try that? [MB points to the passage on the page.]

[Henry plays the RH passage while MB watches.]

MB: Okay, I would just ask one little question. Where would you like your thumb when you play [fingers] 3 [and] 2? [MB plays the RH passage with a good hand position.] Some people would say, it has to be out here on this note [MB demos playing fingers 3 and 2 while the thumb remains stretched out], but look how tight my hand is.

Henry: [The thumb should be] under the hand.

[MB plays again with this correct positioning of the thumb.]

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109. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Henry, DVD created by author (Kingston, NJ: The New School for Music Study, November 17, 2009).

[Henry plays with a stretched out thumb.]

MB: Where's your thumb?

[Henry corrects his thumb position and continues.]

MB: Good.

[Henry continues.]

MB: One way to practice that is [MB plays each grouping, stopping on the highest pitch]. Would you stop on the top [note]?

[Henry plays.]

MB: If you will give that some practice.

Rather than tell Henry to loosen his thumb, Blickenstaff asked him to observe the correct positioning; Henry changed his hand shape to mimic Blickenstaff's, played with a relaxed hand, and learned a new practice technique.

Using a question-based teaching method, Blickenstaff helped Beth, a high school student, perform Etude in A Minor by Kabalevsky at a fast tempo through a sequence of questions:<sup>110</sup>

MB: What would you suggest is the best technique for this piece? Do you want high fingers [MB plays with high fingers] or fingers close to the key? Are you going to do this with rotation-roll or is it finger? Is it scratchy? How do you play really fast?

Beth: Umm. You kind of like play very light.

MB: You play very light. Which is more advantageous, high fingers or close fingers, for speed?

Beth: Close fingers.

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110. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Beth.

MB: Exactly, exactly. And, if we could really get this down to the science of the fact that large gestures are slower than small gestures, and I think you've nailed that down pretty nicely about high fingers versus close fingers. Is there any finger movement that is smaller than this? [MB shows finger movement from the large knuckle.]

[B looks at her hand and moves the small joints of the fingers.]

MB: And the answer is a scratch. If you were there on the key, and said, oh, just scratch. [MB demos. B tries.]

Beth modified the use of her hands after answering Blickenstaff's series of questions; in essence, she discovered how to improve without being lectured on her inadequate approach. His students were frequently engaged in this type of teacher-guided critical thinking. Rather than explaining to students what to do differently, Blickenstaff leads student to the solution through a series of questions, observations, and examples.

### *Observing Peers in Group Instruction*

Because Blickenstaff values observation-based learning, he provides group classes where students can learn from watching their peers. For the years between 1969 and 1999, Blickenstaff taught beginning group classes as part of his pedagogy professorships at UNC-CH and Goshen College. Blickenstaff articulated the importance of group teaching, especially in the elementary years for young beginners:

I feel very strongly that children love to have other children around. There are so many positive aspects of group teaching: the children hear others playing and learn from one another; they serve as models and as teachers of one another. . . . In fact, if I had to choose between offering group lessons or individual lessons to young students, I'd choose the group. The ideal, of course, would be to do both. . . . In dealing with individualized problems [in

a group lesson], class members can help one another. Every time our students solve problems in this way, they are becoming better at practicing at home as well as better musicians.<sup>111</sup>

The value of group instruction lies in the students' exposure to their peers. Peer modeling is a powerful mode of observation, and according to Blickenstaff, makes weekly group lessons for young beginners the preferred mode of instruction.

Since his resignation from Goshen College, Blickenstaff has relied upon individual instruction as his primary mode of teaching beginners, augmenting these lessons with monthly repertoire classes. In 2009 at his home studio, Blickenstaff began offering repertoire classes, in which all of his students, regardless of age, perform for each other. Even though these students are in widely differing age groups (students in elementary through high school) and abilities, these performance classes provide his students with an opportunity for peer interaction and music appreciation, expanding their awareness of musical styles.

### Exaggeration and Descriptive Speech

A teacher who speaks with highly descriptive language and exaggerates content, Blickenstaff attests, stimulates a student's creativity. Lesson activities become magnified, thereby grabbing the attention of the student and making the content memorable. Blickenstaff explained his use of language for concepts:

I am a firm believer in exaggeration, and I tell my pedagogy students that . . . one word that you carry in your hip pocket into every lesson with a younger student is exaggeration. You exaggerate all your points. You cannot get very

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111. Hallquist, 11-12.

far starting with a subtle manifestation of a point. You exaggerate it and then you pare down. . . . I am not adverse to saying, “as loudly as possible,” or “so quiet that we can’t hear you,” or something like that, just to make a point. That’s exaggeration. I think I can get results a lot quicker if I can teach from that standpoint.<sup>112</sup>

In addition to using elaborate speech, teachers must exaggerate activities, especially when teaching young children. He maintains that children learn best through exaggeration; it is one of Blickenstaff’s eight tenets on how children learn.<sup>113</sup>

### *Exaggerated Activities*

The activities in Blickenstaff’s group classes exemplify how to learn music through magnified, physical experience. In his group classes for children at Goshen College, the students learned to read musical notation by manipulating large note heads on an oversized musical staff. When learning songs by rote, Blickenstaff asked students to mime the direction of the notes with large arm movements. Presenting the class with a drawing of an oversized keyboard traced on the floor, students were asked to walk from note to note and “play” a new song with their feet. Students experienced eighth notes by marching to music, stomping the beat

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112. Blickenstaff, Interview 4 of 6.

113. Blickenstaff, *How Children Learn*. The additional seven principles are, children learn best through: their own discovery, repetition/reinforcement, imitating a model, creative activity, integration of eye/mind with ear and hand/body, correct first experiences, and affirmation.

with their feet, and clapping eighth notes with their hands.<sup>114</sup> When musical concepts are folded into physical activities, students can internalize the feeling prior to applying it to piano playing.

Blickenstaff believes that exaggerated physical experiences are equally important for the instruction of older, non-elementary students. With the classes of junior and high school students at the New School, Blickenstaff explored tempo and dynamics through bouncing tennis balls. In this game-like pursuit, students bounce the ball in response to the relative loudness and speed of the piano music played by Blickenstaff. He is also known for having students dance or walk to the tempo, heightening the physical feeling of the music prior to exploring it at the piano. In her first experience with Blickenstaff, Karen Zorn recalled how they walked around the stage together during the masterclass, in order for her to conceptualize a “walking” tempo: “I played a Chopin Nocturne and I remember very vividly . . . what he wanted to do was to get me to play a tempo that was more natural. And so he got me up off the bench, and we talked about what a nocturne is and what walking tempo was.”<sup>115</sup>

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114. Marvin Blickenstaff, *How Children Learn*, VHS (Goshen, IN, Goshen College, 2000).

115. Zorn, Interview.

*Metaphors, Adjectives, and Stories describing Musical Sound*

Blickenstaff promoted the use of “thrill adjectives” to his pedagogy students and frequently describes his student’s music using descriptive metaphors and concise phrases.<sup>116</sup> “He was not a [pause] man of few words,” Beverly Lapp commented. Lapp’s lesson journals, taken during her studies with Blickenstaff at Goshen College, are complete with assignments, goals, and numerous quotations. The journals were transcribed from the tape recordings of her weekly lessons and included many of Blickenstaff’s metaphorical phrases. The following evocative characterizations of the music were notated verbatim by Lapp from the lessons on the indicated repertoire:

Beethoven, 32 Variations in C Minor (WoO 80):

- I want everyone to know when you start this that this is a prayerful, very serious, spiritual experience
- close to heaven
- music to get sea sick by
- thin, angelic texture
- doors of hell open up
- ride the wave
- pain that slowly subsides
- picture of fate
- ice skating on the key

Beethoven, Piano Sonata in A-flat Major (Op. 110):

- You’re preaching a sermon
- heavenly, starry, awesome, not of this earth
- diminished seventh chord engendered fear and trembling in Beethoven whenever he heard it

Mozart, Adagio (unknown sonata):

- This piece must wring you out with emotion

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116. Blickenstaff, *What to Do When the Magic Stops?*



- everything that you can give us, a sigh
- emotion through predictable steadiness

Schumann, Carnival (Op. 9):

- forsaken love
- big, big clown tears
- a tempo such that we could really break their hearts
- be a flirt!<sup>117</sup>

Each of these metaphors for music was important and inspiring to Lapp, to such a degree that she was compelled to include these in her journal. She explained: “He told anecdotes, he made jokes, he put into words what he was trying to get from you. . . . he was so good at metaphor. In his lessons he would help you characterize music in a way that really changed your sound.”<sup>118</sup> Illustrative language is a prominent feature of Blickenstaff’s teaching style because it helps students identify with the sound and transform the expression in their performances.

Blickenstaff’s descriptive terms for musical ideas become a theme for the lesson dialogue. A student from Goshen College wrote, “I think the one thing that stands out is his use of language to convey musical ideas.”<sup>119</sup> The following phrases were recorded during piano lessons. The ellipses indicate a student performance;

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117. Lapp, Personal Journal.

118. Lapp, Interview.

119. Nancy Bachus, “Teaching Demonstration by Marvin Blickenstaff,” National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy, (Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy, 2001) (<http://www.francesclarkcenter.org/NationalConferencePages/2001/blickdemo.pdf> accessed March 4, 2009); Ernst, “Survey for Students.”

the sentences prior to the ellipses are from Blickenstaff's description of a performance goal, and the sentences after the ellipses are his feedback:

It's like time is suspended. You don't pound out these top notes. It's like the procession of saints in heaven and they hardly move. Time is no concern at all. . . . You're just playing very meaningfully tonight. Those saints really marched. I think it's so incredible when a composer can make time stand still.<sup>120</sup>

It just needs more Polish pepper. . . . We're all waving our Polish flags.<sup>121</sup>

It's got to stay in the military mode. . . . That's compelling. People will just want to join the Marines!<sup>122</sup>

What you are trying to convey to your listener is innocence. Play like it reminds you of a child. . . . The aura of childishness, or naiveté, or let's say simplicity, does not have a lot of held over pedal.<sup>123</sup>

Blickenstaff utilizes creative speech to introduce a concept and also uses similar language when providing feedback to the student.

Stories that correspond to musical sound become a framework for Blickenstaff to coach students to more artistic performances. In 1999 at the Goshen College Piano Workshop, a late-intermediate student Susan performed the

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120. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Lindsey, DVD created by author (Kingston, NJ: The New School for Music Study, November 17, 2009).

121. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Beth, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff's Home Studio, November 16, 2009).

122. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Tim, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff's Home Studio, November 19, 2009).

123. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Danielle, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff's Home Studio, November 16, 2009).

Waltz in A Minor (Op. Posth.) by Chopin in a masterclass.<sup>124</sup> Blickenstaff framed his instruction with a story that he created for the music. This lengthy, imaginative story was incorporated into the entire masterclass, providing an inventive backdrop for discussing musical interpretation:

MB: That's really lovely. Have you enjoyed working with this?

Susan: Yes.

MB: What do you like about it?

Susan: It's mellow and you can change different tempos, the rubato.

MB: Why did Chopin write this piece in A minor?

Susan: Make it mellow, sad?

MB: I agree entirely. Probably there is no other key that he could have written this particular piece in because he felt that A minor was perfect for that. How fast would you need to take this piece, that it wouldn't qualify to be mellow and sad. What tempo would be out of the question because it wouldn't really work for the mood? Would you give us a kind of ridiculous illustration?

Susan: Okay. [She plays it with a fast tempo.]

MB: You betcha. Good, that's ridiculous. [The audience laughs.] Because that just doesn't work. Now I'd almost like to know, who is playing this, and how old is she?

Susan: Susan.

MB: No, I'm not talking about Susan; you're the representative. Chopin must have had something in mind. And maybe Chopin's speaking for himself, but he must have been imagining something that really was kind of sad and nostalgic. Do you have a picture for this piece at all, or a story about it?

Susan: No.

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124. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Masterclass II*, Goshen College Piano Workshop, VHS (Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1999).

MB: May I give you a picture?

Susan: Yeah.

MB: There is an elderly lady, sitting in her parlor, and she's going through a photo album, and it's about the husband that she lost. He's dead and they had a beautiful, beautiful relationship, and so all of the memories are basically very pleasant. And she turns a leaf in the album and there's a dance card. In the old days they used to have dance cards, and this was the first time that they met. And she remembers how it felt to dance with him the very first dance, and it was a waltz, and these strains come back to her. And there's something about it that's sad because he's not there anymore, and yet it was such a wonderful love that they had that it's a nostalgia that's all mixed up with sad and sweetness. Now with that in mind, I want you to play the piece a little slower. [MB sings the melody to demonstrate the tempo.]

[She plays, and MB sings along.]

MB: Good. Because you're old, there's nothing that needs to be in a hurry. You don't hurry the ornaments, you don't hurry the time between phrases. In fact, when you're old, you almost need more time to take breaths between phrases [laughter from audience], ask me! [MB sings the whole melody to demonstrate the breaths.] So, I want you to be an actress for awhile, and imagine that you're about 75 or 80 years old, but life has really been beautiful. Okay, and play the piece once again. Here we go. I'm really serious about this because I think when we put ourselves into moods and pictures, we get so much more music out of what we're doing.

[She plays and MB coaches her through the first section, cuing "big breath" at the ends of phrases.]

MB: Something has to happen between the first statement that you play and this one that goes into the third line. You have to imagine if we can carry through with our story, whether the memory becomes more vivid and alive. And you play the repetition here a little bit louder than you did here or whether you want it softer, but it can't be the same. Could it become a bit even more real, that the memories come flooding in so much that you even sort of remember what the color of his suit was or how his hair was that day? . . . I'd like to have you play this out a bit more. Be sure that you always hear a good RH [MB models the sound of a full tone in the RH]. It's not [MB plays poorly with the hands equally loud]. Its [MB plays with the RH louder than the LH].

[Susan plays. MB coaches her, saying “take your time” at the ends of phrases.]

MB: This music right here seems to want to move a little bit more, doesn't it? It's almost happier music, and so the memory is getting more and more alive; it's like the longer she lingers on that, the more the memory becomes clear and vivid. And so you can play now out a little bit faster because it's almost like she's really experiencing that. [MB conducts the tempo.]

[She plays] . . . [They work on the ornamentation and phrasing.]

MB: Is there any place in the piece that you would say really is filled with smiles and very happy recollections? Where's the happiest place in the piece?

Susan: Umm. [She points to the music.] This right there.

MB: Yep, let's start here, and then we'll see the smile grow on her face.

[She plays. MB conducts and cues “get bigger” at the highpoint of the phrase.]

MB: Terrific. Good, so you just play that out. That's great the way you opened that up. And then a lot of times Susan when you have a part of your piece that opens up like that, and you keep it moving because it's wonderful. I'd bet you anything, her body, she may even get out of her chair and start to waltz around the room because that's just so wonderful, the recollection is so vivid right there. And then take time to sit her back down for this final statement of it. [MB sings the phrase.] Let's start here. She gets up.

[She plays; MB conducts and sings, “starts to move around . . . and sit her down . . . a big breath.”]

MB: Thank you. I really appreciate your participation. That's a little bit hokey to imagine a picture like that, and I don't think we do that with every piece. But sometimes, it really, really works. And I don't think that I can think of a single composition that any composer ever wrote that was not written to express a feeling. It may not be to paint a picture, but there's always feeling behind our pieces. Sometimes when we take the idea of a picture, it helps us get across to the audience a feeling. I don't care that anybody out there thinks about an old lady going a picture album and finding a dance card. That doesn't make a bit of difference to me, but if it helps me get them a greater experience, through the sadness that I feel, and

through the joy. . . I'll do anything, I'll do anything to try to get a better experience for the audience across. And you just did it, thanks very much.

Blickenstaff's musical description was not brief and basic; his elaborate picture allowed the student to connect to the musical and emotive content of the piece through anecdotal imagery. Blickenstaff illustrated each musical concept, such as phrasing and altering the tempo, with a specific occurrence in the make-believe scenario. The musical goals were equally as specific, with Blickenstaff demonstrating the concepts, either through singing or playing. The performance of the student was transformed from one that lacked nuance and phrasing into an artistic, mature sound. By the end of the segment, the student played with improved balance, flexibility of tempo, and a notable range of dynamics. Blickenstaff's expressive speech imbues the lesson environment with a lively, expressive spirit, one in which students are encouraged to consider how musical sound is related to extra-musical concepts.

### *Creative Language for Feedback*

Even when commending or criticizing a student's performance, Blickenstaff exaggerates and uses imagery. The following statements of positive feedback were taken from lessons:

That was so successful. . . That was breathtaking! That's to cry for! . . . That was so beautiful, you have to do it again.<sup>125</sup>

Do you know the phone number of your minister? [Student replies, "no?"]  
Well, I wish you'd give that to me because I have to call him and say, do you

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125. Bachus, "Teaching Demonstration."

know that Sophie's ready to play a solo at church? Because it's wonderful!<sup>126</sup>

If I were to play that I'd want that to sound exactly like you play it. That's really good.<sup>127</sup>

I want to congratulate you on your curved fingers. I'd like to take a video of your hands and show the world. . . . Are there enough stickers in the world to put on that piece? That's great.<sup>128</sup>

I have to tell you that I haven't heard my piano sound so beautiful all week long. The soft pedal helps. There is something so magical about your fingers. It is so beautiful.<sup>129</sup>

Sometimes you come in your lessons and play and I have to reform who I think of you as a pianist because you play at this high level of maturity and fluency. What an accomplishment! I am pleased. You must be pleased.<sup>130</sup>

Blickenstaff even uses histrionic descriptions and stories when suggesting a student improve their playing:

It like getting into bad habits. You go to the grocery store and there's an open barrel of candy right there, and your mom's not looking, so you snatch a little candy. The next week you go and you get two pieces of candy. It's a bad habit and it will catch up with you after awhile. The bad habit here is when [the piece is] easy, you play it fast, and then you can't do the whole piece that fast. It's a bad habit!<sup>131</sup>

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126. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Sophie.

127. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Tim.

128. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Faye, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff's Home Studio, November 16, 2009).

129. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Wendy.

130. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Elaina, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff's Home Studio, November 16, 2009).

131. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Phoebe, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff's Home Studio, November 19, 2009).

I would get down on bended knee to get you to do that [practice technique] at home.<sup>132</sup>

Mr. Benda would say, that's wonderful playing little girl! He would say, but hasn't your teacher taught you about staccato?<sup>133</sup>

If you play the first chord with a stiff hand, you may miss the winning trophy. It's not a good sound and somebody may be really offended by how brutal that is.<sup>134</sup>

If I could turn a dial on your sound, I would turn the dial that's marked sparkle. I'm not hearing enough finger attack on the key to give that kind of bright—well actually, what we're trying to do is make the piano pluck like a harpsichord. If you played this on a harpsichord, it would just sound so sparkly.<sup>135</sup>

His feedback is specific and honest, yet the clever language and Blickenstaff's spirited delivery contributes to a pleasant lesson environment where the student is not attacked through harsh speech. Whether he is affirming or challenging a student, Blickenstaff's words amplify his message and keep the environment affable and conducive to learning.

### Principles of Learning and Playing

Blickenstaff's concisely-worded principles for learning and playing are referred to repeatedly in his lessons because they are musical ideas that are widely

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132. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Lindsey.

133. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Olivia, DVD created by author (Kingston, NJ: The New School for Music Study, November 18, 2009).

134. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Tim.

135. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Neil, DVD created by author (Kingston, NJ: The New School for Music Study, November 18, 2009).



applicable. As relates to the prior discussion of exaggerated activities, “We learn easiest when we exaggerate” is a principle that Blickenstaff often declares. His efficient use of language is an intuitive aspect of his teaching, yet the use of self-proclaimed principles is a conscious choice. He described how his “rules” have resulted through his own observations of musical style: “There are so many things that we [musicians] do; don’t you always play a dominant seventh louder than you do the resolving tonic? Well, those are rules because they happen all the time. . . , and so the [list of] rules keep growing, and if I need one, I’ll make it up on the spot.”<sup>136</sup> These rules, given to students during lessons, are an organic and non-static trait of Blickenstaff’s teaching style and are pronounced in many lessons and classes.

#### *The Growth of Student Autonomy*

Expressing universal dictums is important to Blickenstaff because students are more likely to heed and independently apply the concept. Blickenstaff explained how dictums are ways to spark a student’s inquisitiveness and interject common knowledge into the lesson:

Every now and then in a lesson, I’ll drop the phrase, “Pianists all over the world agree on this one point.” And we’ll say that “When the composer has a curved line, you know you’re supposed to play legato.” . . . Or, “I’ve never run into a piano teacher who doesn’t teach this principle.” And so you try to

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136. Blickenstaff, Interview 4 of 6.

get yourself out of the picture, but this is common knowledge. And so you drop in little rules that way.<sup>137</sup>

His creative introduction “pianists all over the world agree” underscores the concept, and is a verbal tactic to gain the student’s attention. Blickenstaff expressed how increasing a student’s autonomy motivates his use of principles: “I try to deal with larger concepts because I really do feel that really good teaching actually works with concepts. If you can get an idea across to a student, then they can apply that to other places in the piece, and then they’re freer to work more independently on their own.”<sup>138</sup> Through concise and creative language, Blickenstaff declares principles to students to highlight a concept and to impart information that can be independently applied by the student.

Blickenstaff’s students and colleagues have acknowledged how his conceptual teaching has enabled them to independently improve, both in performing and in teaching. “Marvin not only taught you how to play that piece, but he gave you the rule that when you played another piece, you could remember that and apply it to the next piece,” expressed Cathy Albergo, his student at UNC-CH.<sup>139</sup> As Arlene Steffen explained, his approach to pedagogy is the same. Steffen rereads her Goshen pedagogy memos frequently: “You know I go back to this file probably once a year because the things that he wrote in response to my lesson

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137. Blickenstaff, *Questions and Answers*.

138. Blickenstaff, Interview 6 of 6.

139. Albergo, Interview.

reports are really basic universal things that apply to just about every lesson I teach.”<sup>140</sup> Amy Glennon, his colleague at the New School, commented on how watching his unique style of teaching has allowed her to apply these maxims. “Let’s say you were to go to a masterclass and you see somebody [a typical masterclass teacher] coach a Mendelssohn *Song Without Words* . . . then you know what to do with that piece; you might mark up your music, and you might say, ‘Okay, this is what I’m going to do with this specific piece,’” explained Glennon. She elucidated the difference in Blickenstaff’s teaching, “But when you watch him [Blickenstaff] teach, you think this applies to *everything*.” [emphasis hers]<sup>141</sup>

Blickenstaff’s students in the Program for Excellence in Piano Study at the New School learn and take notes on these principles during their small group lessons and classes. The students’ notebooks have sections for general notes and student performances. In the section for student performances, there is a page for each student where students take notes during each other’s coaching session. In the general notes, students write down principles that they can apply to their own practice and performance. During the researcher’s observation of a PEPS rotation (a small group lesson of three students) in 2009, Blickenstaff clearly articulated

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140. Steffen, Interview.

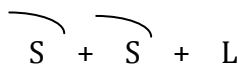
141. Glennon, Interview.

when students were to notate an idea in their books and articulated the precise language to use.<sup>142</sup>

During this PEPS rotation, Blickenstaff used four principles of interpretation and framed each as a “rule” of effective performance.<sup>143</sup> Following a student’s performance of William Gillock’s “Autumn Sketches,” Blickenstaff addressed the idea of how a repetitive melodic motive can create a larger phrase structure. Blickenstaff said, “If a composer focuses on a little idea, the performer has the job of making the little idea into a big idea,” and he drew the phrase structure on the board:



This illustration depicted how the five short slurs over each motive results in one long musical phrase that must be shaped. The second concept applied to the phrasing of “Autumn Sketches;” this composition has the common structure where two short phrases are followed by a long phrase. Blickenstaff illustrated this:

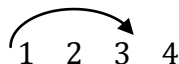


A principle of interpretation was applied to this phrase structure: “Out of four, go for three.” In a four-measure phrase, a performer should crescendo to the down beat of the third measure. On the board, he drew:

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142. Ernst, *Field Notes*.

143. *Ibid.*



In the second student performance, the small group of students learned about minuets, how “the third beat is the softest of the measure.” In the final student performance, Blickenstaff introduced that “one of the best ways to be expressive is to delay the note.” Each of these concepts was discussed by the group, written down in their notebooks, and explored in performance as each student imitated the sound model given by Blickenstaff. This PEPS C class exemplifies how Blickenstaff facilitates learning through peer observation and encourages students to autonomously apply principles in their own playing.

*Principles for Musicality, Technique, and Learning*

The principles referenced in Blickenstaff’s teaching, presentations, and writings fall into three categories: musical interpretation, piano technique, and how humans learn. These categories of “rules” form the backbone of his teaching and the following presentations to teachers:

Interpretation:

*Shaping the Sound: Rules of Thumb for the Student*

*The End Is in the Beginning: Coaching Repertoire to Performance*

*Doing What Comes Naturally: Nature’s Clues to Interpretation*

Piano Technique:

*Technique: Basic Gestures and Fingering Rules*

*Technique for the Developing Pianist*

*Basic Technical Training for the Early Level Student*

Effective Learning:

*Studio Efficiency*

*How Children Learn*

Blickenstaff's maxims form the core of each of these presentations and have resulted from his personal observations during his own practicing, performing, and teaching. "I had a handout on 'rules of thumb,' about phrasing and on rhythm and on harmony, and they were just things that I just teach," Blickenstaff explained (see fig. 6.4); he continued, "A lot of teachers will come to me, 'I got this [the handout on rules of thumb] from you 20 years ago.'"<sup>144</sup> These handouts were from the lecture entitled *Shaping the Sound*, and contain identical principles as the ones that Blickenstaff espoused to his PEPS students in the prior examples from the small group class in 2009.

Taught to students in lessons and shared with teachers in workshops, Blickenstaff's views on proper piano technique are presented through a series of guiding technical rules. As written in his presentation notes for *Basic Technical Training for the Early Level Student*, his complete technical principles of pianism are:

1. If it feels good and looks natural, it is good technique.
2. If it feels bad and looks awkward, it is poor technique.
3. Sitting position and body alignment are a top priority.
4. The mind and eye guide the hand.
5. Teach large movements before small movements. (Teach gesture before finger technique.)
6. Gestures are prepared by a movement in the opposite direction.
7. Opposing sets of muscles impede and tighten.
8. Rounded gestures are more comfortable than angular, straight ones.<sup>145</sup>

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144. Blickenstaff, Interview 4 of 6.

145. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Basic Technical Training for the Early Level Student*, Workshop Lecture Notes.

Marvin Blickenstaff

## SHAPING THE SOUND

### Rules of Thumb for the Student

#### RHYTHM

1. Shorts go to longs (cresc.)
2. Downbeats are magnetic -- the sound is drawn to them...but....
3. No two successive downbeats should be alike.
4. Upbeat figures are interesting and have great musical energy.

#### HARMONY

1. Stress the unusual; de-emphasize (relax) the predictable.
2. I 6/4 chords are magnetic. (Think what a downbeat I 6/4 must be!)
3. Harmonic considerations are more powerful than either rhythmic or melodic ones. Look to harmony first when determining the sound.

#### MELODY

1. The last note of the group is the quietest.
2. High notes must be supported from below. The important notes are the low ones -- they have the energy and push.
3. Composers often place their musical goals on long notes. Go to the long notes. Make them project.
4. Upbeat figures are interesting and unpredictable -- downbeats are the predictable result.
5. When in doubt, .... swell (crescendo).

#### TEXTURE

1. Piano sound is most interesting when the hands are never the same volume.
2. When playing two or more notes within a hand simultaneously, make the volume different for each note.

#### PHRASING

1. Place the focus of your phrase as late as possible. ("The later, the better.")
2. Tradition says:
  - out of 4, go for 3
  - in a two-measure phrase, focus on the downbeat of the second measure
  - the Question is more interesting than the Answer
  - two-note phrases or relationships favor the first note

#### GENERAL

Variety is the spice of musical life. Vary the sound. Do not repeat a phrase exactly the same way.

Figure 6.4. Handout from Blickenstaff's presentation, *Shaping the Sound: Rules of Thumb for the Student*

These eight technical priorities are not complex to understand, yet each is insightful, holistic, and widely applicable. Blickenstaff distilled important technical ideas into simple, memorable sentences. In combination, these eight rules, Blickenstaff believes, form a complete philosophy on how to technically approach the piano.

In a similar eight-item listing, Blickenstaff describes effective practice and how pianists learn. As presented in his workshop *Studio Efficiency*, Blickenstaff named the following tenets for practice:

1. The learning process (at the piano) must proceed from mind to hand (not the reverse). Learning and practice involves careful thinking -- foggy thinking, and lack of attention result in a very tedious and round-about trip to our goal.
2. The learning process involves repetition (of correct responses) . . . .
3. The learning process is facilitated when we focus on a limited number of stimuli. There is a real difference in what is accomplished between playing a piece through 3-5 times vs. playing two or four measures 3-5 times.
4. The learning process is facilitated when first experiences are accurate. . . .
5. The learning process is facilitated when we use exaggeration.
6. Musical goals are attained more quickly when the sound goal is in the S's [Student's] ear from the beginning. . . .
7. The learning process is facilitated when rhythmic issues are solved before reading the pitches. ("In the beginning is rhythm.")
8. Ultimate command of learning involves names and labels. Being able to talk about what we are doing.<sup>146</sup>

Each of these tenets has grown directly from his work with students. For example, in his lesson with intermediate-student Kim in 2009, Blickenstaff reviewed how

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146. Blickenstaff, *Studio Efficiency*.



exaggeration aids learning (item no. 5 on the aforementioned listing).<sup>147</sup> Kim overlooked the rests in the left hand of her Bach invention, inaccurately holding pitches beyond the notated duration. Blickenstaff asked her “Do you know the fastest way to train your hand [to lift on the rest]?” Kim replied, “Exaggerate,” while she demonstrated lifting the left hand high off the keyboard. Blickenstaff playfully responded, “Exaggerate, yep! Who is your teacher?!” and they both laughed. His firm views on what constitutes effective practice allow him to readily reference these tenets in his teaching and workshops for teachers.

Teachers have commented on how easy it is to apply his principles in their teaching. In the survey of teachers, many responded that Blickenstaff is distinguished from other presenters because his principles for playing and teaching piano are thoroughly presented, easily understood, and readily usable.

Several teachers wrote:

- Some things in music defy explanation, but he is able to put those things into words and present them to teachers and students. What makes music musical?
- His presentations are easy to follow, filled with very practical information that can be immediately used by teachers. . . . [O]ne can tell that he has really given much thought to how a teacher needs to teach and how a student learns.
- He offered so much tangible information and gave examples on the piano of what he was talking about.

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147. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Kim, DVD created by author (Kingston, NJ: The New School for Music Study, November 17, 2009).

- [He has a] clear, simple way to present ideas and concepts. He presents material in a way that anyone can understand.<sup>148</sup>

Blickenstaff is able to distill concepts into principles, making his ideas understandable and allowing teachers and students to readily apply his strategies in their teaching.

### **Summary**

The traits of a beneficial learning environment are elucidated and a successful process of learning is defined in Blickenstaff's philosophy of piano education. Blickenstaff believes the environment must stimulate a desire to learn from the student. Challenges are essential to the growth process, Blickenstaff asserts, and students have to enjoy the lesson and the learning. A positive, constructive, and productive atmosphere is cultivated during Blickenstaff's lessons and classes. The teacher, from Blickenstaff's perspective, is responsible for structuring a student's lesson hour and practice time. He insists that teachers diligently plan lessons to use time efficiently. For pre-college students and adult hobbyists, Blickenstaff provides assignment sheets, asks students to record lessons, and continually addresses practice methods with his students. Parents are viewed as essential contributors in the parent-student-teacher triangle; Blickenstaff forms affable relationships with parents, communicating regularly about their child's progress and articulating how they can assist in practice. Blickenstaff believes students learn through concrete and step-by-step instruction,

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148. Ernst, "Survey of Teachers."

through which they incrementally master new skills. Blickenstaff uses problem solving in the lesson to model and facilitate the expansion of a student's independent practice skills. Observation of peer and teacher performances is a key component to student-centered lessons, and Blickenstaff teaches through guided discovery. Blickenstaff's language is highly descriptive and exaggerated, making the lesson content memorable and engaging. Principles of musicality and learning, found frequently in Blickenstaff's rhetoric, emphasize the concepts that he desires to impress upon students.

## **CHAPTER VII**

### **PEDAGOGICAL STYLE**

Marvin Blickenstaff's excellence in teaching has received national recognition, and his viewpoints have been widely disseminated through his workshops and writings. The prior three chapters detailed his teaching philosophy, describing his perspectives on music and learning and his motivations as an educator. The present chapter's content, while remaining closely connected to his philosophy, is pragmatic and provides a synopsis of the routine features of Blickenstaff's lessons at his home studio and the New School for Music Study. The first section of Chapter VII contains an itemized description of the lesson content, detailing which specific elements of piano playing are often incorporated in his lessons. In the second section, each of Blickenstaff's teaching techniques is explained and illustrated. The communication and interaction between Blickenstaff and his students are the subject of the third section. The content of this chapter is drawn from a direct analysis of Blickenstaff's teaching via the field research of the principal investigator. Due to the finite number of lessons observed, this chapter is not an exhaustive account of Blickenstaff's teaching but is presented as an aggregate of Blickenstaff's pedagogical style with adult hobbyist and pre-college students.

## **Lesson Content**

The comprehensive content of Blickenstaff's lessons included numerous musical topics and pianistic skills, many of which were addressed in each lesson with every student. The subsections below are organized by relative frequency of occurrence. The first five subjects (Expression and Interpretation, Score Study, Sound Ideal, Keyboard Theory, and Practice) were incorporated in each lesson at least once. Each lesson began with technical exercises that had a secondary objective of keyboard theory. Blickenstaff emphasized expression, sound ideal, studying the score, and learning how to practice at all stages of learning with nearly every piece on a student's assignment. In a majority of lessons, students learned about the mechanics of reading musical notation (Rhythm, Reading, and Correcting Errors). Blickenstaff dealt with several additional content areas (Tempo and Pulse, Gesture, Position and Hand Shape, Fingering, Pedaling, and Music History) based upon the given student and repertoire.

### **Expression and Interpretation**

One of the most notable features of Blickenstaff's lessons was the continual focus upon expression and interpretation. Blickenstaff spoke freely to his students about the emotive content and the communicative power of the music. In order to highlight a piece's expressive qualities, he used descriptive language, provided a sound model (see Teaching Techniques, Continual Modeling), and studied the score (see next section, Score Study). Dynamics, articulations, and marks of

expression were not merely notations on the page for a pianist to observe; Blickenstaff elaborated upon the sound quality and how it makes people feel to hear the music. “We teachers need to go far beyond correct notes and rhythm, for that is not the essence of the music. When we dig below the surface of the score, it encourages the student to do the same. We need to expect a higher standard of interpretation in the lessons,”<sup>1</sup> Blickenstaff expressed. While Blickenstaff maintained high standards in playing accurately, learning new skills and concepts, and playing with proper technique, the focal point of the lesson was playing music expressively.

Blickenstaff often commenced a coaching session with a student-teacher conversation on the depictive and expressive quality of the music. Blickenstaff coached Elaina, an advanced high-school student, on “Claire de lune” by Debussy.<sup>2</sup> After her initial performance, Elaina and Blickenstaff had this teacher-guided discussion:

MB: What are you trying to achieve with the first couple pages here when you play this?

Elaina: Umm, I guess kind of like setting a scene, painting a picture.

MB: What is your picture?

Elaina: Umm [pause] a landscape with the moon and [pause]

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1. Marvin Blickenstaff, Interpretation through Analysis, Workshop Lecture Notes.

2. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Elaina, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff’s Home Studio, November 16, 2009).

MB: Where is the moon? Are we on the moon?

Elaina: No.

MB: No.

Elaina: We're sitting on a bench and looking out on a lake and there's the moon.

MB: Oh, that's so beautiful! Tell me what time of year it is.

Elaina: I think it's spring, and it's nighttime.

MB: I think it's summer, but that's okay. [They laugh.] Okay, so we're on a bench, and there's a lake and a moon. Is it a full moon?

Elaina: Yes.

MB: Clouds?

Elaina: No.

MB: Oh, that's great. What does it smell like?

Elaina: I don't know. [pause] Like wind and flowers, maybe.

MB: Honeysuckle, [pause] kind of sweet.

Elaina: Yeah.

There was plenty for Elaina to practice, such as correcting notes and rhythms and improving fluency, but instead of beginning with these raw technical details, Blickenstaff explored the broader, depictive imagery. Elaina, intrigued by this conversation, was prepared for the forthcoming intensive practice in which she could refine and increase the precision of her performance. Rather than overemphasizing the deficiencies of Elaina's performance, Blickenstaff concentrated on the expression of the music. This was a frequently utilized teaching approach; Blickenstaff exposed a student to the pictorial or emotive

qualities of the music before a guided practice session. The lasting impression was that meaningful music making was the nucleus of Blickenstaff's lessons.

### Score Study

Blickenstaff thoroughly analyzed the music he taught, and through fastidious score study with students, he imparted his interpretation of the music. He became evenhandedly excited about all levels of repertoire and uncovered the intriguing musical characteristics of elementary pieces such as "The Haunted House" by Lynn Freeman Olson and advanced repertoire such as an Intermezzo by Johannes Brahms. Cathy Albergo, who worked closely with Blickenstaff in analyzing hundreds of pieces for the *Handbook for Teachers*, described his approach; she stated that he has an impressive analytical ability to find "the magic key about what makes each piece special, [and] what makes each piece work."<sup>3</sup> Albergo, when she used the term "magic key," was referring to a structural or musical element of a piece of music that when understood illuminates the composition, an important practice or technical approach, and/or how the composer created the piece. When with students, Blickenstaff explained each composition in detail, revealing its "magic key" and its unique qualities.

During the periods when Blickenstaff instructed students on the score, he became immersed in the sound and energized by the expression of the music. He

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3. Cathy Albergo, interviewed by author (Music Teachers National Association Conference in Albuquerque, NM, March 30, 2010).



spoke passionately, sang important musical figures, and demonstrated elements of the sound. In a one-of-a-kind version of his presentation *My First Sonatina*, presented at the Goshen College Piano Workshop in 1994, Blickenstaff addressed the audience as if he were a young student. All of his ideas were presented through the eyes of the student, and he educated listeners on how to study a score and find its expressive traits. Blickenstaff summarized his belief in detailed analysis:

As your student, working on some of these early-level sonatinas, I simply cannot be untouched by this information, this exploration of up versus down, staccato versus legato, skips and steps. I am especially impacted by this when you my teacher are very excited about these discoveries, these gestures of meaning and what this means in our musical language.<sup>4</sup>

Score study, for Blickenstaff, is a chief motivation tool that educates students in how to be expressive. In lessons, he articulated these musical ideas with ease and used these interpretive clues to inspire learning.

Blickenstaff and his private piano students spent lesson time discovering how a composer created the piece being studied. His intermediate student Kim had begun her study of J.S. Bach's Invention No. 1 in C Major a week prior.<sup>5</sup> Blickenstaff, during the first portion of their lesson, guided her through where to lift the wrist and break the legato sound. He introduced her to the head and tail of the motive to aid her understanding of the lifts and the structure of Bach's masterpiece:

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4. Marvin Blickenstaff, *My First Sonatina: Performance Practices for Elementary Students*, VHS (Goshen, IN, Goshen College, 1994).

5. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Kim, DVD created by author (Kingston, NJ: The New School for Music Study, November 17, 2009).

MB: Why are we lifting there? Shouldn't you play all that legato? If you lift that's not legato.

Kim: Doesn't it make it all sound the same, so you wanna lift it so...

MB: Why there, why don't we lift after another note?

Kim: I'm not really sure.

MB: Is this the first time in the piece where you have had eight sixteenth notes in a row?

Kim: No.

MB: No, up here [pointing to the score]. Is this the first time in the piece that you've had four notes going in step motion and then zig-zag?

Kim: [Shakes her head in disapproval.]

MB: No. What's the difference between this and this? [MB points to the score.] This is upside-down.

Kim: [Nods her head in agreement.]

MB: We call it the inversion. Inverted. The head of our subject went up four notes and zig-zagged. Then he [Bach] says, wouldn't it sound neat if we go down four notes and do the zigzag. The thing that you have to note is the German mindset really loved to have order and control over things. Any German would say, if you start out [MB plays the head motive] and after that shape you lift, that's means that every time in the piece, if you have that shape, you're gonna lift after the eighth note. [MB plays the motive] Now we're done with that and we have to lift, and here's a repeat of that. You wouldn't want to mix together, you'd want to separate those so that we hear that they are different presentations of the same idea. [MB plays the sequence].

Kim: Okay.

MB: Now, answer this question, where did Bach get the idea to do these four notes?

Kim: Well, it's right there.

MB: Good for you. . . . Clever, clever guy that he had the idea that he could take these four notes and do them twice as long, and make a neat

accompaniment out of that. That's a genius composer who does that kind of stuff. And would you believe here, that this head and tail, the tail is accompanied by the head?

Kim: Uh-huh! [she laughs]

MB: It's incredible how tightly composed that is and then he does the same thing over here. He won't do it every time, but I think that's interesting to look for. Let's see if we can find another one. The next time we've got head and tail is?

Kim: [Points to the score.]

MB: He does it. The other hand has the head while you do the tail. It's a fabulous piece of taking a musical idea and seeing how much he could do with it. Actually he [Bach] wrote in the preface to all these inventions. . . he said, the reason I wrote these is to give my students ideas on how you combine two voices and also I want them to learn how to play very legato.

The researcher noted that during this sequence, Kim was engrossed with these ideas, looking between Blickenstaff and the score and intently following along. Following this introduction, Kim played the whole invention hands together, demonstrating her progress during her first week of practice. Blickenstaff questioned her on her enjoyment of the piece, and she exclaimed "It is fun!" Blickenstaff admires composers and their works greatly, and passes on this genuine enthusiasm and dedication to score study to his students.

Blickenstaff and Henry, during their lesson, studied the score to reveal the unique rhythmic qualities and musical layers of Intermezzo in E Major, Op. 116, No. 4, by Johannes Brahms.<sup>6</sup> This work was a new assignment for Henry, an adult hobbyist at the New School; he played the piece slowly and struggled to read

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6. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Henry, DVD created by author (Kingston, NJ: The New School for Music Study, November 17, 2009).

accurately and find functional fingerings in the arpeggiated figures of the left hand.

Blickenstaff delved into the musical language presented in this Intermezzo:

MB: What's the melody here in the beginning?

Henry: [Pointing to the music.] That one. Well actually, there is also [another] theme.

MB: It's almost like everything is melody. [MB plays the first phrase and sings a two-note idea in the melody to the words "oh sigh."] I think that in through here, these sighs are the most important and these [the arpeggios] are supportive. But here in the beginning, you know it's very interesting, composers usually present their most important thing right at the very beginning. It's like we are clean slates; we are a clean sheet of paper in our minds when we hear a composition. And the composer knows that the very first he writes down on that memory is the thing that's going to stick with us. So Brahms wants here at the very beginning for us to get *triplets* and *chromaticism*. [MB plays the chromatic line.] That's very important to him. [MB plays the theme and sings "trip-le-et tee-da."] The upbeat here, the movement is created not by equal eighth notes, but by trip-le-et tee. And we're going to find that all over the place. [MB points to more places in the music.] So that's very important. And then you do your sighs. . . . The message that comes in the first line is that the most important subdivision of a beat in this piece is a triplet. And then he comes later and says, not necessarily, there are [also] duples.

[Henry plays. They work on dynamics and tone quality. . . .]

MB: For understanding, the human ear needs to hear things a couple of times. We like repetition, but we are very bored by too much repetition. And composers know that. There's something in our whole musical backgrounds that says you do something once, you repeat it because we love the familiarity; on the third time, you must change it because we'll get too bored. [MB sings the melody to the words "Idea, repeat, now you change it."] It's very interesting. [MB sings again.]

[Henry plays.]

MB: Now in this piece, the ultimate success of this intermezzo lies in your choice about which notes are important in a little group. . . . Now in the left hand, I'd love to convince you it's not the long note, it's the bass note. [MB plays.] In the Romantic period, the bass notes are so important to establish the sound of the piece.

Blickenstaff, in this long lecture interspersed with Henry's performance attempts, provided a straight-forward analysis of the piece and demystified the interpretative process. Blickenstaff identified how Brahms used repetition and contrast in the important melodic and rhythmic ideas, and explained how to intelligently perform these ideas. In addition, Blickenstaff introduced principles about formal structure (the first idea is the most important, and a new idea follows two repeated ideas) that can be applied to other pieces. The detailed analysis presented within this teaching segment amplified the assignment, encouraging Henry to listen for these ideas when practicing at home.

### Sound Ideal

Blickenstaff established the qualities of artistic sound in the ear of his students through a holistic approach to score study, musical style, and technique. As in Henry's lesson on the Intermezzo by Brahms, Blickenstaff's instruction revolved around playing artistically and stylistically. Blickenstaff modeled for students frequently, often asking a student to compare two models, one that was ideal and one that was ineffective. Beyond the use of modeling, Blickenstaff explored artistic sound production with students through studying the music and finding the most efficient technical gesture. In Henry's lesson above, they explored the phrasing of each rhythmic idea and efficient use of fingering and the arm to execute the left-hand arpeggios. To frame his demonstrations of the ideal sound, Blickenstaff conversed with students regarding the composer's style, the musical

notation, and/or the traits of the stylistic era. With Henry, Blickenstaff helped this adult student hear the ideal balance for each of the musical layers, identified Brahms's uses of various rhythmic subdivisions, and indicated how the bass line needs prominence in Romantic music.

Blickenstaff delved into sound ideal consistently, regardless of where the student was in the learning process. The researcher observed that Blickenstaff provided students with a specific sound model in the initial lessons with a piece and kept refining it once the piece was securely learned. This interpretative process was thus a part of virtually every composition in every lesson and ensured that students performed with an expressive, artistic sound every week with every piece. This continual appeal to mature sound control resulted in students who easily imitated his demonstrations and students who performed expressively without exception.

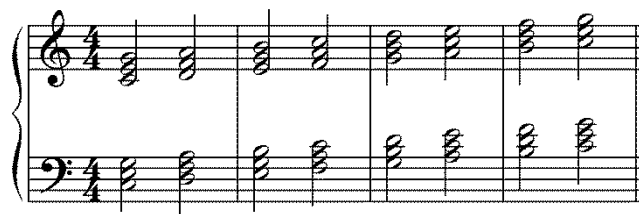
### Keyboard Theory and Technical Skills

Blickenstaff's regimen of technical exercises for students served an additional purpose beyond progressive technical growth at the keyboard: students learned keyboard theory, chordal structures, and key signatures. His students demonstrated knowledge of and fluency in all major and minor key signatures through five finger patterns, scales, and chord progressions. Additional fluency exercises included transposing Hanon exercises to other keys and a five-finger drill for finger independence entitled "Jane Allen." Chordal exercises included cadence

patterns of primary chords and chords in inversions. Some of these exercises are standard in most piano teachers' curricula, but Blickenstaff's approach to teaching traditional exercises was unique because of his requirement for students to demonstrate theoretical understanding.

Several exercises that Blickenstaff uses in his teaching follow. Provided are notations of exercises (see figs. 7.1-7.5) and descriptions of his teaching methodology.

Figure 7.1. Diatonic triads.



In this exercise, students play root position triads up the scale while rhythmically chanting the number and quality of the triad out loud. Students chant "one is major, two is minor, three is minor, four is major (etc.). . . ." This is performed in all major keys.

Figure 7.2. Chords in inversions.

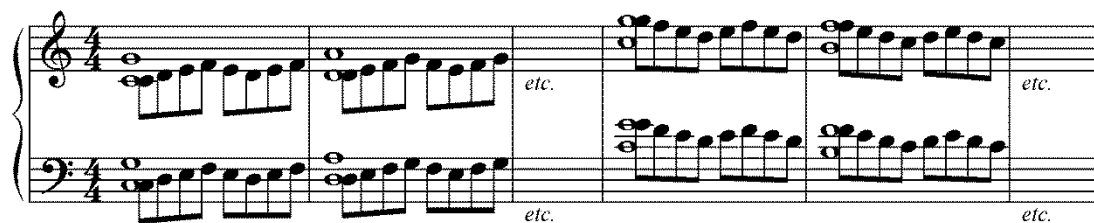
Students play the customary exercise of major and minor triads in all three positions, going up and down the keyboard. To facilitate correct fingering, Blickenstaff has students speak the fingering of the middle key, indicating when the second finger is used instead of the third finger: “Threes together, two in the right, two in the left, threes together, two in the left, two in the right, threes together.” Blickenstaff also has students learn dominant seventh chords in all inversions.

Figure 7.3. Cadence pattern with the root of the chord in the left hand.



Blickenstaff teaches the traditional cadence pattern of tonic, subdominant, and dominant triads. He has students learn this pattern with the left hand playing the root of the triad, rather than having both hands double the triads (which is the prevailing style), because the sound is more musical. Students are asked to shape the cadence pattern, getting louder to the third triad (I 6/4) and getting softer to the final tonic triad. This emphasizes his “rule of thumb” that a cadential tonic triad in second inversion is “magnetic” and should be the high point of the musical phrase. Students perform cadences with connecting pedal, clearing the pedal at each new bass tone.

Figure 7.4. A five-finger exercise named Jane Allen.

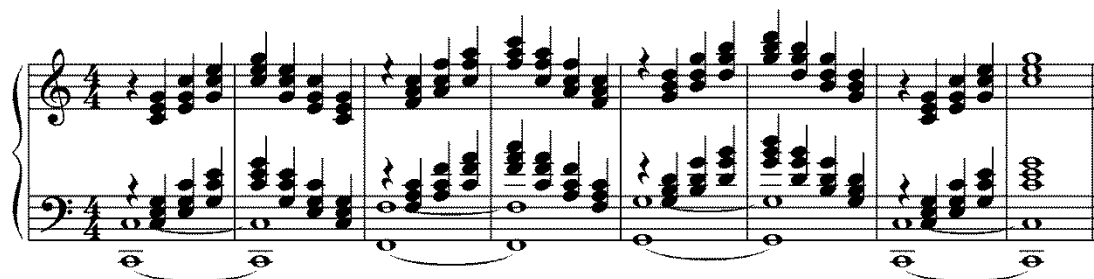


Blickenstaff learned this exercise from the respected piano teacher Jane Allen from St. Louis, Missouri, and he titles this exercise after her name.



Beyond strengthening a student's finger independence, this five-finger pattern builds an intimate understanding of a key signature in a student's hand, and his students are asked to play "Jane Allen" in all major keys.

Figure 7.5. A chord exercise named Phil Clemens or "ONSCE."



This is another exercise named after a piano teacher, Phil Clemens, who was on the faculty at Goshen as an organist and director of the jazz band. At the New School, this exercise is referred to as "ONSCE," an acronym for "Official New School Chord Exercise." This exercise strengthens a student's understanding of the primary chords in major and minor keys. Students are asked to name the primary triads (tonic, subdominant, and dominant) before playing. Connecting pedal is utilized, where the student changes the pedal at each new left-hand octave.

Blickenstaff uses all his technical drills to build a student's knowledge of and ability to play in all keys. Students were taught these exercises by rote, and Blickenstaff questioned students regarding the underlying theoretical concepts behind the technical skill. Even prior to scale playing, Blickenstaff's students gave a "scale announcement." The student identified the number of sharps or flats in the key, named the sharps and flats in the correct order (as given in a key signature), and stated which note the fourth finger plays in both hands. For example, the scale announcement for D major is: "I am going to play D major. It has two sharps, F-

sharp and C-sharp. My right-hand fourth finger plays C-sharp and my left-hand fourth finger plays E.” The researcher observed that his students easily demonstrated these skills at the start of every lesson and that Blickenstaff assigned additional key signatures or new exercises at each lesson; exercises did not appear to stagnate from week to week, with new elements being introduced regularly.

### Practice

Practice strategies were consistently provided and explored during Blickenstaff’s lessons. Students were given directions on using the proper technique, reading the score accurately, and performing expressively, but most importantly, they were shown how to practice for mastery of the assigned goal. In the majority of instances, Blickenstaff articulated the tenets of effective practice and had the student experience the practice technique several times during the lesson. With more advanced students, Blickenstaff did not always ask the student to practice using his technique in the lesson; he suggested an approach to practicing, assuming that the student’s prior knowledge and experience did not necessitate drilling the technique.

As an expert pianist, Blickenstaff demonstrated an extensive arsenal of practice techniques to help solve a wide variety of technical and artistic problems. Blickenstaff, without fail, quickly and easily diagnosed the issue and knew exactly how a student should practice. The listing of practice strategies that follows is not

a comprehensive listing of Blickenstaff's practice techniques but is a sampling of those observed.

"Pop the notes" – Students were asked to rhythmically and repetitively say the syllable "puh" on every note of a passage. This technique was utilized when a student had an uneven sound in highly rhythmic sections featuring scales and arpeggios. Blickenstaff explained during Janette's lesson, "Evenness is the result of good listening and unevenness is the result of careless listening."<sup>7</sup> When students say this neutral syllable on every note, Blickenstaff believes it activates their ear and results in intensive listening and thus even sound.

"The finger that lifts" – In order to train complex finger movements, Blickenstaff asked students to focus on the finger that lifts. Blickenstaff's exercise named "Jane Allen" (see fig. 7.4) trains finger independence because fingers 1 and 5 are held while the inner fingers move in a step-wise motion. When student's struggle with these complex types of movement, he asks them to "focus on the finger that lifts."<sup>8</sup>

"The importance of naming" – Blickenstaff frequently required students to identify elements of music, such as scales and chords, by a name. He

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7. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Janette, DVD created by author (Kingston, NJ: The New School for Music Study, November 17, 2009).

8. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Beth, DVD created by author (Collegetown, PA: Blickenstaff's Home Studio, November 16, 2009).

believes that the process of naming aids retention and learning. While practicing, students identified compositional elements out loud, especially as a tool for memorization. During Lindsey's lesson, Blickenstaff said "freeze," indicating to her to stop on the chords of Brahms's Rhapsody, Op. 79, No. 2, and pinpoint the harmony.<sup>9</sup>

Slow practice – Students habitually practiced passages slowly during lessons. Blickenstaff ensured students played slowly enough by consistently demonstrating the tempo before the student practiced in the lesson. He never allowed a student to continue at a faster tempo than he demonstrated.

Loud practice – Blickenstaff's students practiced with a full tone. He believes that loud practice enables the hand and fingers to retain what has been practiced.

Exaggeration – Blickenstaff directed students to exaggerate a movement or gesture in the hand to aid learning a new sound and feel. For instance, Olivia held notes in the left hand too long, failing to observe the rests.<sup>10</sup> Blickenstaff said, "You can teach your hand very quickly to lift at the right time, if you do something a little silly, and really lift." Blickenstaff showed

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9. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Lindsey, DVD created by author (Kingston, NJ: The New School for Music Study, November 17, 2009).

10. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Olivia, DVD created by author (Kingston, NJ: The New School for Music Study, November 18, 2009).

how to lift the left hand extremely high in order to successfully learn this new skill.

“Say the moves” – This technique was utilized for music in which the hand moves to a new chord or new location on the keyboard. Blickenstaff indicated to Zach in his lesson how to work on a difficult left-hand passage with several position changes to different chords.<sup>11</sup> Blickenstaff instructed him to prepare his left hand on the count before the chord changes. Zach played and counted, saying “move” on the count where the hand prepared the next chord. Zach’s assignment became to practice by “saying the moves.”

These practice techniques each had a specific purpose and Blickenstaff explained the importance of each technique to his students. When leading a student through successful practice steps, Blickenstaff typically followed this sequence of instruction: identify the problem, demonstrate the solution, observe as the student tries, correct the student as needed, and summarize the practice technique through an explanation of how and why it works.

Practice discussions were not always teacher directed and were occasionally student led. Blickenstaff asked students to demonstrate how they had practiced during the prior week and articulated new goals and practice techniques for the next week. The purpose of these practice interchanges was to engage

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11. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Zach, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff’s Home Studio, November 19, 2009).

students in problem solving, to modify their approach when necessary, and to increase the viability of student-identified practice techniques.

### Rhythm

Blickenstaff believes that rhythm is the foundation of musical ideas and that correct reading is facilitated when students execute the rhythm first. “The student who cannot tap and count the piece/section *perfectly* [emphasis from original] is not ready to add note playing to the pyramiding complexity of learning the piece,” Blickenstaff wrote in an article in *Keyboard Companion* on assigning new repertoire.<sup>12</sup> During the introduction of a new piece and in their subsequent lesson, elementary and early-intermediate students were asked to tap both hands on the fallboard while counting the rhythm out loud. Students playing music from *Music Pathways* utilized the syllabic approach to counting (i.e. “ta ta-te ta-ah”) outlined in this text, whereas students working on standard repertoire utilized traditional numeric counting (i.e. “1 ee and uh”).

At all levels of study, students were asked to “prove the rhythm,” which meant they needed to isolate the rhythm and tap and count it correctly. When students had inaccurately played a rhythm, Blickenstaff did not explain the error in detail or indicate precisely where it occurred; rather, he stated to students that they had not carefully considered the rhythm, gave generalized guidance, and

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12. Marvin Blickenstaff, “Do Your Students Hear Their Newly Assigned Repertoire before They Begin to Practice?,” *Keyboard Companion* 7, no. 4 (1996): 26.

asked them to “prove the rhythm.” For example, Blickenstaff had to correct rhythmic errors during Sophie’s lesson.<sup>13</sup> She was learning “Morning Prayer” (Op. 39, No. 1) by Tchaikovsky and performed this slow piece in triple meter without maintaining the pulse through long notes. Rather than pointing out which rhythms were played incorrectly, Blickenstaff instructed her to subdivide by counting “1 and 2 and 3 and” in each measure. The lesson continued:

MB: May I tell you that the one thing that needs to improve can be solved so easily if you will just count your “ands” in every measure. Would you tap with me a little bit and count the “ands.”

[They tap and count together.]

MB: Now I’m gonna do a for instance. Maybe you had played and hadn’t quite realized that you played [taps incorrectly] and skipped over something. Well, the thing that will prove how long that has to be is counting the “ands.” Let’s go on a little bit and count the “ands.”

[They tap and count together. Sophie incorrectly taps one spot. They both laugh.]

MB: Are we absolutely sure about our counting here? Once again.

[Sophie taps and counts the rhythm by herself, with MB counting along.]

MB: That’s hard. . . . [They tap and count together.] Terrific. There are a few rhythmic issues, I can’t point out [each place] but I can point out how you solve that, and it is to say the “ands.” You’re going to play and say the “ands,” all the way.

[Sophie plays and counts, and MB counts with her.]

MB: Now that is a major improvement. That is really good. Doesn’t it feel good to be able to say, “Oh this is correct! I’m proving it’s correct.” Let’s go on.

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13. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Sophie, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff’s Home Studio, November 19, 2009).

[Sophie continues to play. MB counts with her again, but stops counting as she continues. Sophie catches her own error and repeats a measure.]

MB: Do you know that in most music, the hardest notes to play correctly, rhythmically, are the long notes? It's interesting. Everybody thinks that long notes are so easy. . . . You have to count like crazy!

Blickenstaff did not admonish Sophie for incorrectly learning the rhythm and did not enumerate her errors. Rather, he indicated to Sophie that her assignment was to “prove” the rhythm. Ultimately, students discovered and rectified their own mistakes upon Blickenstaff's evaluation that they were not playing the rhythm accurately. In most cases, Blickenstaff's students were able to tap and count with ease.

When students could not tap and count the rhythm correctly, Blickenstaff resorted to additional teaching strategies. If the student did not understand the notation, the student wrote the counting in the music and Blickenstaff modeled the sound. If the student struggled to execute the rhythm (but had demonstrated conceptual understanding), he took the student's hands, tapping and counting for him or her in a puppet-like fashion; the student, after feeling the rhythm, was able to tap and count independently. Occasionally when Blickenstaff needed to make a strong impression on a student, he used rhythmically chanted words, such as their name, to demonstrate and help them internalize a rhythm. Ultimately, Blickenstaff's rhythmic guidance ensured the student had finished with a system of counting for practice, heard the rhythmic figure repetitiously, and practiced the section correctly.



## Reading

When Blickenstaff initially introduced a new piece of repertoire, students, regardless of level, sight-read passages of it in the lesson. Rhythm was typically isolated first (see previous section, Rhythm) and then the student played a portion of the music. Blickenstaff frequently asked students to read the right or left hand, whichever was most difficult, and then asked them to play both hands together at a slow tempo. Playing with each hand separately was never suggested as a practice technique but was used to facilitate an accurate first reading of new music. With elementary and intermediate students, Blickenstaff occasionally played one hand while the student played the other. This type of duet allowed the student to hear the complete sound without carrying the burden of reading all of the notes. For more advanced students, Blickenstaff required the student to read slowly with both hands or to read a difficult passage with one hand.

Blickenstaff used several techniques to encourage his students to read by shape and structure rather than by individual note name. Students were required to find repeated sections and find where patterns changed; this technique is consistently found throughout *Music Pathways* where questions in the text urge students to circle repeated ideas. Students were asked to identify common musical patterns such as intervals, scales, and chords. In tandem with naming common patterns, students played the patterns on the keyboard. Blickenstaff had students block occurrences of broken chord patterns (a technique of playing notes simultaneously that were written successively), and often these chordal structures

were named (i.e. G major). “I find it helpful to figure out what my hand is experiencing,” Blickenstaff explained to Wendy; Blickenstaff challenged her to identify where the black key was in each three-note chord (top, middle, or bottom note) before she played each one.<sup>14</sup>

A common scenario during reading sessions was when Blickenstaff provided reading guidance while a student played. For example, while an elementary student sight read three-note chords in the left hand, Blickenstaff cued phrases such as “notice which note stays and move the other notes up,” “the notes surround bass C,” and “here’s a G chord.”<sup>15</sup> Blickenstaff included all of these activities to facilitate his student’s growth into efficient readers of common keyboard patterns. Blickenstaff’s approach to reading impressed upon the student that reading is not naming single notes but finding typical keyboard figures.

### Correcting Errors

Blickenstaff corrected errors in pitch and rhythm in a style that did not feel punitive nor overtly corrective. As in Sophie’s lesson on Tchaikovsky’s “Morning Prayer” (see section Rhythm), Blickenstaff did not reprimand her in any way for inaccurate learning; as they worked through each section of the piece, he articulated places where she needed to correct rhythms and notes.

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14. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Wendy, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff’s Home Studio, November 19, 2009).

15. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Zach.

After students performed a piece from the previous week's assignment, Blickenstaff consistently congratulated their efforts, authentically praising some positive result from their practice. He never immediately addressed mistakes but rather corrected errors as part of an organic process of discovering the music together. He and the student worked through the piece exploring all aspects of the notation and musicality from the first to the last measure. At the same time, Blickenstaff did not allow errors to slip by unaddressed; this included mistakes in pitches, rhythms, and fingerings. The most frequent item addressed was fingering, as students were not allowed to disregard the fingerings marked in the score (see section Fingering).

### Tempo and Pulse

Blickenstaff believes that a steady pulse and metrical understanding is essential for musical playing. If students played with an irregular pulse in their technical drills or repertoire, Blickenstaff established a steady beat for his students without stopping their performance by conducting, clapping along, loudly tapping his foot, or counting aloud. To further correct a lack of steady pulse, Blickenstaff appealed to his student's internal pulse and asked them to count and play rather than relying upon the metronome.

Blickenstaff also coached students to perform music with a larger metrical pulse. For example, Elaina played Debussy's "Claire de lune," a piece in 9/8, and

she was emphasizing each eighth note as she played.<sup>16</sup> Blickenstaff asked her to feel “the circle” and “the swing” of the larger pulse, the dotted quarter note. He asked her to swing three pulses before playing; she swayed her torso on the bench and Blickenstaff conducted and cued with her as she performed. Blickenstaff explained to Elaina that swinging flow of this composition in 9/8 is the key to a musical performance.

Blickenstaff did not hesitate to ask students, regardless of age and level, to perform music at the tempo at which he would perform. He helped students learn to play at a fast tempo through modeling the tempo frequently and working on practice techniques and technical gestures to enable the fast performance. He gave Rose, a junior high student, the instruction to play Grieg’s “Puck,” Op. 71, No. 3, at a much faster tempo than she had practiced in the previous week.<sup>17</sup> He suggested she drill small sections at this tempo, giving her the analogy that “You can never learn to water ski slowly.” He worked with Rose on using rotation in the right hand in order to help her achieve the fast tempo. Elementary students were also asked to perform music at a fast tempo.

Although the metronome was infrequently utilized, Blickenstaff used the metronome in two ways: to help stabilize the tempo in a piece and to increase the speed of technical drills. To help adult student Alex, Blickenstaff used the

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16. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Elaina.

17. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Rose, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff’s Home Studio, November 19, 2009).

metronome to determine a practice tempo for Beethoven's Sonatina in F Major.<sup>18</sup> Alex's first performance revealed that each section of the piece was played at a different tempo. Blickenstaff recommended placing the metronome on a fast eighth note pulse (mm=138) and practicing such that every eighth note matched the metronome.

Blickenstaff wanted Vicki, an advanced high school student, to increase the speed of her scales, and in her lesson, the metronome was used during her four-octave scales.<sup>19</sup> He allowed Vicki to pick her "best" scale and she played D major once without the metronome. Blickenstaff turned the metronome on 138 for a repetition of the scale and then changed the metronome to 152 for another repetition. Blickenstaff's Technical Skills curriculum has metronome goals indicated for scale and arpeggio patterns,<sup>20</sup> and he believes that agility is best developed through a regular routine of technical drills and etudes. Overall, the metronome was used sparingly during Blickenstaff's lessons; in the four days of lessons observed, Alex's and Vicki's lessons were the only in which the metronome was utilized. Notwithstanding, his tendency was to improve tempo control and

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18. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Alex, DVD created by author (Collegetown, PA: Blickenstaff's Home Studio, November 16, 2009).

19. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Vicki, DVD created by author (Collegetown, PA: Blickenstaff's Home Studio, November 19, 2009).

20. Marvin Blickenstaff, Technical Skills: Level 1-5, Teaching Files.

speed not via the metronome but through the student's internal pulse, his clapping and playing along, and his modeling.

### Gesture

Playing with gestures was the foundation of the technical approach taught by Blickenstaff. Different uses of the physical mechanism were named to facilitate quick reference to and application of the gesture. The following gestures were utilized in the lessons observed during field research:

Finger – A technique where finger motion is utilized, “swinging” the finger from the largest knuckle on every note.<sup>21</sup>

Scratch – Using the smallest joint, the finger is pulled in towards the palm of the hand.<sup>22</sup> This small motion is best for music that is fast, soft, and light.

Out Around – A movement of the wrist, where the wrist drops slightly and moves away from the first finger (thumb) and towards the fifth finger (pinky). The “out around” is completed when the wrist rises and circles back toward the thumb. Blickenstaff labels this gesture in his student's music with an abbreviation “OA.”<sup>23</sup> He teaches out around through Hanon exercise No. 1.

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21. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Janette.

22. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Beth.

23. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Rose.

Rotation – This gesture uses the hand and arm, such that “you can play the piano without moving your fingers.”<sup>24</sup> The hand rocks back and forth as the forearm twists. Blickenstaff abbreviates this as “RO.” Rotation is taught through a five-finger pattern exercise, where the hand rocks back and forth between the thumb and the other fingers.

Throw – In this gesture, the hands throw into the keys on a note only to pull out of the keys on the subsequent note(s). The wrist drops on the first note and then lifts upward.<sup>25</sup>

Push – This gesture is a quick arm jab into the key-bed, ideal for playing double note passages or loud sonorities.<sup>26</sup>

During lesson segments when Blickenstaff isolated a gesture, he often repositioned students, touching and guiding their hands in order for them to feel the gesture.

### Position and Hand Shape

Blickenstaff’s students sat at the piano with commendable posture. In the beginning minutes of each lesson, students positioned themselves properly at the piano. Young elementary students adjusted the bench as needed, raising or lowering it to the proper height, and placed foot risers in front of the bench that

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24. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Beth.

25. Ibid.

26. Sara M. Ernst, 2009, Observation Notes from Classes for the Program for Excellence in Piano Study, The New School for Music Study, Kingston, NJ.

allowed their feet to rest solidly on the risers.<sup>27</sup> Blickenstaff encouraged this habit in his young students through praise of their efforts. The researcher observed that intermediate and advanced students sat at the piano with enough distance from the keyboard to move freely. All sat on the front half of the bench with tall posture at the waist. Blickenstaff did not stress posture with any of the students that the researcher observed because good positioning had already been established as a habit.

Blickenstaff insisted upon a rounded hand and finger from his students, frequently addressing the shape of the hand during portions of each lesson. Blickenstaff's required students to curve the finger and avoid collapsed finger joints. The thumb remained loose and stayed close to the hand in order to avoid a stretched, flat hand. Blickenstaff modified the hand shape of students of all ages and abilities during technical exercises and when working on specific passages in their repertoire. Students easily and quickly fixed issues of hand shape and demonstrated an understanding of correct positioning. Blickenstaff frequently reminded students to curve the fingers and often congratulated students on proper hand shape. This continual reinforcement and reference to the hand resulted in all of his students playing with a solid and formed piano hand.

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27. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Lesson of Faye*, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff's Home Studio, November 16, 2009).



## Fingering

Fingering is of utmost importance to Blickenstaff, as significant lesson time was devoted to determining effective fingerings. Discussions of fingerings were related to general principals of good fingerings. The principals of effective fingering espoused by Blickenstaff included the following:

- Fingerings are chosen in order to achieve the desired sound.
- Sequential musical patterns should be played with the same fingerings, even if that results with a thumb on the black keys.
- Rely upon lowered numbered fingers when possible.
- It is easier to cross longer fingers (3 and 4) onto black rather than white keys.
- Play repeated notes with different fingers.

Brainstorming alternate fingerings frequently occurred in lessons, and he did not hesitate to re-finger passages in the music. Blickenstaff used lesson time to play through figures and determine the best fingering, allowing the student to observe and try the new fingering. His advanced students realized the value of effective fingerings and often asked his opinion on the best fingering for a passage. He always wrote in the new fingerings or dictated them to a student as he slowly played the passage. His students abided by his motto that the fingering used and written in the score must be equivalent.

Students were often required to try out alternative fingerings and drill them during the lesson. In a lesson with a new assignment on Sonata in G Major from

Domenico Scarlatti's *30 Essercizi*, Blickenstaff carefully considered the fingering with Beth:<sup>28</sup>

Beth, if I could suggest the sharpest fingering for the upbeat, [MB plays the figure], it is to avoid the 4th finger because a 4 doesn't work well with 3 and 5. You play 1-2-3-5 [they play together], and then the 3 goes quickly down to the D. [Beth plays.] That's right. . . . Try it again. [Beth plays, and they play together. MB writes the fingering in the music.] 1-2-3-5. There's rotation once again, if you twist your hand [MB demonstrates and Beth tries]. . . . Now I'd like to have you practice that slowly. [Beth repeats the figure several times.] The energy at the top, it doesn't get lighter at the top, it gets louder. [Beth plays.] That's right.

[Moving onto the next figure in the music] In light of our discovery here that fourth fingers are sort of unwanted guests, . . . I would play 2-3-5. [Beth plays 2-3-4 and MB corrects her.] You want to avoid the 4th finger. [Beth plays again.] That's right.

[Moving onto the next figure in the music] I would like for you to experiment and see if you have any trills in your hand that are a little bit sharper, a really bright sound. I won't tell you the fingering I use because it's odd and you'll say, "I can't do that!" You see, I change a finger 3-2-3-1. I go 3-2-3-1 [MB plays and Beth tries.] Oh, Beth, do that again! [Beth plays again.] Oh Beth that's fantastic, talk about firecrackers, that's just terrific. [MB writes the fingering in the music.] . . . That's exactly the spark you want.

Blickenstaff gave Beth several unobvious fingering solutions for the fast figures in this Scarlatti Sonata. As with Beth, he did not hesitate to use complex fingering patterns with a student if it resulted in the best sound. He required significant repetition and drill of new patterns during the lesson to ensure that the student knew how to practice.

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28. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Beth.

## Pedaling

Blickenstaff considered the clarity of sound and accuracy of style when dealing with issues of pedaling. His convictions regarding the suitability of pedaling given the repertoire and stylistic period of the work were articulated to students. For example, he gave students precise regulations to limit pedaling when working with repertoire from the Classical era. In Iris's lesson, he strongly stated about her performance of a Haydn Sonata that had frequent use of overlapping pedal, "I really feel that this [pedaling] is out of the question."<sup>29</sup> He instructed Olivia to perform the Sonata in A Minor by Georg Anton Benda strictly without pedal.<sup>30</sup> She had practiced at home with pedal and continued to pedal during her lesson despite Blickenstaff's plea for no pedal; Blickenstaff lightly and playfully kicked her foot off of the pedal causing Olivia to burst out in laughter and finally stop pedaling.

In music of later eras, Blickenstaff approached the pedal through score study and careful listening. The researcher observed that he was not prescriptive with students on pedaling in music of the Romantic era unless there was pedaling marked by the composer. For instance, in a masterclass with a student performing Chopin's "Harp" Etude, Op. 25, No. 1, Blickenstaff insisted that the performer hold

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29. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Iris, DVD created by author (Kingston, NJ: The New School for Music Study, November 17, 2009).

30. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Olivia.

the pedal as Chopin indicated.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, in a lesson with Grace on Brahms's Rhapsody, Op. 79, No. 2, he suggested "trust your ear" when discussing the frequency of pedal changes. Grace, an advanced high school student, was well-versed in the technique of harmonic pedaling, and thus Blickenstaff knew that her ear was sensitized to clear pedaling. In another lesson, Blickenstaff taught intermediate student Olivia how to pedal appropriately in the music of Debussy, a composer of Impressionist style. Blickenstaff explained two types of pedaling in Debussy's music: when the hand can hold the key for a long tone, the pedal is changed freely with the other notes; and secondly, where it is impossible for the hand to sustain a long tone, the pedal is used to sustain the long tone.

Even with young beginners who could not reach the pedals when sitting on the bench, Blickenstaff taught pedaling. For example, he adjusted the sitting position of his young student Faye who could not reach the pedal easily. Faye typically used three pads under her feet to allow for an upright posture on the bench. When Faye needed the pedal, they removed two of the pads leaving only one for her feet. She sat far forward on the bench and kept her heel on the foot pad when lifting and depressing the pedal. This bench position and foot pad allowed her to maintain a reasonable height, comfortably reach the pedal, and effectively control the pedal releases. Faye used the simplest pedal technique, direct (not

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31. Marvin Blickenstaff, *Masterclass II*, VHS (Montana State Music Teachers Association Convention, 1994).

connecting) pedaling. She coordinated the lift of the foot with the hand in her repertoire and in exercises out of Edna Mae Burnam's *Dozen a Day*.

With students beyond the elementary years, Blickenstaff taught connecting (syncopated) pedaling. His students used connecting pedal with their technical exercises based upon triads (see figs. 7.3 and 7.5 in Keyboard Theory) to build fluency and control of the pedal motion and sound. Although not observed by the researcher, Blickenstaff introduces students to this difficult technique by clarifying the rhythm, on which count the foot lifts and depresses the pedal.<sup>32</sup> The researcher observed a teaching technique for modifying a student's connecting pedal; Blickenstaff had students place their foot upon his while he pedaled. This approach allowed students to feel how the hands and feet act independently and feel the appropriate timing and speed of the pedal movements.

### Music History

Blickenstaff discussed music history with students as it related to their repertoire, the composer of each piece, and the musical period's larger sense of style. Blickenstaff frequently injected historical information and facts about a composer's style and life into the lesson. Pre-college students were assigned to learn about the composers, including their birth and death years, country of origin, and the stylistic era to which they belong. Blickenstaff explained that "students are

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32. Marvin Blickenstaff, 2010–2012, Personal Correspondence with Sara Ernst.

required to announce their pieces . . . to build a sense of historical style.”<sup>33</sup> Students announced the composer’s biographical information and a summary of the piece’s mood and expression prior to their performances in informal classes at his home studio and in formal classes such as Parents’ Classes at the New School for Music Study. Students conducted research outside of their lesson, memorized their verbal description, and rehearsed them in class; thus his students of all ages spoke knowledgably and professionally about their repertoire. Blickenstaff explained how this knowledge is further solidified during repertoire classes because students “keep notes on the pieces they hear, the information about composers, and on our discussion of interpretation and style.”<sup>34</sup>

### **Teaching Techniques**

Blickenstaff’s lessons were quickly paced, and his instruction covered a prodigious amount of musical, technical, and theoretical knowledge. He accomplished this dynamic lesson content through several teaching techniques that occurred in every lesson: coaching complete student performances in great detail, frequently modeling the sound for students to imitate, playing with the student to reinforce new goals, and guiding students on how to practice. Only when needed, Blickenstaff repositioned students, touching their hands and arms to help them feel a new technique or improve their positioning. Each of these

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33. Marvin R. Blickenstaff, “How Do You Include Music History in the Study of Repertoire?,” *Keyboard Companion* 15, no. 2 (2004).

34. *Ibid.*

teaching techniques are illustrated below with excerpts from lessons with students of various ages and playing levels.

### Active Coaching

Blickenstaff gave lengthy coaching sessions on pieces that students were refining and polishing. After a student performed the entire work, they dissected the piece from beginning to end. Most often, Blickenstaff asked the student to play at a slower tempo during these sessions to facilitate careful listening and playing. During this process, Blickenstaff stopped students very frequently, insisted upon precision of notes and rhythms, and gave clear interpretive guidelines. This process was teacher-directed with Blickenstaff providing the majority of the musical suggestions. Yet, students were fully engaged in the performance and often voiced ideas or frustrations. Blickenstaff addressed these interjections of the student immediately and fully. An extremely dynamic interchange resulted, one in which the student's performance drastically improved and one in which numerous ideas were presented in fugacious segments. Blickenstaff's students were accustomed to these quickly-paced coaching sessions. Both the teacher and student had intense focus on the task and appeared to enjoy this refining process.

A unique aspect of Blickenstaff's style of coaching was how he infused the music with lyrics for interpretation. Blickenstaff sang and spoke short cues of several words to the melodic line while students played. These short cues directed the student's attention to an element of interpretation and were used repetitively

throughout the coaching session. Blickenstaff's singing voice is pleasant and refined even though he is largely an untrained singer; it is deep and resonant with expressive use of vibrato. While singing, he often used arm gestures like those of a conductor to amplify the dynamics and pacing and guide a student to play with expressive timing. The combination of Blickenstaff's gestures, singing, and cuing created memorable musical experiences in each lesson.

Blickenstaff exhibited an impressive ability to spontaneously create these verbal cues during coaching sessions. Except for the opening technical exercises and a brief discussion of her other repertoire, Lindsey and Blickenstaff spent her lesson preparing Rhapsody in G Minor by Brahms for Parents' Class at the New School.<sup>35</sup> Blickenstaff utilized numerous sung and spoken cues during this portion when Lindsey performed the lyrical theme from the first section:

Lindsey plays and MB sings, "break my heart" to the melody.

Lindsey stops as MB flips the page back.

MB says, "Can you tell me a little bit about your dynamic plan for these notes. What gives the greatest expression there? Do you believe this [pointing to the crescendo in the score] that you go to the last note?" Lindsey nods her head in agreement.

Lindsey plays it again and MB stops her. MB plays the melodic fragment and says, "You really have to work on the last two notes because they're not really convincingly crescendoing." They play the melody together, and MB is pleased, saying, "yeah, yeah." Lindsey plays the section, now with both hands, and MB says while she plays, "last two notes." [The last two notes of the melody must get louder.]

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35. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Lindsey.



Lindsey stops and MB says, “He seems to feel that is indeed the dynamic plan for that motive.” MB plays and sings the melody to the words, “go to the long, and now you back away.” [He is referring to the crescendo of the first part of the melody and the diminuendo of the second half of the melody.] Lindsey plays and MB sings with her, “go to the long, now you back away,” and he repeats these lyrics to each phrase of the melody. Lindsey continues to play into the next section.

Lindsey stops and MB says, “You’re missing the point Lindsey. When you go to the long, these have backed away, and you do that very, very well. And then, what happens then is the tail takes precedent over the head.” MB plays and sings the next part of the melody to the words, “Here is the head, and the tail is subservient.” MB explains in a spoken voice, “And this gets almost out of control.” MB begins to sing the melody on a neutral syllable and then sings the words, “throw it up high, throw it up high, throw it up high.” MB stops playing and says, “It gets bigger and bigger. You have to plant the seed the very first time you hear this, that it has potential for growing.” MB plays the melody, explaining “He [Brahms] tries, and then it becomes a realism [referring to the first statement of the idea and the repetition of the idea that then grows.] Take this last phrase.”

While Lindsey plays, MB says, “the potential.” As Lindsey continues to play, MB sings the melody, and then sings the words, “throw it up high, now even more, not quite the most, and up to here.” Lindsey stops and MB says, “That’s right, and if you do not dynamically plan each of those to be bigger, your listeners will lose the whole point. It’s this incredible crescendo up there and it sounds so natural because there is the preparation for it.” MB sings “throw it up high, throw it up high. . . .” Lindsey plays the section again.

Blickenstaff freely switched between modes of coaching: singing the melody on words or a neutral syllable, playing the melody, verbalizing and singing cues while the student played, and lecturing without playing along. Lindsey received reinforcement of these interpretative ideas through these different instructional methods.

To guide the shaping of a musical line, Blickenstaff relied upon his expressive voice, singing the melody along with a student’s performance. This

teaching method was utilized to draw the student's attention to proper balance of musical layers, phrasing, or articulation. Singing along with students impacts their performance and creates a long-lasting impression of the interpretative goal.

Albergo, his student in the 1970s at UNC-CH, can recall some of these sounds as she reviews certain compositions: "My fondest memory is Marvin singing . . . [with] that deep voice behind you. Marvin is a very expressive singer. He taught you phrasing, . . . he was singing behind you. And when Marvin sang with you, . . . you played much better. . . . I still hear [his singing] when I'm doing certain pieces. . ."36

For instance, in Neil's lesson on Felix Mendelssohn's *Rondo Capriccioso*, Neil projected an unimportant musical figure in the thick texture. Blickenstaff clarified to Neil that the bass line should be heard, not the repetitive right-hand motive. Blickenstaff initially sang the bass line with musical phrasing as a solo, and then, Neil played the piano with Blickenstaff's singing.

### Continual Modeling

Blickenstaff's teaching illustrated how observing a proper model is the most efficient way to transform a student's performance and solidify a student's understanding. Modeling was incorporated into every lesson and used to demonstrate all aspects of pianism. Blickenstaff modeled correct technique, hand position, fingering, sound, practicing, tempo, and expression. His playing examples were brief, and when his idea was complex or radically opposed the student's

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36. Albergo, Interview.

performance, he illustrated it several times before asking the student to imitate him. In addition, Blickenstaff verbally summarized the goal before asking the student to copy his performance. Therefore, the student had copious opportunities to observe and understand. Lengthy playing demonstrations (whole sections or whole pieces) only occurred when Blickenstaff introduced new repertoire to a student.

Blickenstaff illustrated both the incorrect and correct playing approach to teach a new technique or sound. Janette, a high school student, studied “Malagueña” by Ernesto Lecuona and struggled in her lesson with an extremely technical passage. Blickenstaff, displeased with her technical method, helped her discover a new gesture and posture:

MB: This is serious stuff. I’m not making fun of you. Let’s do a Janette and a Marvin, okay. This is Janette [MB plays at the second piano, imitating the tense posture and active torso of Janette], and here’s lazy Marvin [MB plays with an upward and still posture, using the hands and arms]. Just throwing it off! You’re working too hard. You need to sit back and just push that sound. You’re sort of moving your torso down on every note. [MB walks to her, touches her shoulder and pushes downward. MB returns to the second piano.] Janette [MB demos incorrectly], okay [MB demos correctly]. I’m not talking about speed; I’m talking about a gesture into the keyboard. Push it off. [Janette gets ready.] Push in.

[Janette plays.]

MB: Is your name Marvin! That looks so much better. Doesn’t that feel different?

Janette: Yeah, it feels so much better.

MB: Just throw it! Thank you. You’re wonderful!

Blickenstaff, understanding that this type of imitation could make his student feel mocked, began by clarifying his intention. While he modeled the ideal, Janette intently observed and began to imitatively gesticulate while he played. This direct visual comparison allowed her to quickly see her error and immediately attempt a new approach. Her playing changed dramatically as she was able to play with improved speed and greater accuracy once her posture and gesture were corrected.

### Playing Together

In addition to modeling frequently for students, Blickenstaff played along with student performances in a variety of ways. There were three modes of playing together: the student and Blickenstaff each played opposite hands of a solo piece, the student and Blickenstaff played a formal duet with two different parts, Blickenstaff and the student played a solo part simultaneously.<sup>37</sup>

With elementary students, Blickenstaff frequently divided the music and performed duets with them. When students were in the early stages of learning, he apportioned the staves of the music between him and the student to facilitate reading and to hear the full sonority of the piece. For instance, Faye had learned the right hand of “Oh Come Emmanuel,” and to familiarize her ear with the sound

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37. In his home studio, Blickenstaff has only one piano, and hence, any doubling occurred in the high treble range of the piano. At the New School for Music Study, his studio was equipped with a grand and a digital piano; he often modeled and doubled students using the digital piano, but also utilized the treble of the grand piano for doubling.

of both hands for her next assignment, Blickenstaff read the lower staff while she read the upper staff. In each of the elementary lessons observed by the researcher, at least one duet was included during the lesson. Duets were often performed twice, with the second repetition improving an element of interpretation such as expression, dynamics, or quickening the tempo.

With all levels of students, Blickenstaff frequently doubled the solo part while the student performed. In Wendy's lesson at his home studio, Wendy played a Baroque piece confidently at a brisk tempo, but her performance lacked a steady pulse and clarity in the articulation.<sup>38</sup> Blickenstaff wanted Wendy to play the eighth notes detached and feel an accented emphasis on the quarter notes. Blickenstaff modeled for her and doubled her sound to coach the needed articulation:

MB: I love [MB plays the open measures of the right hand]. Would you play the right hand, and what I'd like to have you do is appreciate the arrival on the quarter notes. [MB plays the right hand and rhythmically says "now we're home" on the rhythm eighth-eighth-quarter. They play together, and MB cues "now we're home."]

MB: Would you add the left hand and also let it celebrate that landing? [MB demos the emphasized quarter note and then they play together. She stumbles, and MB stops her. They address a problem with hand coordination and then return to working on the articulation.] . . .

MB: We're going to emphasize how you lift here and how you hold here. [MB demos.] You exaggerate what lifts. [MB demos and then they play together.] That's right.

[Wendy plays individually and MB has her change the tempo to a practice tempo.]

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38. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Wendy.

MB: Do you know what a paradox is?

Wendy: No.

MB: Two truths working against each other. It's kind of a paradox that I'm telling you to land and lift. [Laughing] You say, wait a second, give me a choice, I can either lift or I can land. But it's both! Here's your arrival [MB plays] and before you go on, you make a definite lift. [MB demos.] Play the right hand and land and lift. [They play together, and then MB drops out.] And then from here. [MB points to the place in the music. They play together, and MB drops out.] I would say that every time you have two eighth notes followed by a quarter, your quarter needs to be distinctly louder than the two eighth notes. [MB plays, and then they play together.]

MB: That's right. Beautiful. You are basically done with the piece, . . . I'd like to hear it [again] in two weeks from tonight [at their next lesson] but I'd like to have you think about how the music has these little short goals. . . .

Through numerous playing repetitions, Blickenstaff impressed this phrasing goal upon Wendy giving her many opportunities to hear the sound and play with this different technique. The frequent doubling of his sound with her sound allowed her to hear when she was not articulating the quarter notes and self-correct while she continued to play. By the end of the sequence, her sound changed tremendously, and Blickenstaff defined an explicit goal for her last weeks of practice.

### Step-by-step Progression

Blickenstaff provided students with step-by-step instructions to aid their practice on pieces that were in any stage of learning. He guided learning strategies for new pieces, practicing difficult sections, mastering technical gestures for specific passages, and refining small nuances in well-executed performances. This mutable teaching process was reassessed when a student struggled, and in

response to the student, Blickenstaff altered the number of steps and the complexity of each.

Blickenstaff directed the practice procedure for new pieces on a student's assignment. During Sophie's lesson at Blickenstaff's home studio, they began a new piece together.<sup>39</sup> Sophie, an elementary school student playing intermediate literature, studied the rhythm and the qualities of each hand:

MB: Because the rhythm is a little tricky here, how would you count the first measure?

Sophie: 1, 2, 3, 1-ee-and-ah.

MB: 4-ee-and-ah.

Sophie: Oh yeah.

MB: Yeah, you're right. Let's do it.

[They tap and count together on the keyboard cover.]

MB: Now you get that, and you've got the whole piece.

[They tap and count together again.]

They continued tapping the rhythm of the piece, moving on to a contrasting section. Once the rhythm was firmly established in Sophie's ear and hand, Blickenstaff turned to learning the more difficult hand, the right hand:

MB: Would you play the right hand please? [While Sophie plays, MB guides her verbally.] You start there. That's right, and then you go down to a fourth. That's right, and now you scoot your fourth finger over. Good, now you got the notes. Would you play them loudly please?

[They play together loudly. MB counts out loud.]

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39. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Sophie.

MB: Very very good, Sophie. You'll get the fingering here. Evidently the editor wants you to use the 4th finger on those sixteenth notes because there are four notes down, and that fits the hand so well. What's your most obvious fingering for these sixteenth notes?

Sophie: 5th.

MB: Yeah, 5th finger because it's a five-finger pattern. And here you put your thumb, five-finger [pattern going up]. . . . Now, the left hand in the first measure is pretty simple, you've got two notes. Let's hear [MB plays both hands with the counting].

[Sophie plays both hands.]

MB: Almost. You got started out really well.

Because Sophie began to struggle with playing both hands together, Blickenstaff simplified the process having her review the right hand before practicing the left hand.

[Sophie plays and counts the right hand again, and MB counts along.]

MB: It seems like this [pointing to the notes for the left hand] is just made to be blocked. Would you block the first chord?

[Sophie plays, leaving out one note.]

MB: Add the middle note. You've done this in a thousand pieces.

[Sophie continues.]

MB: You're doing so well. I wouldn't dream of adding the right hand to that until I really blocked that and felt good about that. Would you play that as written?

[Sophie starts playing both hands but is stopped immediately.]

MB: Fourth finger [correcting her].

[Sophie continues playing both hands and plays accurately.]



MB: I am so pleased that your sight-reading is developing so well. It wasn't too long ago that you would not have been able to do that. Aren't you proud of that?

Blickenstaff's teaching steps were tap the rhythm, study the right-hand fingering, count and play the right hand, block the left hand, and play with both hands.

Ultimately, Sophie's first exposure to this piece concluded once she successfully read the first phrase and practiced using the steps she was to continue at home.

Through a progressive process governed by Blickenstaff, adult-student Iris learned how to practice and use a rotation technique in Schubert's Impromptu in G-flat Major, Op. 90, No. 3.<sup>40</sup> They began by discussing sound-directed practice:

MB: What are the considerations of practice on this piece?

Iris: Bringing out the melody line obviously, but getting it without sounding harsh, without an edge on the sound. You want a warm sound.

MB: Yeah. And probably part of that same picture is what you do with the accompaniment. And that is, how can you play that light enough? I think the big problem of the Schubert G-flat is what you do with all the inner notes, the broken chord accompaniment. How do you think about that?

Iris: What I think is you have to be light on the key; you don't want to press deeply into the key.

MB: Yeah. Well, I think that's it exactly.

Iris: You stay on the surface.

MB: You stay on the surface of the key. So this goes down into the key [plays melody note] and this is just touching the surface [plays accompaniment figure].

Iris: They need to be even too.

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40. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Iris.

MB: Oh yeah! It is so hard!

Once he confirmed the need for a full tone in the melody and a transparent tone for the accompaniment, he turned their attention to the gesture and practicing:

MB: Does rotation play any role in control of the inner [accompaniment] part?

Iris: Yeah, sure.

MB: It's a little difficult because your hand is so spread out.

Iris: And you're tacked down on one end.

MB: I have always felt that I didn't have a prayer—I've got to feel a little bit of rocking. One thing I have always found helpful there is to feel like I start with a breath of fresh air. [MB demonstrates] I can take a little time to get the right hand started. The trick of this piece is in those little notes. Now, may I suggest a practice that might sound something like this. [MB holds the melody note before arpeggiating the accompaniment notes quickly.] I should be playing that slower. [MB plays again, arpeggiating slowly.] In other words I am giving my hand time to adjust the needs of the arpeggiation.

Iris: Let me watch again.

After Iris observed his approach, Blickenstaff asked her to try the practice technique and modified her execution until they became satisfied with her sound and gesture:

MB: [MB demos again.] Would you try a little bit of that? Take your time; do not play until you are really ready to play, oh it's quiet and soft [MB plays].

[Iris plays.]

MB: Notice that I basically don't hold the top note.

Iris: That's what I was looking to see. I thought you were holding it. You're letting it up.

MB: I'm not sure when I lift it up, but I feel no obligation to that, especially in practice, because my total focus is on how I control [MB plays the

accompaniment]. I don't want to encumber my hand while I'm still trying to control these notes. I can control these notes a lot better if my hand is smaller [not stretched out].

[She plays.]

MB: That's very good. The one thing I'd like to add to that is a bit more breath space between the thumb and the key for the first note. Allow yourself to drop [MB demos].

Iris: [Iris plays.] I feel like I am not following through. I'm doing it, but it's not going into the key.

MB: The purpose of the drop is that when you drop your hand down, the other side of the hand lifts slightly, that means we're getting set up with our rotation. You drop so that you will roll.

[She plays again.]

MB: The drop is not for tone quality, it's to initiate a movement in your hand. We're dropping to say, now hand are you ready to roll? If we are limited to just [MB plays with finger action]. Fingers aren't going to do it! That's not very helpful.

[Iris plays a final time.]

MB: Yes.

The lengthy discussion and numerous performance attempts prepared Iris to play with a suitable gesture and mature sound for this Impromptu. Blickenstaff primed Iris's practice methodology through each progressively difficult step.

### Persistent Repetition

Blickenstaff persisted in his teaching objective and did not hesitate to be fastidious, which often necessitated repeated efforts from students. Blickenstaff clearly articulated if the student had not reached his goal and reframed the activity until successful. This tenacity existed equally between students of varying levels

and with pre-college students and adult hobbyists. All students eventually excelled, rising to his artistic standards, and Blickenstaff never lessened this standard or expressed doubt during periods when students struggled.

Blickenstaff introduced a professional-caliber sound to his students, and he persevered in his instruction until he was pleased with the student's performance. In his lesson with adult-hobbyist Megan, she was in the early stages of learning Chopin's *Andante Spianato*. His objective with Megan was to hear her play a delicate left-hand accompaniment and a singing tone in the right-hand melody:

MB: This may sound like a hokey question. What would you like to feel like when you play this? How would you like your arms to feel?

Megan: [pause] Light.

MB: Good. Because the music just floats.

Megan: Yeah.

MB: Would you play the left hand and feel like you'd like to feel?

Megan: Yeah [MB cues "so light" while she plays. MB plays the melody while she continues with the left hand.]

MB: Beautiful. That's great. And what would you like the right hand to feel like?

Megan: Like it's carrying the melody.

MB: Like it's carrying the melody. It just sings. Now, this is a dumb statement to make, but is a singing tone stiff? No, no, a singing tone is very relaxed.

Megan: Put some vibrato [in it].

MB: [Laughing.] Yes, we could turn the dial and turn on the vibrato machine. I'd like to have you put your hand down on the keyboard and imagine that that finger is going to produce a singing sound and it's relaxed.

[Megan plays the right hand.]

MB: Easy. As far as the legatos concerned, I'd like for you to produce the sound that has the least amount of hammer attack onto it. What can you do to disguise [it]?

Megan: Stroke it.

MB: Exactly. Disguise the hammer attack.

[Megan plays again.]

MB: Well that's too much attack!

[She plays.]

MB: You know what I'd do is start the piece with the third finger.

[She plays.]

MB: And then you can substitute [the fingers] so that you have plenty of hand. Now do that once again and see if you can give us a bit more sound, but still be very sensitive to whether the key is a fast key or a slow key. We want slow keys.

[Megan plays and MB sings with her.]

MB: Wow! [Megan continues and finishes the melodic line.]

MB: Now, the C, I don't know whether it is this piano or if it is your finger. [MB plays the C.] I think it's the piano, you have to forgive yourself sometimes. You have a good piano at home. You ask yourself, can you distinguish in your ear between fast sound that has too much edge on it and a beautiful singing sound?

In this segment with Megan, she easily performed the left hand with the delicate tone quality that Blickenstaff sought. When they concentrated on the right hand, Blickenstaff tenaciously listened for a singing tone; upon the *fifth* attempt, Megan performed with this desirable tone. Blickenstaff did not allow Megan to complete the melody until the sound was exact; on the first four attempts, Blickenstaff

stopped Megan to clarify the sound, the fingering, and how to depress the key.

Therefore Megan's first complete performance had the ideal sound.

During Blickenstaff's lessons, repetition was also utilized to solidify a correct performance. Blickenstaff instructed students to repeat sections of their music, often three times, as a model for practice, which allowed students to feel the benefits of repetition during the lesson. The researcher was surprised by the frequency of practice repetitions with students of all levels; Blickenstaff did not assume that any pianist, even those of advanced abilities, did not need this type of teacher-directed reinforcement.

#### Repositioning the Student

Blickenstaff used a hands-on approach to teaching position and technique, touching students to modify their posture and hands as needed. Blickenstaff handled students in two different ways: Blickenstaff guided a student's hand or arm during playing, and Blickenstaff's students placed their hands upon his to feel a gesture. Typically, Blickenstaff first showed the student how the gesture looks when he plays. If the student did not succeed through observation alone, Blickenstaff turned to repositioning and guiding the student's hand.

Blickenstaff's gestural method of playing the piano often necessitated him to adjust the student's hand and arm motions. For instance, in Rose's lesson, she learned how to play her Hanon exercise using an "out around" gesture:<sup>41</sup>

MB: You are so advanced that there are two ways I want you to play the Hanon. And you're doing the one way really well: finger, finger, finger. Would you play it that fast, every finger.

[MB demos, and they play together. Rose plays on her own.]

MB: That's why you play your sonatinas so well, the Benda and the C.P.E. Bach, because those fingers are so active. Now, I'd like to show you another way the Hanon is just ideal for. Every now and then we talk about out around, and I label it a big OA in your music. Now that means your wrist goes that way [MB shows the circular movement]. The Hanon is ideal for that.

[MB plays and sings, "drop and then it's out around." Rose begins, and MB guides her wrist.]

MB: Okay. Now, I want you to play the left hand on the way down and notice it's exactly the same thing.

[MB shows the left hand, and they play together.]

MB: That's fantastic. Now, start both thumbs on middle C and let the left hand go down and the right hand go up [MB shows and sings as before, Rose tries and stops.] You're fine! [MB guides her wrists as she plays].

MB: Beautiful. I'd like to have you work on that, and I only want you to do it in C major and I only want you to do it in contrary motion. [MB writes on her assignment.]

Blickenstaff first steered Rose's right wrist to modify the circular feeling of the "out around" gesture. Rose easily applied the gesture to her left hand without the need for physical guidance. Yet, when she played with hands together, the gesture was

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41. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Rose.

no longer natural; Blickenstaff held both of her wrists and conducted the movement. This type of physical repositioning was used only when necessary, if the student did not experience the gesture independently.

### **Style of Communication and Interaction**

Blickenstaff communicated ideas to students in two main manners, one that was concise and directive and one that was long and descriptive. These two modes of communication served different purposes. Directive language was used for quick instructions during coaching sessions or during an introduction of a new concept. Lengthy descriptions were used to preface and conclude a teaching segment (for an example of lengthy description, see the segment from Henry's lesson and Kim's lesson in Score Study). Both styles of instruction were utilized with all students.

Concise instructive language was delivered to students using imperatives, strongly-worded statements, and short questions. The clear, pointed, and compact nature of Blickenstaff's instructive phrases was impressive. Examples include the following:

"Change the pedal for the changing notes." Cathy

"I really feel that this is out of the question." [In reference to a student's use of pedaling in a Classical sonata.] Iris

"Play the left hand and observe the length of the notes." Beth

"The secret of the piece is the lightness of the inner notes." Iris

"I don't hear Kabalevsky's music here." Kim



“Sight-read this please.” Neil

“Louder, we’re practicing.” Wendy

“I want you to circle all the rests that come after a note.” Olivia

“Your parents are impressed only with steadiness.” PEPS Repertoire Class  
[Feedback to a class activity which is in preparation for a class that parents will observe]

“Lift [the pedal] when you say ‘R’ of word rest.” Faye

“Who controls the crescendo? It truly is the left hand.” Kim

“I am sorry [pulling Zach’s hands off the keyboard], but both hands have to go up together. . . . Thank you.”

“That last chord is what? [Grace corrects a wrong note] Thank you.”

Lessons filled with strong imperatives and concise directions could feel cold and domineering to a student. To soften the use of imperatives and directions, Blickenstaff used this communicative style in moderation, occasionally said “please” to his students, and interspersed humor and creative language during these sessions. When a student had made a careless error (especially if it had been previously addressed), Blickenstaff spoke in a pointed, strict tone; he followed this by saying stiffly and strongly, “Thank you.”

#### Frequent Use of Student Name and Eye Contact

While conversing with a student, Blickenstaff regularly used the student’s name and gave direct eye contact. Student names were used in varied contexts, including when students were given praise and when Blickenstaff wanted to emphasize an idea. In his classes with multiple students, Blickenstaff called

students by name in order to involve all students equally and to maintain a fast pace to the class content. In the PEPS classes, Blickenstaff also spoke to each student individually to commend their progress since the prior class. Eye contact was continual and direct; the principal investigator was surprised by the frequency of direct eye contact and discerned a strong connection between Blickenstaff and his students. The trustful relationship between Blickenstaff and his students was confirmed through this congenial and respectful interaction.

#### Use of “We,” “You,” and the Music

An environment of team work and individual responsibility was instilled in the lesson through Blickenstaff’s balanced use of “we” and “you.” Blickenstaff said “we” when he and the student were working together to solve issues, whereas he said “you” when he gave the student an assignment or goal. In a lesson with Janette, Blickenstaff said to her “We’ve got to really roll up our sleeves and get that going right,” as he referred to a section in a sonata that she performed with a wavering pulse.<sup>42</sup> Blickenstaff provided her with the understanding and the tools for practice, as he and Janette played and counted together. Blickenstaff switched from referring to the student-teacher duo to placing independent responsibility on the student. He instructed Janette, “You must count [pause], and you can prove that you can do that at home.” The responsibility for practice and review was passed from the in-lesson team to the student for home practice.

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42. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Janette.

Blickenstaff, rather than itemizing what the student had and had not mastered, discussed a vast majority of musical suggestions from the standpoint of the music. When Blickenstaff wanted to explore a musical marking that was overlooked by the student, he would not point out the oversight, but rather he stated what the music needed to be expressive. For instance, Blickenstaff concentrated on Danielle's lack of crescendo in Beethoven's Rondo in C in this manner:<sup>43</sup>

This is a very dramatic section. It's kind of dark and mean spirited. You don't know quite what's going to happen. And out of the middle of all that . . . C minor to E-flat major, darkness and threat to a kind of a tune that says there is hope for us. [MB plays the melody in E-flat major.] It's a very positive statement. And then this line in here turns that positive statement—and I think the pivot note is that one right there, because you don't know what's going to happen after that note right there—and it gets darker and darker and leads us back into this terrible despair and tragedy. [MB plays the music as it transitions into the C minor section.] And we're back to this big stuff. This line basically here is a crescendo line, and its turning niceness into ugliness.

This language (one without over emphasis on the student or the teacher) kept the focus upon the music and the expression, without attacking the student's preparation or playing. Blickenstaff gave a compelling explanation or picture of the musical marking, as he did with Danielle, explaining how the mood of the music changes and how the crescendo impacts this change. While it may have been more time-efficient to tell the student to crescendo, Blickenstaff's imaginative language

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43. Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Danielle, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff's Home Studio, November 16, 2009).

was particularly captivating, and coupled with his contextual guidance, critiques became memorable, inspiring, and never chastening.

To further spotlight the music rather than the student, Blickenstaff discussed the composer's and listener's perspectives. In the same lesson with Danielle, Blickenstaff addressed her musicianship through an appeal to Beethoven's choice of notes and musical markings:<sup>44</sup>

Wide leaps represent a distance that takes time to cover. You can't just play [MB demos in a strict tempo] because Beethoven wrote that to say "I'm going from low to very high." That's Beethoven's highest note on his piano. He didn't have a note that's higher. He's going for the ultimate. You may not play [MB plays strict again]. You've got to play it like its struggling. [MB demos the expressive approach.] . . .

The fermata is everything. He [Beethoven] says now you're going to slow down first. [MB demos the slowing down and the fermata.] It's almost like you're asking a question, "How should I end this piece," or "Do I know where I'm supposed to go?" It's like you're pausing at a crossroads, and you look, "Should I go right should I go left, what should I do?" And you try down here [MB plays the music where it changes keys], and you're still not decided. And he says, "I like the flat side of things." [MB plays the next section in another new key.] This is fine for a while, and then he finds that he is off onto a whole different scenery here [MB points to next section in the music.] . . .

Blickenstaff referred to the music and the composer more frequently than addressing the student directly. As in the example above, "you" was a generic reference to the perspective of the performer, without directly implicating the student. Discussing how a listener hears the music and the goals of the composer

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44. Ibid.

were additional strategies that Blickenstaff used when exploring interpretation and suggesting changes.

When Blickenstaff perceived carelessness in the student's playing, he pointedly stated the issue yet avoided placing the student as the subject. Instead of saying "You have been careless," he said, "That's capital C careless," to Danielle in response to her lack of phrasing at the end of a melody. He continued, "that's beneath your ability," and had her repeat the phrase. In these moments of frank criticism, Blickenstaff most often placed the student's performance as the subject of his discussion rather than give the student accusative and punitive feedback.

#### Individual Communication Styles in Students

In the numerous lessons observed, the varied temperaments of each student were apparent because Blickenstaff allowed students to respond individualistically. For instance, students such as Neil who were reserved rarely talked during lessons and communicated largely non-verbally. Yet, outgoing students such as Iris regularly stated their ideas and opinions during lessons. With some students such as Olivia, Blickenstaff kept the lesson light-hearted and jocular. With other students such as Grace, Blickenstaff kept the lesson more rigorous and demure. This was not dependent upon the age or playing level of the student, but rather was a direct response to the personality of the pianist. But regardless of the student's personality, there was always open communication between student and teacher.

### Responsiveness to Student Input

Blickenstaff's students stated their own opinions, sought guidance, asked questions spontaneously, and responded to Blickenstaff's questioning. At the same time, students viewed Blickenstaff as the master teacher and deferred to his judgment. For instance, advanced students sought out his opinion for a fingering or practice technique. In Danielle's lesson, fingering was addressed frequently during her work on a Mozart Sonata, both by Blickenstaff and by Danielle.<sup>45</sup> He insisted on fingerings for chromatic scale passages, and they altered the editorial fingerings in numerous passages. In one section, Danielle initiated a conversation and asked if she could use her own fingering. Blickenstaff studied her fingering: "Your own fingering might be great. Let's try it! . . . Yes, you use your own fingering . . . Write it in!" Later in the lesson while working on a piece by Chopin, Danielle spontaneously asked for guidance, "I was wondering about this page, too. . . . How should I practice this?" Without hesitation, Blickenstaff responded and directed Danielle through a practice technique.

In the lessons of the three elementary students observed by the researcher (Faye, Phoebe, and Zach), the students stated with pride what they had accomplished and expressed interest in learning new music.<sup>46</sup> In Zach's lesson, he

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45. Ibid.

46. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Faye; Marvin Blickenstaff, Lesson of Phoebe, DVD created by author (Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff's Home Studio, November 19, 2009); Blickenstaff, Lesson of Zach.

boasted, “I think I kind of memorized [an assigned piece],” and Blickenstaff heard his memorized performance. In Phoebe’s lesson, they reviewed items from her prior assignment, and after she tapped and counted “Forest Murmurs,” Blickenstaff asked her to play the piece. She responded, “On the assignment sheet from last week you wrote only to tap and count.” Blickenstaff exclaimed, “Oh, that’s right! I told you last week only to tap and count, and it’s because this rhythm is so hard. You have done a perfectly wonderful job.” Elementary-student Phoebe expressed a desire to learn more Christmas music, and Blickenstaff asked her to select her favorite song from her Christmas book. All three of these students expressed their accomplishments and opinions freely, and Blickenstaff considered and acceded to their input.

#### Acceptance of Student Feelings

Blickenstaff acknowledged and accepted his students’ feelings and outlooks, even when they countered his instructional agenda. When students want to prematurely complete a piece, Blickenstaff listens to the student’s opinion (rather than dismissing it as unimportant) and follows up with his perspective. He does not let the student remove the piece from the practice assignment but clarifies what they will learn from the piece under contention.<sup>47</sup> He explains to the student

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47. Sara M. Ernst, 2009, Field Notes, Blickenstaff’s Home Studio, Collegeville, PA.

that they are obliged to meet this learning objective, and once this is accomplished, they will begin new repertoire.

It can also occur during music study that a student prefers a specific musical style and expresses dislike of assigned repertoire, and these preferences can be challenging for piano teachers. As the researcher observed during Alex's lesson, Blickenstaff responded to this adult student's dislike of an arrangement of "Old Time Religion" through a lesson sequence of intense focus on the music.<sup>48</sup> They deconstructed the syncopated rhythms, solidified the hand positions and fingering in difficult sections, and completed several practice repetitions. Blickenstaff played the piece for Alex and described how the piece embodied the "revival-tent style." Through Blickenstaff's persistence and enthusiasm, Alex's perspective changed; at the outset Alex said, "I'm not crazy about this piece," and by the end, he expressed an interest in the style and sound. Blickenstaff spent considerable lesson time endorsing the piece and ensuring the student understood the skills needed for independent practice.

Blickenstaff required students to perform artistically and expand their listening and technical abilities, and often, it resulted in moments when students struggled to achieve the sound. Students expressed, either verbally or non-verbally, how challenging it was to imitate Blickenstaff's performance. In Beth's lesson, they spent approximately ten minutes working on the first phrase of a

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48. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Alex.



Mozart sonata.<sup>49</sup> The complexity of this opening stemmed from the voicing and tone production for the two-note intervals in the right hand, pacing the diminuendo, and utilizing a light connecting pedal. Her posture sank as it became obvious that she was not matching Blickenstaff's sound. He responded by acknowledging the difficulty, which encouraged her to continue trying: "That is so hard because the melody has to sound independent. It has to sound like its two hands. . . ." Blickenstaff had Beth practice with numerous techniques, pinpointing the next step and needed improvements at each juncture, and Beth responded positively to his methodology. Blickenstaff restated several times how difficult this process is, and he affirmed her progress and the resultant beautiful sound.

#### Balance between Lecturing and Questioning

Blickenstaff's clear and strong opinions on all matters of playing were balanced with moments where students were challenged to make a personal decision. He did not always give the answers or provide a definitive solution, and students were responsive to these times of collective brainstorming. For example, Olivia and Blickenstaff explored the expression in Anton Benda's Sonatina in A Minor.<sup>50</sup> They discussed how to play the cross-hand section where the left hand of the pianist carries the melody:

[Olivia plays the B section.]

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49. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Beth.

50. Blickenstaff, Lesson of Olivia.

MB: I think that's very good. Actually the left hand is truly the soloist here, [MB plays] until right here. We want [MB plays with the left hand louder].

[Olivia plays with the left hand louder.]

MB: Could you decide how staccato you want [MB plays the left hand] and then make those always the same.

Olivia: Well, you don't want it [pause], like [pause]. I don't want it like really staccato like this [she plays a single key].

MB: Show me. Can you play the sound?

[She plays.]

MB: That's pretty short! If that's what you want, that's okay because he does write staccato.

Olivia: I don't want that.

MB: You don't want that, well why'd you do it? [laughing]

Olivia: I'm just saying I don't like that.

MB: What do you want?

Olivia: I don't want it too legato either. I would say [she plays again with longer staccato notes].

MB: Wonderful, I like that. I think that's very nice. I have a question, is the high C louder than the treble C, are they the same, or is it a little bit softer?

Olivia: Louder?

MB: Try it.

[Olivia plays.]

MB: Okay, would you try it a little softer? [MB demos softer C.]

[Olivia tries the softer high C.]

MB: Do you like that sound?

[Olivia nods.]

MB: Do you prefer that sound?

Olivia: Yeah! Because if you make the top one louder it doesn't sound good to go [she plays.]

MB: I agree. I am so glad you experimented with that and changed your mind about that. Would you mark something in the score to indicate that this is quieter than that. . . .

[Olivia writes in the book.]

Blickenstaff encouraged Olivia to make musical decisions regarding the quality of the staccato and the dynamic plan for the phrase. He was prepared to accept her decision to perform extremely short staccato notes, but then realized he had misunderstood her; she had demonstrated what she did not like. Following each decision, Blickenstaff affirmed her choice. Having Olivia notate her decision in the score signified that her musical decisions were equally as important as his. At times, Blickenstaff was overtly directive, yet he always created a student-centered environment by engaging self-reflection at key teaching moments.

### **Summary**

Blickenstaff's lessons at his home studio and the New School for Music Study were musically-centered, dynamic, and filled with learning. These pre-college and adult hobbyist students were active participants in the lessons and finished each lesson with a carefully-prepared new assignment. Blickenstaff explored musicality and performing expressively with every piece and managed to infuse the lessons with theoretical knowledge through technical exercises. The students learned how to interpret the music, study the score, play expressively

with the best technique, practice efficiently, and improve their skill of reading. Student errors were consistently corrected although Blickenstaff encouraged self-correction and did not reprimand students for inaccuracies. Additional elements included in the lessons were gestures for playing with ease, posture and position, hand and finger shape, effective fingering choices, pedaling, and music history. Blickenstaff's guidance was detailed, specific, and always responsive to the needs and input of the student. The interactions between student and teacher were supported through Blickenstaff's direct eye contact and frequent use of student's first names. He allowed for the lesson to be infused with the personal style of the student, allowing some to remain serious and others to be playful. Although the lessons were teacher-directed, they were student-centered and musically-oriented because of his continual appeal to the art of sound creation and his humanistic interactions with students.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SUMMARY, LEGACY, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Marvin Blickenstaff's career as a music educator and piano pedagogue spans over fifty years. Through Blickenstaff's numerous faculty positions, continual maintenance of a teaching studio, career as a workshop presenter, and leadership roles, his contributions to pianists and teachers and to the growth of piano pedagogy as an academic pursuit are extensive. This chapter addresses the research questions posed in Chapter I, presented as the subheadings of each section. Blickenstaff's contributions to the field of piano pedagogy, his career, and his philosophy of music education are synthesized into Blickenstaff's legacy as a music educator. Suggestions for future research conclude this final chapter.

#### **Summary of Blickenstaff's Philosophy and Pedagogy**

*What is Blickenstaff's philosophy of piano playing and piano teaching and how has this changed throughout his career?*

Music is defined by Blickenstaff as "organized sound that is expressive of the entire scope of human experience and emotion."<sup>1</sup> It is thus important to Blickenstaff that all students are taught how to project expressive musical ideas and to connect to the power of musical sound. Blickenstaff speaks about the importance of music passionately, believing that music nourishes the soul. He

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1. Marvin Blickenstaff, Response to Sound, Workshop Lecture Notes.

posits that this conviction has grown throughout his career. The music that Blickenstaff has always been most connected to is Western European classical music, and it is this music that he aspires to teach his students. Nonetheless, Blickenstaff utilizes a wide variety of educational music in his teaching repertoire, especially in his instruction of young beginners and elementary students. The music he teaches is music he believes is innately expressive; ultimately, his goal is to educate students in music of the master classical composers. Even with his youngest students and with the simplest pieces, Blickenstaff champions musical expression as the *non plus ultra* of piano study. Because of this firm belief, all skills and knowledge are taught in service of musical sound.

Blickenstaff believes that piano lessons should be offered to any student who has a desire to learn. His roster of piano students thus includes all ages and abilities, even though his prominent career could justify him teaching only the most talented students. He does not audition students, nor turn any away, if he has an open space in his schedule. Blickenstaff avows that all students can be successful in piano study and maintains his artistic standards equally across all levels and ages of students. To ensure each student's success, he teaches a comprehensive skill set and knowledge base that cultivates student autonomy.

A model teacher is defined by Blickenstaff as an individual who is educated, committed to music education, and enjoys giving their expertise to students. Throughout his career, Blickenstaff has insisted that pianists must learn how to teach and is an avid supporter of pedagogical training. Beyond being educated in

pedagogy, teachers need to be active musicians who are practicing, but Blickenstaff does not insist that all piano teachers need to be high-level performers. More importantly, the knowledge and skill of a teacher must be passed on to the next generation, and hence, Blickenstaff is adamant that teachers be open and giving of their craft to their students. According to Blickenstaff, exuding a passion for music and for learning is crucial for the success of piano teaching, and demonstrating a sincere concern and appreciation for each student is essential for building an effective relationship with him or her.

Blickenstaff values musical study for both its intrinsic and extrinsic benefits. The crux of musical studies is the cultural heritage that is passed on from one generation to the next, and Blickenstaff takes this responsibility seriously. Composers and their musical scores fascinate Blickenstaff, and he devotes significant lesson time to analyzing these compositions. This process of learning music and making music at the piano is intrinsically motivating, and Blickenstaff believes that this is the foundation of a student's desire to take piano lessons. Extrinsic to the music itself, he regards music study as an avenue for personal growth and for learning about oneself. Blickenstaff has demonstrated the importance of life-long learning through his consistent practicing and regular performances. A teacher, according to Blickenstaff, thus becomes a model in many ways for the student.

Central to Blickenstaff's philosophy is the student-teacher relationship. A collaborative spirit is fostered in his lessons, so that learning and improvement is a

mutual goal of both student and teacher. Blickenstaff cultivates a warm, affirming relationship with his students, and while he is respected, he does not think the teacher should be a figure of intimidation. Affirmation is essential to establishing this relationship, and Blickenstaff understands that students must feel respected by the teacher in order for a productive learning environment to result.

Blickenstaff believes that teachers must indicate to students what they are doing well; teachers can then be honest and serious in their negative critiques.

Blickenstaff demonstrates that these critical remarks are most effective when they are benevolent and followed by helping the student achieve the new goal. To further encourage continued growth, Blickenstaff maintains that student successes must be outwardly and enthusiastically celebrated by the teacher.

Blickenstaff enjoys the learning process, establishes a formidable learning environment, and uses key teaching techniques to facilitate ease of learning. His lessons are filled with mutual enjoyment of music making and learning, and Blickenstaff attests to the fact that the lesson should feel fun. Students' minds need to be stimulated and new goals need to be set in each lesson, so that students feel compelled to practice. Furthermore, Blickenstaff believes that learning is demanding at times; if teachers provide the necessary tools, challenges can motivate students to reach a greater potential. From Blickenstaff's viewpoint, the teacher provides all the necessary structure for piano study, which includes working closely with parents of pre-college students to guide the practice at home. Blickenstaff gives teachers the responsibility to plan lessons in advance and to



prepare detailed lesson assignments. From his standpoint, a structured learning environment results in students who can accomplish goals.

Blickenstaff's distinct viewpoints on how humans learn result in recurrent teaching strategies. In order to overcome challenges in repertoire and learning new technical abilities, students are led by Blickenstaff through a series of steps, in which they are given a performance model to imitate, technical gestures, and practice strategies. This same step-by-step and guided approach is part of Blickenstaff's piano pedagogy curriculum, as he believes that teachers can improve their instructional methods if given detailed guidance. He instructs via observation and discovery because it is an efficient mode of learning whereby the teacher models for and questions the student. Allowing students to observe and discover new concepts creates a learning environment completely structured by the teacher while remaining wholly centered on the student. Blickenstaff believes the power of this instructional mode is most important in the beginning years of study and most powerful when students learn from their peers and learn new concepts via prior knowledge. Exaggerated activities, such as learning to read on a large staff and learning to play a waltz by dancing a waltz, also aid comprehension. Blickenstaff speaks descriptively in his instruction because content thus becomes engaging and memorable for the student. The most important teaching strategy for the growth of student autonomy, according to Blickenstaff, is the use of foundational principles. He uses a principle-based approach to teaching musicality, technique,

and how to learn, so that the ideas he teaches in one lesson can be applied by the student in their future studies.

*What are the teaching techniques and learning content of Blickenstaff's lessons?*

The learning content and pedagogical approach of Blickenstaff was remarkably congruent throughout his lessons with a vast range of students. Regardless of whether the student was a child or adult hobbyist or whether a beginner or an advanced player, Blickenstaff stressed the same content and required the same excellence. In all of his lessons, Blickenstaff addressed expression and interpretation, score study, sound ideal, keyboard theory, and practice techniques. Rhythm was isolated frequently, and students were required to use solidifying practice techniques to correct rhythmic errors. Reading musical notation was discussed through shape and pattern. Blickenstaff's style of correcting errors was nonpunitive because it was addressed during the broad study of the musical score, as a single aspect within the larger goal of making the music more expressive. Blickenstaff taught students a gestural approach to technique, required a rounded hand shape, and was meticulous with student's choices for fingerings. Students were expected to know general historical facts about the composers and the music they studied.

Blickenstaff's lessons were filled with six distinct teaching techniques, and at least five of them were employed in every lesson. The five recurrent instructional methods were active coaching, continual modeling, playing together,

step-by-step progressions, and persistent repetition. Blickenstaff's coaching style consisted of a complete work-through of a piece, often at a slower than performance tempo, and resulted in the student's sound changing dramatically. Modeling was used frequently, often in brief demonstrations of a sound or a technique, and when Blickenstaff gave lengthy verbal descriptions, modeling was used to augment and amplify his idea. Students' performances were often accompanied by Blickenstaff's playing, and teacher-student duets were incorporated in the lessons of elementary students. Blickenstaff personalized stepwise instruction for the student enabling mastery of complex skills and concepts. Students were asked to repeat sections of music, as Blickenstaff guided them through practice techniques, and he persisted toward the desired result even when it required many attempts. Only when it was necessary, Blickenstaff repositioned the student's hand or guided the student's physical gesture.

*How does Blickenstaff's philosophy of piano playing and teaching manifest itself in his teaching techniques and the learning content?*

Blickenstaff's actions during lessons and classes were absolutely consistent with his spoken and written philosophy. Music is the source of his inspiration and was at the core of his lessons. His teaching appeared effortless, and his consistent approaches to instruction were streamlined for success. Because he has such a comprehensive curriculum and effective teaching methods, all of his lessons flowed naturally and contained significant learning. Student growth and musical expression was palpable, as was his love for his students and his commitment to

music education. It is impossible to determine which preceded the other, a grounded philosophy or superb teaching. Each of Blickenstaff's beliefs about music education at the piano was born out in his teaching and is a testament to how exceptional teaching is grounded in a multifaceted and profound philosophy. While he is embarrassed that he only had one official pedagogy course, his abilities as a pianist and educator have grown from what he described as the "school of hard knocks"<sup>2</sup> and have evolved out of a deep desire to be an effective music educator.

Blickenstaff demonstrated an honest and keen sense of self-evaluation throughout the interviews. Specifically, Blickenstaff stated several concerns about his teaching: not holding group lessons for his students in his home studio, insufficient step-by-step lesson planning for individual lessons, not devoting enough thought to selecting the perfect repertoire for students, lack of discovery learning with advanced students, and infrequent assigning of modern music in his student's repertoire (music from the latter half of the 20th century and beyond). The principal investigator observed how Blickenstaff outwardly addressed one stated flaw; he altered his schedule to begin providing repertoire classes in his home studio. Furthermore, several of his stated concerns were, in the opinion of the researcher, exaggerated by Blickenstaff. A notable amount of discovery learning occurred with advanced students, which was balanced with Blickenstaff's style of lecture and use of principles. Lesson planning occurred before every

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2. Marvin Blickenstaff, interviewed by author, Interview 5 of 6 (Collegeville, PA, November 20, 2009).

lesson, during which Blickenstaff considered repertoire and prepared the assignment (although this did not include a detailed lesson plan). With nearly every student, repertoire was at a suitable difficulty level, which is indicative of Blickenstaff's skill of repertoire selection.<sup>3</sup> Student's repertoire was generally balanced between styles albeit with less emphasis on modern-era music, yet Blickenstaff's utilization of recent collections such as the *Celebration Series* enabled him to incorporate some contemporary selections with early intermediate students. Blickenstaff did not assume that his philosophical aims were thoroughly born out in his teaching, but rather he possessed a desire to continue striving towards his utopian vision of piano study. Undoubtedly, Blickenstaff's modest and unassuming attitude was indicative of a sincere respect for the challenge of excellence in music education even as he continues into his sixth decade of teaching.

### **Legacy of Marvin Blickenstaff**

*What personal, musical, and professional events and experiences led Blickenstaff to become a pianist, teacher, and pedagogue?*

During his pre-college education, Blickenstaff grew into an individual who defined himself as a pianist and wanted to major in music in college. While his early piano education in Nampa, Idaho, with local teachers was average, his studies

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3. The only student for whom the repertoire was notably unbalanced was Elaina. The personal goals of Elaina led Blickenstaff to include a specific piece on her assignment that was significantly more difficult than the others. For a discussion of this student, see Chapter V, Intrinsic Motivation of the Music.

with Fern Nolte Davidson, beginning in the eighth grade (ca. 1947) and continuing through his first year at the College of Idaho, were highly motivating and challenging. Blickenstaff credits Davidson for providing him with a solid technique, teaching him an impressive quantity of music, giving him many varied performing opportunities including duo performances with a peer student, and encouraging him to excel at the piano. Davidson's mentorship is apparent through Blickenstaff's frequent references to her when he discusses his philosophy and teaching.

During his post-secondary education and studies in Germany, Blickenstaff grew into an independent, expert pianist and began his career as a college professor. His undergraduate years at Oberlin College Conservatory of Music (1956–59) provided him with years of focused practice, a solid understanding of keyboard literature under the tutelage of Emil Danenburg, and his first introduction into piano teaching in his only pedagogy course with Janet Russell Owens. Following Oberlin, Blickenstaff studied abroad in Germany where he discovered his own voice as a pianist. At Indiana University (1960–61), Blickenstaff established himself as a high-functioning performer. He completed his Master's degree in three semesters under the guidance of professor Béla Böszormenyi-Nagy. Following his graduation, Blickenstaff was a professor of piano and pedagogy at McPherson College (1961–63) and Fort Hays Kansas State College (1963–65), and from this point forward, he began to teach regularly alongside his engagements as a performer.

Blickenstaff moved to New York City (1965–69) because he desired to refine his pianism, and it was during this period that he discovered his abilities as a presenter. He pursued studies with Wolfgang Rosé, taught at the Stecher and Horowitz School of Music, and was employed by the publisher Carl Fischer Music. Beginning in his New York City years, Blickenstaff began to regularly give workshops to teachers through his work at Carl Fischer. This time period culminated with a debut recital that was enthusiastically reviewed in the New York Times. He left New York to continue his career as a professor of piano and piano pedagogy at a prominent university, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

*What did Blickenstaff's work contribute to piano students, piano pedagogy students, and colleagues while a faculty member at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Goshen College?*

During Blickenstaff's years at UNC-CH (1969–78), he established himself as an active faculty member through his engagements as a performer, clinician, author, and teacher. The piano faculty at UNC-CH worked collaboratively and were under his chairmanship from 1970 to 1974. The faculty maintained balanced rosters of undergraduate and graduate students in their studios and divided the academic course duties. Blickenstaff taught piano pedagogy and began his intensive pedagogy curriculum. The course included a demonstration class in which the pedagogy students observed Blickenstaff teach a group of beginners followed by the student teachers instructing the same children in individual lessons. Blickenstaff performed solo and/or collaborative recitals every year,

which he has continued throughout the majority of his career. His engagements as a clinician became increasingly frequent, and he administered UNC-CH's summer workshop for teachers (Piano Clinic), both of which increased the reputation of the Music Department. He co-authored *Music Pathways* (first edition published in 1974, revised in 1983), a pioneering method for young pianists that combined multi-key and intervallic approaches to learning. His piano pedagogy students witnessed the creation of *Music Pathways*.

Following his position at UNC-CH, Blickenstaff worked at Goshen College in Indiana for over two decades (1978–99) and began to develop a national and international stature in the field of piano pedagogy. Blickenstaff had a stellar reputation at Goshen through his active performing and practicing schedule, and students felt honored to be part of his piano studio; his studio roster included undergraduate piano majors, music majors, and non-music majors. The piano pedagogy curriculum at Goshen was comprehensive, and through his pedagogy course, he taught his most effective classes to young beginners, in which *Music Pathways* was used. Blickenstaff increased the prominence of the Piano Workshop, which was collaboratively presented by the piano faculty, by inviting national figures of piano and pedagogy to the college; the enrollment of the Piano Workshop steadily increased throughout his administration of this summer event for teachers and students. Blickenstaff, as a part-time professor who did not work on Fridays, travelled frequently around the country as a clinician for piano teacher seminars and conferences. His professional engagements included being a



presenter for the International Workshop (1988–2004), an associate editor for the national magazine *Keyboard Companion* (1990–2004), and an author of the three editions of *Handbook for Teachers* for Frederick Harris Music. In addition, he frequently presented at the Music Teachers National Association Conference independently and through showcases of publishers Frederick Harris and Carl Fischer.

*How was the core content of Blickenstaff's piano pedagogy classes at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Goshen College related to his teaching strategies and philosophy of teaching?*

The teaching strategies and philosophy of teaching that Blickenstaff espoused in his piano pedagogy courses were in accordance with his actual practice as a piano teacher. The college students in his pedagogy courses admired his commitment to the profession, his love of music, and his enthusiasm for learning. He cultivated collaborative relationships with his pedagogy students, as they worked together to educate the young beginners in the demonstration class. His pedagogy courses began with a discussion of how music is the expression of the human experience through organized sound. He displayed through his demonstration classes that all students can be taught piano and that knowledge and skill are the foundation of success. Because of Blickenstaff's commitment to a solid foundation, he spent considerable time and effort preparing an effective curriculum and lesson plan for each of his demonstration classes.

Blickenstaff gave tremendous amounts of time to these pedagogy students through his numerous observations of their lessons and his copious written notes. In his evaluations of their teaching, Blickenstaff shared his philosophy and teaching techniques, providing the student teachers with pragmatic solutions and the larger philosophical aims of centering piano lessons on making music and transmitting a cultural heritage. He was both brutally honest with the student teachers regarding their ineffective teaching and celebratory of strong teaching and their successes with the young beginners.

The pedagogy courses were carefully structured by Blickenstaff to provide appropriate and meaningful activities and experiences for the pedagogy students. His college students reported learning a tremendous amount about teaching and feeling challenged by his requirements. The curriculum was wholly established by Blickenstaff for the demonstration class, and he led the pedagogy students through the entire first-year curriculum giving them the specific guidance they needed to teach the individual lessons. The student teachers were given ample opportunities to observe his teaching and the learning process of the young beginners. Blickenstaff also guided the evaluation process, assigning year-end evaluations of the young beginners to the student teachers. All of these actual teaching experiences were augmented by lectures on common teaching techniques and by academic coursework. For instance, he lectured on preparation-presentation-reinforcement and the introduction of new repertoire and assigned readings by various pedagogues and reviews of educational piano music. Blickenstaff

introduced other basic pedagogical principles such as the value of off-the-bench activities and his curriculum TERRAC.

*What are Blickenstaff's major contributions to the education of pianists and piano teachers as a result of his workshops and publications?*

Blickenstaff has presented workshops and masterclasses nationally and internationally for piano teachers since the late 1960s. His first workshops were sponsored by Carl Fischer Music, and his engagements for this publisher mushroomed in the mid-1970s and early 1980s upon their publication of *Music Pathways*. Blickenstaff, at both UNC-CH and Goshen, administrated a summer workshop for piano teachers and students. His prominence increased through his presentations for the national conference of the Music Teachers National Association and through him being guest artist for conferences of MTNA's state affiliates. His international engagements began in 1988 with the International Workshop, which brought Blickenstaff's presentations to several European countries and Canada (1988-2004). He was also invited to New Zealand in 1995 and 2004. Most recently, he has been featured in showcases of Frederick Harris, as a guest artist at state conferences of MTNA, and as a presenter and masterclass artist at the National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy. Susan See, independent music teacher, summarized the legacy of his workshops: "He has inspired more than one generation of teachers to show their love for music as they are trying to

teach these students.”<sup>4</sup> Karen Zorn, a student of Blickenstaff at Goshen, realized the impact of his workshop career: “There are so many piano teachers, music teachers in this country, who went back to drink from the Marvin Blickenstaff well a lot of times because they got something. It had to be they walked away feeling that they themselves were worth it. . . . It’s huge!”<sup>5</sup>

In addition, Blickenstaff’s pedagogical wisdom is available to teachers across the country through his publications. *Music Pathways*, the piano method authored by Blickenstaff, Louise Bianchi, and Lynn Freeman Olson, explored a new approach to beginning piano study. He wrote for *Keyboard Companion* (currently published as *Clavier Companion*) as associate editor for fifteen years, from the magazine’s inception in 1990 until 2004. Elvina Truman Pearce, Editor-in-Chief of *Keyboard Companion* from 2000 to 2006, summarized Blickenstaff’s ability to give teachers practical help: “Because he thoroughly understood the needs of piano teachers who spend most of their teaching time working with average children, his contributions to *Keyboard Companion* were always relevant to addressing in a ‘practical’ way the issues which confront most independent teachers.”<sup>6</sup> The three editions of *Handbook for Teachers* by Blickenstaff, Cathy Albergo, and Reid

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4. Susan See, interviewed by author (Telephone interview, January 8, 2010).

5. Karen Zorn, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, March 16, 2010).

6. Elvina Truman Pearce, interviewed by author (Email Interview, December 31, 2009).

Alexander, guide American teachers through teaching each piece in the Canadian anthology, the *Celebration Series*. This resource is unique in its breadth and scope, providing teaching suggestions for over 400 pieces in each edition.

*How was the core content of Blickenstaff's workshops related to his teaching strategies and philosophy of teaching?*

Blickenstaff's workshops are inclusive of musical, pianistic, and pedagogical topics, and have grown from his own teaching and from his pedagogy courses. His subjects include general pedagogy, pianistic skills, interpretation, and literature, with topics such as *The Transfer Student*, *Warm-Ups? Who, Me?*, *Guidelines to Stylistic Performance*, and *Grieg's Lyric Pieces*. His pragmatic approach to his pedagogical workshops has been especially beneficial for teachers; many of those surveyed commented that his presentations provide tools that are applicable to their own teaching. Yet, even in his idea-based workshops, Blickenstaff espouses many of his philosophical principles to establish his motivations and reasons for his teaching style and techniques. His sole philosophical lecture is entitled *Are We Really Teaching Music?* in which Blickenstaff presents his primary objectives for piano study. Many of his presentations are directly tied to the core content of his pedagogy courses with topics such as *How Children Learn* and *Building on a Firm Foundation: Preparation-Presentation-Reinforcement*. In addition, many topics are summaries of his own lesson content and teaching strategies such as *Technique for the Developing Pianist* and *Coaching Repertoire to Performance*.

*What are Blickenstaff's major contributions to the Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy, the New School of Music Study, and the National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy?*

Blickenstaff is envisioning the future through his leadership in the Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy. Beginning in 1999 at the New School for Music Study, Blickenstaff has served as a teacher for their most dedicated pre-college students and many adult hobbyist students, a member of the administrative team, and a teaching mentor for the faculty. In 2000, Blickenstaff was appointed as president of the Board of Trustees and became a member of the planning committee for the National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy. Blickenstaff has collaboratively organized and created six of the national conferences, which have occurred biennially since 2001, with Sam Holland and Louise Goss. His celebrated excellence and prominence in the field of piano pedagogy and his similar philosophical outlook as Frances Clark have contributed to his ability to lead the Frances Clark Center.

*What do Blickenstaff's colleagues and former students identify as his legacy, in terms of his philosophy and pedagogy?*

Blickenstaff has taught an extensive roster of piano students. From his first lesson with a beginner during his degree at Oberlin College (ca. 1958) to his current faculty position at the New School for Music Study (beginning in 1999), he has worked with students at all levels of pianism in every year of his career. It is a rarity for a master teacher to be equally successful with a six-year-old beginner who is learning simple folk songs and also as successful with a graduate student

preparing full concert recitals. He also maintained a group of pre-college students in his teaching schedule during his faculty appointments, his time in New York City (Stecher and Horowitz School of Music, 1965–68), and in his current situation at his studio in Pennsylvania and at the New School. In his initial collegiate positions (McPherson College and Fort Hays Kansas State College), his years at Goshen College (1978–99), and his last collegiate position (The College of New Jersey), he taught many undergraduate students including both music and non-music majors. During his years at UNC-CH (1969–78), he worked with undergraduate and graduate students alike. Arlene Steffen, graduate of Goshen College, contemplated on the quantity of students Blickenstaff instructed at Goshen during his twenty-one years there: “He was there for so long, and he got whole generations of students. . . . And you think of the hundreds of kids who went through just [the preparatory] program. He was teaching sixteen kids in classes . . . for twenty some years. And that’s not counting all the kids that he taught privately. That kind of legacy!”<sup>7</sup> Steffen also reflected upon his students who became teachers: “To think about how that spreads out then from those of us he taught to be teachers. He never had any of his own children, but boy does he have a lot of grandchildren.”<sup>8</sup>

Beyond the piano students that Blickenstaff taught, he instructed many college students in piano pedagogy, and many of these students have continued as

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7. Arlene Steffen, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, January 18, 2010).

8. Ibid.

piano teachers and become renowned in the field of piano pedagogy. The bulk of Blickenstaff's piano pedagogy courses occurred for over thirty years as part of his professorships at UNC-CH and Goshen College. In addition, Blickenstaff also gave pedagogy courses at McPherson College (1961–63), Fort Hays Kansas State College (1963–65), Oberlin Conservatory of Music (1978), Peabody Conservatory of Music (1987), The Catholic University of America (1992–93), and Westminster Choir College of Rider University (1999–2001). Cathy Albergo, a piano and pedagogy student at UNC-CH in the 1970s, summarized the legacy of Blickenstaff's pedagogical instruction:

I think his legacy is that he's . . . passed on that special part of himself, from Fern [Blickenstaff's first teacher] to Marvin, to those of us [his piano and pedagogy students] that are out there [teaching]. I think he's extraordinarily successful, passing on some of those keys to what he does, and I hope that through us, we pass it on to our students. I have some pedagogy students here now who are really doing quite nicely. . . . It's thrilling to see your pedagogy students . . . doing that, but they owe it to Marvin, too. . . . I think that Jane Magrath and what they've done at OU, and the pedagogy that's going on there, Marvin had a hand in that. . . . He's had an effect on an awful lot of students through his lifetime, and [if] we can pass even half of that on to our students, then that's a legacy that stands. I just think he's going to stand the test of time.

Beyond many of his students continuing as independent piano teachers, some of his pedagogy students have made lasting impacts of their own, such as Jane Magrath (University of Oklahoma) and Albergo (William Rainey Harper College in Palatine, Illinois, and University of North Carolina at Wilmington).

Amongst the surveys and interviews conducted for this document, there existed a surprising unanimity of opinion when individuals described Blickenstaff,



the person and the teacher. His former students and colleagues commented on Blickenstaff's unwavering concern and interest in the people in his environment. An enthusiasm for teaching piano and an undying commitment to piano pedagogy pervade his professional endeavors, whether he is teaching a piano lesson, planning a conference, performing a recital, or presenting to a group of teachers. Strengthened by his own desire to continue improving his skills as a teacher and pianist, he pursues excellence in his own work and requires this from his students. He is often called a master teacher, one who has a complete willingness to share his expertise and help others achieve their personal bests. His level of success as a piano pedagogue resulted from his tireless energy and unparalleled work ethic. Despite his excellence, he remains humble and teaches any student who wants to learn.

Blickenstaff's students and colleagues have summarized the legacy of Blickenstaff in personal ways. Many have indicated his love of teaching and music, his infinite pedagogical wisdom, his care and concern for others, and how he is a model for them personally.

"As both a teacher and a friend, Marvin had a profound effect on me as a musician and as a person. Even though it's been years since I last saw him in person, I think of him at least every week, if not daily, as I pursue my career as a musician - I am so thankful to have studied with him, and try to

put forth as many of his teachings as possible.”<sup>9</sup> Judy Cole (MacLellan), 1973–77, UNC-CH student

“He is present in every lesson I teach, for he structured the foundation of not only my playing, but also the way I think. When I come upon those moments of not knowing exactly what to do or where to go with a student, I think, ‘What would Marvin do?’”<sup>10</sup> Arlene Steffen, 1981–86, Goshen College student

“With the benefit of more life experience and perspective, I can now more easily identify a trilogy of impact that Marvin offers as a piano teacher. He skillfully enables the physical and aural delight of good music making. He also allows the student to leave the lesson with a boost to self-esteem (the significance of which we teachers should not underestimate in our work with young people). Finally, he empowers the desire to be a better person and musician.”<sup>11</sup> Beverly Lapp, 1987–91, Goshen College student

“But he prepared me to be the best musician I could be. Looking back, I see the way he did things, and what he expected out of me; it was not, are you going to be a music major?, or are you not going to be a music major?, but was like, you have this gift, and you should develop your gifts. And he talked a lot to me about feeling in his own [life], that all he’s done, is try to use the gifts he was given by God. And you know, what he saw in his own parents, how they worked hard and gave of themselves, that’s how they raised him, and that’s how he taught me.”<sup>12</sup> Mary Rose Jordan, 1988–99, pre-college student in Goshen, Indiana

“I want to be a better teacher, and the qualities that I saw in him I want to emulate in my own teaching. . . . His pure love of the art of teaching, and his ability to show that to the students and to be so patient to try to figure out

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9. Sara M. Ernst, “Survey for Students of Marvin Blickenstaff,” (Online survey conducted via SurveyMonkey™, <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Blickenstaff2>, 2010-2011).

10. Marvin Blickenstaff, Email from Arlene Steffen, Personal Files.

11. Beverly Lapp, “A Tribute to Marvin Blickenstaff,” *Piano Pedagogy Forum* 10, no. 1 (January 2007), <http://www.music.sc.edu/ea/keyboard/ppf/10.1/10.1.PPFLapp.html> (accessed May 2, 2009).

12. Mary Rose Jordan, interviewed by author (Skype Interview, February 1, 2010).

and realize what the student needs, and to put it in a way that that student can relate to and allow them to be better.”<sup>13</sup> Kelly Marquis Frieje, 1995–97, Goshen pre-college student

“It is not enough to be a technically proficient pianist, a knowledgeable teacher, an intellectual writer, an organized administrator, and a fine musician. Marvin embodies every one of these qualities and more. But, all of those things are for naught if one does not develop a deep and personal awareness of the piano and music, and what they mean to people as sustaining, rewarding and life-affirming activities in a world that can be very difficult and mean to so very many people. Marvin has taught me the importance of being a real and caring person to my students, and that we have such a great responsibility not to get, but to give of our gifts to those around us.”<sup>14</sup> Scott Price, creator and editor of the Piano Pedagogy Forum

“The thing that really makes him ‘the best loved piano teacher in America’ is a quality beyond all the rest - the open, supportive, warm, caring human being in whose presence the rest of us can grow and flourish.”<sup>15</sup> Louise Goss, chair emeritus of the Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy

### **Recommendations for Future Study**

This research document contains an analysis of the career of Marvin Blickenstaff, his philosophy of music education, and his teaching techniques. As a result of this research, the following emerged as potential projects for future investigation:

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13. Kelly Marquis Frieje, interviewed by author (Telephone Interview, March 5, 2010).

14. Scott Price, “A Tribute to Marvin Blickenstaff,” *Piano Pedagogy Forum* 10, no. 1 (January 2007), <http://www.music.sc.edu/ea/keyboard/ppf/10.1/10.1.PPFPrice2.html> (accessed May 2, 2009).

15. Louise Goss, “A Tribute to Marvin Blickenstaff,” *Piano Pedagogy Forum* 10, no. 1 (January 2007), <http://www.music.sc.edu/ea/keyboard/ppf/10.1/10.1.PPFGoss.html> (accessed May 2, 2009).

1. Replicate this qualitative study on other master teachers of the current time. Teachers of varying professional statures, not necessarily those with national and international careers such as Blickenstaff, could be included to provide a broader understanding of how teachers impact their students. Include study of the philosophical perspectives of teachers whose primary occupation has been either independent music teaching or a collegiate professorship to establish successful approaches in either and both levels; Blickenstaff's career has been unique because of his continual pursuit of both levels of teaching.
2. Conduct a qualitative study on a master teacher instructing a small number of students longitudinally. Studies such as this could provide insight in how master teachers develop skills in students over several months or an entire year of study.
3. Conduct a study on the differences between teachers' stated philosophy and their philosophy as observed in their teaching to assess how having a philosophy impacts instruction. With a master teacher who has taught for five decades such as Blickenstaff, there was not a discrepancy between the stated philosophy and the teaching practice.
4. Survey the video archives from the Goshen College Piano Workshop, and document the history and growth of this unique summer program for teachers and students. The Music Department at Goshen College holds a vast library of sound and video recordings of each year of its Piano Workshop. Many highly prominent figures of music, piano, and education presented at these workshops, and this library contains significant historical footage.
5. Document the archives and history of the conference of the Music Teachers National Association. Information regarding presenters and the content of each national conference is not readily available. This would be a tremendous resource for the field of piano pedagogy.
6. Document the development of the Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy, including its beginning and the growth of its divisions, the New School for Music Study, *Clavier Companion*, and the National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy. This study should be conducted as soon as possible because of the age of key human resources.
7. Analyze the three editions of the *Handbook for Teachers* by Blickenstaff, Cathy Albergo, and Reid Alexander. This tremendous resource has been underutilized, and an in-depth study of these handbooks could result in a highly valuable compilation of teaching techniques.

8. Conduct a study on the status of the piano professional; how independent piano teaching has changed throughout the last fifty years. There have been many significant professionals such as Blickenstaff who have devoted their careers to educating teachers around the nation. The study could seek to answer how the growth of the profession through key, prominent individuals has impacted the status of piano teaching.
9. Using currently published piano method books, compile a resource of the preparation-presentation-reinforcement activities utilized by the master pedagogues who created the instructional materials. As Blickenstaff strongly maintained, excellent teachers carefully prepare and reinforce concepts with students before and after the concepts are presented in the method book. Yet, these activities are typically not printed in the method book and are thus overlooked by teachers.
10. Conduct a study on the impact of modern technologies on the musical tastes and desires of piano students. There remain master teachers such as Blickenstaff who rely heavily upon the canon of Western European classical music. The continuation of this tradition relies upon the viability of piano lessons, the desire to learn to make music, and the importance of this music to future generations.

It is the principal investigator's opinion that the true legacies of music educators are not wholly what they have contributed to the profession at large. The most significant contribution of any educator is who they taught, how they taught, and what they taught. The principal investigator hopes that this study will spur future interest into documenting the philosophies and approaches of our most-prized teachers so that future pedagogues can truly emulate and learn from their excellence.

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APPENDIX A

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS BY MARVIN BLICKENSTAFF

## LIST OF PUBLICATIONS BY MARVIN BLICKENSTAFF

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———. "'Good Luck' – a Message from Marvin Blickenstaff." *Piano Pedagogy Forum* 10, no. 1 (January 2007), <http://www.music.sc.edu/ea/keyboard/ppf/10.1/10.1.PPFBlickenstaff.html> (accessed July 3, 2011).

———. Letter to the editor, "Plea for Traditional Church Music." *American Music Teacher* 41, no. 5 (April/May 1992): 4.

———. "A Fond Farewell..." *Keyboard Companion* 15, no. 4 (2004): 38.

APPENDIX B

BLICKENSTAFF'S TOPICS AND ARTICLES IN KEYBOARD COMPANION

## TOPICS AND ARTICLES IN KEYBOARD COMPANION

### **Responses Authored by Marvin Blickenstaff (Alphabetical)**

- “Describe Your Own Home Practice. Why Do You Do It?” Vol. 3, no. 1 (1992): 12.
- “Does Practice on a Digital Keyboard in the Early Years of Study Prevent a Student from Becoming a Good Pianist? Part I.” Vol. 6, no. 1 (1995): 51–52.
- “For What Purposes Do You Play for Your Students?” Vol. 8, no. 3 (1997): 36–37.
- “How Do You Find the Musical Messages in a Piece Of Music? Part II.” Vol. 3, no. 4 (1992): 32.
- “How Do You Involve Parents in Their Children’s Piano Study?” Vol. 4, no. 1 (1993): 5.
- “How Do You Practice Rhythm? A Student Survey.” Vol. 4, no. 4 (1993): 28–30.
- “How Does the Student’s Reading Level Influence Your Repertoire Assignments?” Vol. 11, no. 1 (2000): 42–43.
- “How Has Keyboard Pedagogy Changed Over the Last 20–30 Years? Part II.” Vol. 16, no. 3 (2005): 30–32.
- “Teaching Artistic Phrasing.” Vol. 19, no. 1 (2008): 6–12.
- “When and How Do You Introduce Rubato?” Vol. 11, no. 2 (2000): 20–21.
- “When Does Rhythmic Training Become Training for Interpretation?” Vol. 4, no. 2 (1993): 20–22.

### **Topics Overseen and Invited Authors by Blickenstaff as Associate Editor of Subsection “Rhythm” (Chronological)**

In the articles marked with an asterisk (\*), Blickenstaff contributed a lengthy introduction, which constituted a response to the question he posed as Associate Editor.

- Joanne Smith, Barbara Wasson, Janell Whitbby, Jane Magrath, Suzanne Guy, Barbara English Maris. “What is Your First Concern when Teaching Rhythm to Beginners?” Vol. 1, no. 1 (1990): 30–32.

- Vivian Miller Dula, Joan Reist, Louise Bianchi, Joyce Grill, Carol Winborne, Carmen Shaw. "How Do You Foster the Sense of Pulse with Your Intermediate Students?" Vol. 1, no. 2 (1990): 30–32.
- Annette Conklin, Jill Christian, Kay Moore, Karen Koch. "What Have You Found to Be the Best Way to Teach Eighth Notes?" Vol. 1, no. 3 (1990): 30–34.
- Rick Andrew, LeAnn House, Diana Bearmon, Jean Stackhouse. "What Off-the-Bench Activities Have You Found Most Useful with Elementary Students?" Vol. 1, no. 4 (1990): 28–34.
- Rebecca Shockley, Sylvia Coats, Sandra L. Camp. "What Kind of Counting Do You Use with Beginners . . . and Why?" Vol. 2, no. 1 (1991): 30–32.
- Janet Palmberg Lyman, Nancy Bachus, Kathleen Murray. "How Do You Teach Dotted Rhythms?" Vol. 2, no. 2 (1991): 26–32.
- Terry Weber, Becky Corley, Donna Sanders, Elaine Bingenheimer. "Why Do You Use Unit Counting with Your Beginners? When and Why Do You Teach Meter Counting?" Vol. 2, no. 3 (1991): 32–36.
- Margaret Strong, Jane Bastien, M'Lou Dietzer, Natalie Matovinovic, Virginia Koun. "How Do You Use the Metronome in Your Teaching of Early-Level Students?" Vol. 2, no. 4 (1991): 28–34.
- Linda Wotring, Mary Eunice Troy, John T. O'Brien. "Why Do You Use Meter Counting with Your Beginners?" Vol. 3, no. 1 (1992): 32–34.
- Marsha Woldersberger, Frances Larimer, Marilyn True, Wilma Machover. "How Do You Go About Correcting Rhythmic Inaccuracies in Pieces Which Have Reached Performance Level?" Vol. 3, no. 2 (1992): 28–32.
- Jean Candlish, Miriam Byler, Sue Shannon, Mary Reiff, Boyce Reid Sher. "When and How Do You Introduce the First Rubato?" Vol. 3, no. 3 (1992): 28–34.
- Lynn Kitts, Ellen Reithmaier And E. Gregory Nagode, Karen Bartman. "How Do You Teach 6/8 Meter?" Vol. 3, no. 4 (1992): 26–30.
- Anne Farber. "How Are Dalcroze Eurhythmics Concepts Integrated into the Piano Lesson?" Vol. 4, no. 1 (1993): 22–24.
- Marvin Blickenstaff. "When Does Rhythmic Training Become Training for Interpretation?" Vol. 4, no. 2 (1993): 20–22.

- Elizabeth Caluda, Mary Maddox, Marilyn Witcher, Nancy Dyes. "How Do You Teach a Piece Containing Both Duplet and Triplet Eighths?" Vol. 4, no. 3 (1993): 28-31.
- Various Students. "How do you practice rhythm?—A student survey." Vol. 4, no. 4 (1993): 28-30.
- Virginia Koun, Virginia Campbell, Verne Campbell. "How Do You Use Computer-Assisted Instruction to Teach Rhythm in Your Studio?" Vol. 5, no. 1 (1994): 32-35.
- Andrew Camacho, Alice Heyer, Jean Fox, Myrna Lyons, Polly Kuelbs. "What Is Your Opinion of Counting Aloud and How Do You Encourage This Activity of Home?" Vol. 5, no. 2 (1994): 34-38.
- Debra Ronning, Karen Zorn, Martha Smith, Sharon Lohse Kunitz. "How Do You Teach Students to Feel Tempo Before Beginning to Play?" Vol. 5, no. 3 (1994): 30-34.
- Elaine Holmes, Yat-Yee Chong, Arlene Steffen, Yu-Jane Yang. "How Do You Teach Downbeats?" Vol. 5, no. 4 (1994): 26-30.
- Beverly Lapp, Connie Jones, Shann Wood, Ruth Rotondi, Steve Betts. "How Do You Teach Your Students Not to Hesitate at a Bar Line?" Vol. 6, no. 1 (1995): 26-32.
- Martha K. Smith, James Goldsworthy, Laura Vickers. "How Do You Teach Cut Time (Alla Breve)?" Vol. 6, no. 2 (1995): 28-31.
- Ann Milliman Gipson, Enid Ewing Hickman, Nancy Hallsted, Michelle Conda. "Do You Continue 'Pure Rhythm' Activities into the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Years?" Vol. 6, no. 3 (1995): 33-42.
- Rhoda Rabin. "What Rhythm Activities Are Appropriate for the Preschooler in Preparation for Piano Lessons?" Vol. 6, no. 4 (1995): 26-28.
- \*Marvin Blickenstaff, Barbara Clyde, Janice Meyer. "How Do You Teach Your Students to Keep a Steady Tempo in the First Movement of Mozart's K. 545?" Vol. 7, no. 1 (1996): 24-27.
- Kathryn Rood, Nancy Nelson, John Weems. "What Do You Do When Students Count With their Hands, Arms, and Elbows?" Vol. 7, no. 2 (1996): 28-30.
- Beverly K. Lapp, Cheryl Everett, Richard Chronister. How Do You Teach Triplet Subdivisions? Vol. 7, no. 3 (1996): 34-37.

Carol E. Ratzlaf, Judy Warburton, Jennifer Lim. "Do Your Students Hear Their Newly Assigned Repertoire Before They Begin to Practice?" Vol. 7, no. 4 (1996): 26-29.

\*Marvin Blickenstaff, Naomi Oliphant, Constance Kotis. "How Do You Teach Two-Against-Three?" Vol. 8, no. 1 (1997): 28-32.

**Topics Overseen and Invited Authors by Blickenstaff as Associate Editor of Subsection "Repertoire" (Chronological)**

Sara McDaniel, Judy Plagge, Linda Witchie. "What Kind of Repertoire Do You Assign for an Extended Summer Break?" Vol. 8, no. 2 (1997): 42-46.

Kathryn Sherer, Roma Eicher, Donna Saunders. "What Kind of Repertoire Do You Assign to Start Off a New Year?" Vol. 8, no. 3 (1997): 48-51.

\*Marvin Blickenstaff, Amy Rothstein, Sandra Stewart, Yat-Yee Chong. "What Repertoire Helps Your Students Prepare for Baroque Style?" Vol. 8, no. 4 (1997): 42-45.

Mary Sallee, Sister Cecilia Byrns, Vivian Miller Dula, Carol March. "When Choosing a Method for Your Beginning Students, What Role Does the Repertoire Play in Your Decision?" Vol. 9, no. 1 (1998): 42-47.

Helen Canine, Beatrice A. Miller, Erica G. McClellan. "When Choosing a Method for Your Beginning Students, What Role Does the Repertoire Play in Your Decision? Part II." Vol. 9, no. 2 (1998): 44-46.

Peggy Hegel, Karen Harrington, Susan See. "How Do You Balance Repertoire Students Want to Play with Repertoire You Want to Teach?" Vol. 9, no. 3 (1998): 46-50.

A compilation of teacher surveys. "What Repertoire Do You Pull Out of the Hat When a Student Falls into a Slump?" Vol. 9, no. 4 (1998): 44-46.

Robert Vandall, Karen Vandall, Barbara Wasson. "How Do You Check that a Recital Piece Is Well Memorized?" Vol. 10, no. 1 (1999): 36-40.

\*Marvin Blickenstaff, Sam Holland, Joanne Smith, Becky Corley, James Goldsworthy. "What Is the Pedagogical Legacy of Louise Bianchi?" Vol. 10, no. 2 (1999): 38-41.

Teachers in North Carolina and Colorado. "What Is Your Favorite Repertoire for the Teaching of Alberti Bass, Trills, Different Articulations between the

Hands, and Balance of Melody and Accompaniment?" Vol. 10, no. 3 (1999): 42–45.

Kathryn Sherer, Arlene Steffen, Beverly Lapp, Monica Hochstedler. "Do You Ever Assign Arrangements of Traditional Repertoire?" Vol. 10, no. 4 (1999): 36–41.

\*Marvin Blickenstaff. "How Does the Student's Reading Level Influence Your Repertoire Assignments?" Vol. 11, no. 1 (2000): 42–43.

Martha Smith, Yu-Jane Yang, Annette Conklin, Susan See. "How Do You Introduce New Pieces to Students?" Vol. 11, no. 2 (2000): 32–36.

Gay Garard-Brewer, Jean Fox, Avonne Higgins, Anita Renfroe. "When You Know that High School Will Be the End of a Student's Lessons, What Repertoire Should Have Been Covered?" Vol. 11, no. 3 (2000): 36–39.

Sylvia Coates, Melissa Falb, Karen Bauman Schlabaugh, Benjamin Whitten. "What Makes a Piece Too Hard for a Student?" Vol. 12, no. 1 (2001): 34–37.

Nancy Faber, Catherine Rollin, Paul Sheftel. "What Pieces Have You Written that You Consider Preparation for Style?" Vol. 12, no. 2 (2001): 34–39.

Audrejean Heydenburg, Marilynn A. Snyder, Suzanne Torkelson. "How Do You Cultivate Your Students' Understanding of Theory through the Repertoire They Play?" Vol. 12, no. 3 (2001): 36–39.

Karen Beres, Mariam Eley, Mary Reiff. "How (and When) Do You Teach Phrasing?" Vol. 12, no. 4 (2001): 34–39.

Carolyn Cassidy, Sister Mary Jane McGettigan, Rosemary Olson, Donna Sanders. "What Are Some of Your Students' Favorite Recital Pieces?" Vol. 13, no. 1 (2002): 42–46.

Miriam Byler, Yat-Yee Chong, Amy Glennon, Debra Ronning. "What Is Your Student's First Encounter with Sonatina Literature?" Vol. 13, no. 2 (2002): 34–41.

Elizabeth Gutierrez, Sylvia Hunt, James Litzelman. "What Repertoire Do You Use as Preparation for Romantic Style?" Vol. 13, no. 3 (2002): 32–39.

Carol Burggraaf, Laurisa Cope, David Sharpe, Martha K. Smith. "Are Duets a Regular Part of Your Elementary and Intermediate Level Students' Repertoire Assignments?" Vol. 13, no. 4 (2002): 36–39.

Virginia and Kathryn Moore, Charlotte Rowe, Karen Thickstun. "What Jazz Materials Do You Use with Your Students?" Vol. 14, no. 1 (2003): 42–47.

\*Marvin Blickenstaff, Jennifer Lim, Cathy Lynn Smetana. "Do You Assign Special Repertoire During the Summer? Vol. 14, no. 2 (2003): 36–39.

Vivian Dula, Sherilyn Ortman, Barbara Wing. "Are There Special Pieces that Help You Start a New Teaching Year On a Positive and Successful Note?" Vol. 14, no. 3 (2003): 44–47.

\*Marvin Blickenstaff, Marie Burnette, Noël Hogberg. "What Repertoire Have You Used for 'Theme' Recitals?" Vol. 14, no. 4 (2003): 42–47.

Mary Jane Clarke, Carla Dean Day, Jama Reagan. "Do You Use Recordings to Reinforce Your Teaching of Repertoire?" Vol. 15, no. 1 (2004): 42–45.

Renée Derstine, Jean Stackhouse, Sheila Vail. "How Do You Include Music History in the Study of Repertoire?" Vol. 15, no. 2 (2004): 38–42.

E. Douglas Bomberger, Sharon L. Parker, Rachael Short. "What Repertoire Do You Use When a Student Can Play with Only One Hand and How Do You Assign It?" Vol. 15, no. 3 (2004): 38–42.

Ann Guest, Jan Houser, Denise Strayer. "How Do You Introduce Your Students to Beethoven's 'Für Elise?'" Vol. 15, no. 4 (2004): 39–44.

### **Other Contributions**

Joint response with Elvina Pearce, Joyce Cameron, Richard Chronister, and Brenda Dillon. "What Are Your Main Concerns About Your Students' Home Practice?" *Keyboard Companion* 3, no. 2 (1992): 10–11. "What Are Your Main Concerns About Your Students' Home Practice? Part II." *Keyboard Companion* 3, no. 4 (1992): 9–10.

"A Fond Farewell..." Vol. 15, no. 4 (2004): 38.



APPENDIX C

LIST OF RECORDINGS OF BLICKENSTAFF

## LIST OF RECORDINGS OF BLICKENSTAFF

The following list of recordings includes presentations, workshops, masterclasses, piano classes, and interviews of Marvin Blickenstaff. The list is grouped according to the organization responsible for the resource.

### **Goshen College Piano Workshop**

*The Joys of Group Teaching.* Goshen College Piano Workshop. Audio Cassette. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1990.

*Reading Reinforcement.* Goshen College Piano Workshop. Audio Cassette. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1990.

*Technique Tips.* Goshen College Piano Workshop. Audio Cassette. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1990.

*Masterclass - June 16.* Goshen College Piano Workshop. VHS. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1991.

*Masterclass - June 17.* Goshen College Piano Workshop. VHS. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1991.

*Mozart's Viennese Sonatinas.* Goshen College Piano Workshop. VHS. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1991.

*The First Week of Practice on New Repertoire.* Goshen College Piano Workshop. VHS. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1992.

*Games Students Play.* Goshen College Piano Workshop. VHS. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1992.

*Integrating What We Teach.* Goshen College Piano Workshop. VHS. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1992.

*Schubert's Moments Musicaux.* Goshen College Piano Workshop. VHS. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1992.

*Intermediate Material of Kabalevsky and Khachaturian.* Goshen College Piano Workshop. VHS. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1993.

*Masterclass - June 14.* Goshen College Piano Workshop. VHS. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1993.

*Masterclass - June 17.* Goshen College Piano Workshop. VHS. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1993.

*Masterclass.* Goshen College Piano Workshop. VHS. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1994.

*My First Piano Class.* Goshen College Piano Workshop. VHS. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1994.

*My First Sonata: Performance Practices for Elementary Students.* Goshen College Piano Workshop. VHS. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1994.

*Lesser-Known Clementi.* Goshen College Piano Workshop. Audio Cassette. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1995.

*Restructuring the Transfer Student.* Goshen College Piano Workshop. Audio Cassette. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1995.

*Interpretation through Analysis, Part I.* Goshen College Piano Workshop. Audio Cassette. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1996.

*Interpretation through Analysis, Part II.* Goshen College Piano Workshop. Audio Cassette. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1996.

*Interpretation through Analysis, Part III.* Goshen College Piano Workshop. Audio Cassette. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1996.

*Interpretation through Analysis, Part I-III.* Goshen College Piano Workshop. Audio Cassette. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1996.

*Masterclass.* Goshen College Piano Workshop. VHS. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1996.

*Masterclass.* Goshen College Piano Workshop. VHS. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1997.

*How Are We Reading?* Goshen College Piano Workshop. VHS. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1998.

- Masterclass*. Goshen College Piano Workshop. VHS. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1998.
- Preparing for Brahms*. Goshen College Piano Workshop. Audio Cassette. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1998.
- Squiggles and Curlicues: Bach's Ornamentation*. Goshen College Piano Workshop. VHS. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1998.
- Beethoven's Sonatinas*. Goshen College Piano Workshop. Audio Cassette. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1999.
- Building on a Firm Foundation*. Goshen College Piano Workshop. VHS. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1999.
- Masterclass I*. Goshen College Piano Workshop. VHS. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1999.
- Masterclass II*. Goshen College Piano Workshop. VHS. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1999.
- How Children Learn*. Goshen College Piano Workshop. VHS. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 2000.
- Masterclass*. Goshen College Piano Workshop. VHS. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 2000.
- The Confusing Curved Line: Phrase? Slur? Articulation?* Goshen College Piano Workshop. CD. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 2003.
- The End Is the Beginning: Coaching a Piece to Perfection*. Goshen College Piano Workshop. VHS. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 2003.
- Intermediate Repertoire by Reinhold Glière*. Goshen College Piano Workshop. CD. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 2003.
- Masterclass*. Goshen College Piano Workshop. DVD. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 2003.
- Warm-Ups? Who Me? Technical Routines for All Students*. Goshen College Piano Workshop. VHS. Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 2003.

### **Interlochen Center for the Arts Summer Camp**

*Masterclass - Intermediate Piano*. Interlochen Arts Camp. DVD created by author. Interlochen, MI: Interlochen Center for the Arts, 2010.

*Masterclass - Junior Piano*. Interlochen Arts Camp. DVD created by author. Interlochen, MI: Interlochen Center for the Arts, 2010.

*Piano Pedagogy 101*. Interlochen Arts Camp. DVD created by author. Interlochen, MI: Interlochen Center for the Arts, 2010.

*Questions and Answers*. Interlochen Arts Camp. MP3 created by author. Interlochen, MI: Interlochen Center for the Arts, 2010.

### **Montana State Music Teachers Association 1994 Convention**

*Chopin Preludes, Op. 28*. VHS. Montana State Music Teachers Association Convention, 1994.

*Honeymoon or Havoc: The First Week of Practice*. VHS. Montana State Music Teachers Association Convention, 1994.

*Masterclass I*. VHS. Montana State Music Teachers Association Convention, 1994.

*Masterclass II*. VHS. Montana State Music Teachers Association Convention, 1994.

*What to Do When the Magic Stops?* VHS. Montana State Music Teachers Association Convention, 1994.

### **Music Teachers National Association Conferences**

Blickenstaff, Marvin, Fern Nolte Davidson, and Phillip Kevern. *Basics at the First Lesson and Forever More*. MTNA National Conference. CD. Seattle, WA: Music Teachers National Association, 2005.

*Intermediate Piano Masterclass*. CFMTA-MTNA-RCM Collaborative Conference. CD. Toronto: Canadian Federation of Music Teachers' Associations, Music Teachers National Association, The Royal Conservatory of Music, 2007.

*Technical Training for the Elementary Piano Student*. MTNA National Conference. CD. Austin, TX: Music Teachers National Association, 2006.

## **Interviews**

Interviewed by Jane Magrath. VHS. University of Oklahoma, ca. 1983.

Interviewed by Robert Dumm. Interview at Shenandoah College Conservatory of Music in Winchester, MA. Audio Cassette held at Stetson University's duPont-Ball Library, 1989.

Interviewed by Julie Knerr. DVD. Collegeville, PA, June 21, 2006.

Interviewed by author. Interview 1 of 6. Collegeville, PA, November 16, 2009.

Interviewed by author. Interview 2 of 6. Collegeville, PA, November 17, 2009.

Interviewed by author. Interview 3 of 6. Collegeville, PA, November 18, 2009.

Interviewed by author. Interview 4 of 6. Collegeville, PA, November 19, 2009.

Interviewed by author. Interview 5 of 6. Collegeville, PA, November 20, 2009.

Interviewed by author. Interview 6 of 6. Music Teachers National Association Conference in Albuquerque, NM, March 27, 2010.

## **Other Various Resources**

*Doing What Comes Naturally: Nature's Clues to Interpretation*. Piano Festival: From Vienna to Harlem. CD. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Music Library, 2004.

Piano lesson of Avery, Ben, Cassie, Diana. DVDs created by Julie Knerr. Collegeville, PA: Blickenstaff's Home Studio, June 21, 2006.

*Piano Study's Magic Triangle: Parents, Teachers, Students*. Instrumental Music Symposium. VHS. Elizabethtown, PA: Elizabethtown College, 1992.

*Repertoire Class for the Program for Excellence in Piano Study*. VHS. Kingston, NJ: The New School for Music Study, ca. 2002.

APPENDIX D  
LIST OF PIANO LESSONS OBSERVED

### LIST OF PIANO LESSONS OBSERVED

The following piano lessons were observed by the principle investigator at Blickenstaff's home studio in Collegeville, Pennsylvania, and at the New School for Music Study in Kingston, New Jersey. Student names were changed to allow for anonymity. Students are listed in the order that lessons were observed. All individual lessons were videotaped and made into an MPEG file and DVD by the researcher.

Alex, Home Studio, November 16, 2009  
Beth, Home Studio, November 16, 2009  
Cathy, Home Studio, November 16, 2009  
Danielle, Home Studio, November 16, 2009  
Elaina, Home Studio, November 16, 2009  
Faye, Home Studio, November 16, 2009  
Greg, Home Studio, November 16, 2009  
Henry, The New School for Music Study, November 17, 2009  
Iris, The New School for Music Study, November 17, 2009  
Janette, The New School for Music Study, November 17, 2009  
Kim, The New School for Music Study, November 17, 2009  
Lindsey, The New School for Music Study, November 17, 2009  
Megan, The New School for Music Study, November 18, 2009  
Neil, The New School for Music Study, November 18, 2009  
Olivia, The New School for Music Study, November 18, 2009  
PEPS Rotation, The New School for Music Study, November 18, 2009  
PEPS C Class, The New School for Music Study, November 18, 2009  
PEPS B Class, The New School for Music Study, November 18, 2009  
Phoebe, Home Studio, November 19, 2009  
Rose, Home Studio, November 19, 2009  
Sophie, Home Studio, November 19, 2009  
Tim, Home Studio, November 19, 2009  
Vicki, Home Studio, November 19, 2009  
Wendy, Home Studio, November 19, 2009  
Zach, Home Studio, November 19, 2009



APPENDIX E

LISTING OF BLICKENSTAFF'S PRESENTATION NOTES

## LISTING OF BLICKENSTAFF'S PRESENTATION NOTES

The following presentation notes were given to the principle investigator by Blickenstaff. Each item was numbered to facilitate organization and reference. The listing does not constitute Blickenstaff's complete historical output but were Blickenstaff's current notes on his computer in 2009. The first list is alphabetized and the second list is presented in numerical order, which was organized by topic.

### Alphabetized Listing

Anatomy of a Masterpiece: Chopin's Nocturne in F-Sharp Major, Op. 15, No. 2 (item no. 55a)  
 Anton Diabelli: 1781–1858 (item no. 61)  
 Are We Really Teaching Music? (item no. 68)  
 Bach: Short Preludes and Fugues (item no. 47)  
 Basic Technical Training for the Early Level Student (item no. 32)  
 Beethoven's Bagatelles, Op. 33: Experimenting with Humor (item no. 48)  
 Beethoven's Sonatinas: The Familiar and the Unexplored (item no. 49)  
 Building on a Firm Foundation: Preparation-Presentation-Reinforcement (item no. 11)  
 César Franck (item no. 51)  
 Chopin Ornamentation (item no. 53)  
 Chopin Preludes, Op. 28 (item no. 54)  
 Chopin: Nocturne in E-Flat, Op. 90, No. 2 (item no. 55b)  
 Coaching Repertoire to Performance (item no. 34)  
 The Confusing Curved Line: Phrase? Slur? Articulation? (item no. 45)  
 Czerny, Op. 299 (item no. 52)  
 Doing What Comes Naturally: Nature's Clues to Interpretation (item no. 42)  
 Effective Teaching: A View from the Other Side of the Coin (item no. 1)  
 The End Is in the Beginning: Coaching Repertoire to Performance (item no. 33)  
 From Russia with Love: Intermediate Repertoire of Khachaturian and Kabalevsky (item no. 63)  
 Games Children Play... (item no. 8)  
 Grieg's Lyric Pieces (item no. 56)  
 Guidelines to Stylistic Performance (item no. 38)  
 Haydn's Early Keyboard Sonatas (item no. 60)  
 Honeymoon or Havoc? (item no. 9)  
 How Children Learn (item no. 10)  
 The Intermediate Student (item no. 14)  
 Interpretation through Analysis (item no. 35–36)  
 Keyboard Harmony Exercises (item no. 26)

Kuhlau Sonatinas, V. II (item no. 66)  
 Meeting with Parents and Students and Teachers (item no. 7)  
 Muzio Clementi, Beyond Op. 36 (item no. 57)  
 My First Sonatina: Classical Performance Practices for the Elementary Student  
 (item no. 39–41)  
 (Nearly) Forgotten Treasures - Intermediate Repertoire from Past Decades (item  
 no. 58)  
 Ornamentation (and Articulation) in Bach's Short Preludes (item no. 46)  
 Passing the Baton: The Language of Basic Skills (item no. 25)  
 Pedagogy 101: Reviewing the Basics (item no. 13)  
 Preparing for Brahms (item no. 50)  
 Preventive (Proactive) Teaching: Solving the Problem before It Happens (item no.  
 18)  
 Reading Session with Teachers and Students (item no. 21–23)  
 Reading: The All-Important Skill (item no. 19–20)  
 Reinhold Glière 1875–1956 (item no. 59)  
 Response to Sound (item no. 43)  
 The Role of the Parent in the Success of the Student (item no. 15)  
 Samuel Maykapar 1867–1938 (item no. 65)  
 Schumann Fantasiestücke, Op. 12 (item no. 67)  
 Self-Care for the Independent Piano Teacher (item no. 6)  
 Shaping the Sound: Rules of Thumb for the Student (item no. 37)  
 Student Guidelines for Baroque Interpretation (item no. 44)  
 Studio Efficiency (item no. 17)  
 Teaching Mendelssohn's Songs without Words (item no. 64)  
 Technique for the Developing Pianist (item no. 31)  
 Technique: Basic Gestures and Fingering Rules (item no. 29)  
 The Teaching of Rhythm (item no. 24)  
 Thoughts on Burn-Out (item no. 16)  
 The Transfer Student (item no. 12)  
 Variations for Piano by Dmitri Kabalevsky (item no. 62)  
 Warm-Ups? Who, Me? (item no. 28)

### Numerical Listing by Topic

Items marked with an asterisk (\*) are those that are not Blickenstaff's presentations but were numerically catalogued in the same file.

#### Pedagogy

- 1 Effective Teaching: A View from the Other Side of the Coin
- 2\* Fern's Recital Tribute

- 3\* Gail Berenson's Introduction at the MTNA Achievement Award
- 4\* Response to the MTNA Achievement Award
- 5\* Email from Arlene Steffen
- 6 Self-Care for the Independent Piano Teacher
- 7 Meeting with Parents and Students and Teachers
- 8 Games Children Play...
- 9 Honeymoon or Havoc?
- 10 How Children Learn
- 11 Building on a Firm Foundation: Preparation-Presentation-Reinforcement
- 12 The Transfer Student
- 13 Pedagogy 101: Reviewing the Basics
- 14 The Intermediate Student
- 15 The Role of the Parent in the Success of the Student
- 16 Thoughts on Burn-Out
- 17 Studio Efficiency
- 18 Preventive (Proactive) Teaching: Solving the Problem before It Happens

### **Skills**

- 19–20 Reading: The All-Important Skill
- 21–23 Reading Session with Teachers and Students
- 24 The Teaching of Rhythm
- 25 Passing the Baton: The Language of Basic Skills
- 26 Keyboard Harmony Exercises
- 27\* Technical Skills: Levels 1–5 [This is a handout for students.]
- 28 Warm-Ups? Who, Me?
- 29 Technique: Basic Gestures and Fingering Rules
- 30\* Scale Fingerings [This is a handout for students.]
- 31 Technique for the Developing Pianist
- 32 Basic Technical Training for the Early Level Student

### **Interpretation**

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- 57 Muzio Clementi, Beyond Op. 36
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- 67 Schumann Fantasiestücke, Op. 12

### **Philosophical**

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APPENDIX F

LIST OF PROMINENT PRESENTATIONS BY BLICKENSTAFF

## LIST OF PROMINENT PRESENTATIONS BY BLICKENSTAFF

### Music Teachers National Association Conference Presentations

- 1977 Atlanta, Georgia: *The Transfer Student*
- 1981 Phoenix, Arizona: *Rules of Thumb for Interpretation*
- 1989 Wichita, Kansas: *Are We Really Teaching Music?*
- 1993 Spokane, Washington: *My First Sonata: An Introduction to Classical Performance Practice*
- 1996 Kansas City: *A Perspective on Student Preparation and Progress Assessed through Videotaped Student Performance* with Jane Magrath, John O'Brien, and Lisa Zdechlik
- 1997 Dallas, Texas: Masterclass and Member of the Pedagogy Saturday Panel
- 2000 Minneapolis, Minnesota: *Beethoven's Sonatinas: The Familiar and the Unexplored*
- 2005 Seattle, Washington: *Basics at the First Lesson and Forever More*
- 2006 Austin, Texas: *Technical Training for the Elementary Piano Student*
- 2007 Toronto, Ontario: Intermediate Piano Master Class
- 2012 New York, New York: Intermediate Piano Master Class

### The National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy in Lombard, Illinois

- 2001 Teaching Demonstration: Lesson with an Intermediate Student
- 2005 Workshop: *Nature's Clues to Interpretation*
- 2009 Workshop: *Pedagogy 101: Reviewing the Basics*  
Pre-Conference Session for Collegiate Pedagogy Teachers: *Effective Teaching: A View from the Other Side of the Coin*
- 2011 Teaching Demonstration: Repertoire Class for Elementary and Intermediate Students

### International Workshops – Years and Locations

- 1988 Eisenstadt, Austria
- 1989 Graz, Austria
- 1990 Calgary, Alberta, Canada
- 1991 Lausanne, Switzerland
- 1992 Graz, Austria
- 1994 Lyon, France
- 1995 Glasgow, Scotland

- 1996 Graz, Austria
- 1997 Stavanger, Norway
- 1998 Biarritz, France
- 1999 Glasgow, Scotland
- 2000 Graz, Austria
- 2002 Stavanger, Norway
- 2003 Biarritz, France
- 2004 Graz, Austria

### **Additional Presentations**

- 1972 Atlanta, Georgia, Music Educators National Conference: *MENC-NFMC Cooperate to Build a Vital Musical Culture*
- 1995 North Island of New Zealand: Workshops for the Institute of Registered Music Teachers
- 2004 North and South Island of New Zealand: Workshops for the Institute of Registered Music Teachers
- 2004 Alberta Piano Teachers Association Provincial Conference, Edmonton



APPENDIX G  
ANNOTATED LISTING OF INTERVIEWEES

## ANNOTATED LISTING OF INTERVIEWEES

### The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

#### **Cathy Albergo**

Albergo began her undergraduate degree in 1969 and was a piano and pedagogy student of Blickenstaff throughout her degree. She collaborated with Blickenstaff on the three editions of *Handbook for Teachers* for the repertoire collection *Celebration Series* published by Frederick Harris Music. She is director of the Bower School of Music and the Department of Theatre and Visual Art at Florida Gulf Coast University and is the author of several important texts in the field of piano pedagogy.

#### **Joel Harrison**

In 1970–73, Harrison was an undergraduate piano major of Blickenstaff. He is currently the President/CEO of the American Pianists Association.

#### **LeAnn House**

House was a graduate student and studied with Blickenstaff in 1976–77. One of her childhood piano teachers Marjorie Cogswell took lessons as an adult with Blickenstaff in Kansas. House collaborated with Blickenstaff on an edition of Scarlatti Sonatas and works by Handel for Carl Fischer Music. She is currently a faculty member at College of St. Scholastica in Duluth, Minnesota.

#### **Tom Lohr**

Lohr studied piano and piano pedagogy with Blickenstaff in 1973–77. He is currently a faculty member at Meredith College in Raleigh, North Carolina.

#### **Francis Whang**

Whang is an associate professor emeritus and was a member of the faculty beginning in 1971, being a colleague of Blickenstaff until Blickenstaff's resignation.

### Goshen College

#### **Beverly Lapp**

Lapp was a piano and pedagogy student of Blickenstaff beginning in 1987 and throughout her undergraduate degree. In 1995 she became a faculty member at Goshen, replacing Kathryn Sherer upon her retirement.

**Kathryn and Lon Sherer**

Kathryn Sherer (d. 2012) was a professor emeritus of Goshen College, teaching college students in 1959–95. Both she and her husband Lon Sherer were colleagues of Blickenstaff until Blickenstaff's resignation.

**Arlene Steffen**

Steffen studied piano and pedagogy with Blickenstaff in 1981–86 and is currently an independent teacher in Fresno, California. She was the director of the Piano Preparatory Department in 1989–96 at Goshen College.

**Karen Zorn**

Zorn was a student of Blickenstaff in piano and piano pedagogy beginning in 1980. Upon performing for Blickenstaff in a masterclass in the late 1970s, she decided to attend Goshen College to study with him. She is currently the President of the Longy School of Music in the greater Boston area.

**Pre-college Students (while at Goshen)****Kelly Marquis Freije**

In 1995–97, Freije studied with Blickenstaff as a high school student. At the time of the interview, she was a doctoral student in piano performance at Ball State University.

**Mary Rose Jordan**

Jordan was the youngest piano student (age 5) to enroll in group class with Blickenstaff. She continued her studies with him until her senior year in high school in 1999, when Blickenstaff moved to Pennsylvania.

**Jeffery Weaver**

As a high school student, Weaver took piano lessons with Blickenstaff in 1997–99. At the time of the interview, Weaver was establishing a private piano studio near Rochester, New York.

**International Workshops****Gerald Fischbach**

Fischbach cofounded the International Workshops in 1972 and continued as its director until it disbanded in 2004. He is Professor of Violin at the University of Maryland in College Park.

**Nelita True**

True was the coordinator of the piano area and a faculty member of the International Workshops. She is a piano professor at the Eastman School of Music.

### **The Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy**

**Scott Donald**

Donald was the Administrative Director of the New School for Music Study and began at the school the same year as Blickenstaff. Donald directed and taught at the school from 1999–2009.

**Amy Glennon**

Glennon is the Educational Director of the New School for Music Study and has been teaching at the school for the entirety of Blickenstaff's tenure.

**Louise Goss**

Goss founded the New School for Music Study with Frances Clark (1905–98) and was instrumental in forming the Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy. She continued to work at the New School after Blickenstaff became its Director of the Program for Excellence in Piano Study in 1999. Blickenstaff, Goss, and Sam Holland have been the organizational committee for the National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy.

**Sam Holland**

Holland was a pedagogy student of Frances Clark and Louise Goss at the New School and is currently the Executive Director of the National Conference of Keyboard Pedagogy, working with Blickenstaff and Goss to plan each conference. He is also a member of the faculty at Southern Methodist University.

**Elvina Truman Pearce**

Pearce was the second Editor-in-Chief of *Keyboard Companion* following Richard Chronister (d. 1999). Blickenstaff was an associate editor under the leadership of Pearce until he retired from the position in 2004.

### **Additional Interviewees**

**Maggie Yang**

Yang's daughter Grace took piano lessons with Blickenstaff from 2000–2010 until she graduated from high school. She began lessons with him at his home studio in Pennsylvania, and in a surprising turn of events, was able to continue with him at the New School when Yang's family moved to New Jersey.

**Susan See**

See is an independent music teacher in Iowa, who is familiar with Blickenstaff's workshops, masterclasses, and teaching. Several of her piano students attended Goshen College and became Blickenstaff's students during college.

APPENDIX H  
TRANSCRIPTS OF INTERVIEWS WITH BLICKENSTAFF

## TRANSCRIPTS OF INTERVIEWS WITH BLICKENSTAFF

In all interview transcripts below, “SE” refers to the author and “MB” refers to Marvin Blickenstaff. All transcripts were created using the software Transana v2.42b, created by David Woods and Chris Fassnacht at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Any italics are used to indicate Blickenstaff’s vocal emphases. In some instances, personal information not significant to the career or philosophy of Blickenstaff has been omitted.

### Interview No. 1

Monday, November 16, 2009

This content of this interview is Blickenstaff’s philosophy of teaching.

Ernst: Let’s talk some about your philosophy of teaching. I’ve got some questions we can go through, or if you want to talk off the top of your head, that would be fine. Then I can [pause].

MB: Let me talk a little bit off the top of my head and then you can ask questions that will get me going in the other directions. [long silence] I believe first of all that teaching is truly a noble profession. I think handing on a heritage to the next generation of whatever your subject matter is, is sort of what makes us go from one generation to the next, and so in that I feel that my chosen field has been a good one and a worthy one. And I often say that if I had to live my life over again, I think I would do exactly what I am doing right now. I really do; you smile, but...

Ernst: Well you asked Fern that same question.

MB: Really.

Ernst: At the [MTNA] conference.

MB: Really.

Ernst: You said, “Fern if you would do it all over again would you be a piano teacher?” and she kind of laughed and said, “I guess so.”

MB: Oh [pause]. I would not laugh and say “I guess so,” I would laugh and say “you betcha.” It’s been so rewarding and I have had through, piano teaching, I’ve had so many personal, wonderful experiences, and I’ve met so many wonderful people,

and I would have to say that my best friends right now in my life are either former colleagues or former students. And in some cases, like in Beverly Lapp, it's a former student who's become a colleague. So, and that's just enriched my life tremendously. I think, [long pause]

I'm a firm believer, but not a very good practitioner, in the idea that teaching is leading a student to discovery. And I think I may have done best in my teaching career when I was teaching elementary piano classes, little kids, because I really would think through partly because the pedagogy students were observing me all the time. I would think through what kind of experiences do I need to provide this group of children so that they will make the discoveries basically on their own. And so, we tried to learn about reading principles on the staff, and things, through a series of games and activities. And then all of the sudden, they understood how to read because they understood the logic of how notes went on lines and spaces and the distance between, et cetera et cetera. I think I don't do that very successfully; I have a tendency in my teaching I think to tell and I know this flies right in the face of Frances Clark philosophy, she says "Teaching is not telling." And, you'll probably observe this week, that there is a lot of telling that I do in my lessons; I have a tendency in my teaching to state principles that I believe in, principles of practice, principles of interpretation, principles of shaping sound. And am hoping if I can instill principles in a student's mind, the student will be able to apply that from one piece to the next. And with the little kids, I am constantly asking, "Now, what do we do with the last note of a phrase?," and this kind of thing, trying to reinforce principles. [long pause]

I think that in a way I teach my little students in much the same way I do my more advanced students. We try to get to the heart of the music. We try to discover what technique, technical approach will get the best sound and this kind of thing, and so, it will be interesting to talk on Thursday evening, to see what your observation; is there consistency, or is there a need for more differentiation between my more advanced students and my younger students? But, I would not be too surprised if you would say that my teaching has a kind of a theme to it, and I would hope that you would be able to report that that theme is getting sound to make meaningful music, so that we touch other people's lives and souls. I feel that music truly is created to give people insight into their life's experience and into their emotions, and I find it difficult to tolerate music making that stays all one level, does not express, this kind of thing, because I tell my students that's not music. So those are a few things; I'm not sure that I can go much further than that right now as far as a philosophy of teaching.

Ernst: So do you think the reason you are drawn to the music yourself was due to the emotive [qualities], or what led you to feel that way about music?



MB: I think there were a number of things. [personal information omitted] And in our little hometown, being a Blickenstaff was being a star athlete, and I was not a star athlete, sort of, out of tradition, out of feeling that I had to, I went out for the teams, and really didn't do much more than get the second team, second strain on the basketball team and things like that. I was a fairly descent tennis player, but it was so obvious that I excelled in piano.

And I think that one of the reasons in spite of the fact that I told my mother I wanted to quit in the seventh grade, and one of the reasons that I really pursued piano was that was my place in the sun. I was good and won all the contests. And Fern affirmed, but she did not say, "Oh you're the most wonderful student I've ever had," because she had a lot of students who were as good as I was. But it was something that came easy for me. And I got a lot of affirmation in various venues for that, and I think, so psychologically, I think I gravitated toward something that gave me affirmation. And I really loved the sound, and I loved playing the piano. And it was really very natural. I don't know if you've heard the story about getting permission from my parents to major [in music.] Have you heard that?

Ernst: Uh-huh.

MB: Because they were not eager at all for me to major in music and then my dad said, "Mother, I think we'll let Marvin major in music if he wants to." [laughing] And that was just a wonderful testimony and affirmation of the fact that I could be whatever I would want to, whatever felt good. I probably would have been a scientist, or more likely, I would have gone into some field of medicine. Most likely, I would have been a dentist like my dad was, but [pause].

Ernst: So who do you think drew you to connect with the emotive qualities of music that you try to instill in your students?

MB: I cannot pinpoint that, because I don't know that I [pause]. My Oberlin teacher was, in a way [pause], he was a wonderful pianist, but kind of a [pause], we didn't talk a lot about the emotional background in music he taught the score very well. He had studied with Sturman at Juilliard and he was really brought up to really, really read the score, and Fern was the first teacher that I ever had who said that "There's a staccato there, you're not reading the staccato. There's a rest there; so you didn't lift your hand." It was just wonderful training because she made all of her students really, really read the score. So coming to Dannenberg at Oberlin was an easy further step in that, he was very insistent on exact dynamic levels and things like that, without much discussion about how it should feel. He played beautifully and so proficiently, but, and then at Indiana, again a wonderful performer, teacher [Nagy], who knew the literature backwards and forwards, and he would talk more in terms of physical images and things, not a lot. But I still

remember one place in the Beethoven Eroica variations, and he said that “This is the sun coming out from behind the clouds,” you know, that’s unusual for you to say that [laughing]. I remember reacting to that because it was so unusual that he would use that kind of metaphor. So, that’s an interesting and kind of a difficult question because I really can’t put my finger on who that was and is this something that developed from going to workshops or something.

Ernst: Have you felt the inclination get stronger over your career?

MB: Yeah, I think so. I think I talk more in images, and I think I am less tolerant of sound that doesn’t project some feeling. I think that has grown. Yeah.

Ernst: When you talk about the cultural heritage, is there an ideal teaching repertoire, in your mind? Are you working to really introduce students to the Western Fine Art Tradition? Is that one of your goals, or do you have a larger picture?

MB: Not particularly. I like for my students to be concurrently studying at least three different style periods. I look at my assignments and I think, “Oh but they’re not doing Baroque right now, we’ve got to get some Baroque on their assignment, or something more contemporary.” The weakest part of my teaching repertoire is contemporary; weak in so far as I’ve played a fair amount of contemporary repertoire myself, but if there’s anything that’s missing on their assignments, lots of times it is contemporary literature, post Kabalevsky. [pause] But, I’m quite, I feel that my job is a big one just to give my students the cultural heritage of Western European Classical Music. That’s the music that has enriched my life, that’s the music that gives me joy and makes me cry, and I don’t feel the need to delve into Asian music or experimental music and things, so much; I would just hope to pass the baton onto my students, as I have experienced it in my life.

Ernst: Considering that a lot of your students may not become professional musicians, how does that legacy tie to [their lives]?

MB: Very, very directly. I don’t expect any of my students to become professional musicians. I teach my students with the thought in mind that I want them to enjoy playing the piano for the rest of their lives, and basically avocationally. I want to give them skill that will equip them so that they can sit down and pick up hymnals and leaf through and play, go to the store and buy pop music if they want to and pick up and play, and leaf through their Mozart sonatas and play that. And *enjoy* that. No, my goal is a music appreciation teacher, that they learn to love this music and that it means something to them. And I think that’s why I’m so hell bent, if I dare say, on not tolerating just playing notes because I know that that doesn’t ring true in your heart and your soul. It’s when you make a meaningful, emotional

statement—meaningful to me, other people would have to judge that—that that’s what comes through. And so I really try to spur my students on to more intense expression, and what I would say, more projected in expression. Because I think that will then impact them too, and that experience will be a good experience.

Ernst: One of things that’s struck me about watching your teaching tapes is how even with the simplest pieces you seem to be captivated by their musical qualities.

MB: Oh. [pause] Yeah, [pause] it’s music! [laughing] That’s something that really, I really have a very serious bone to pick with teachers who only want to teach advanced students because it’s like they overlook the fact that Lynn Olson wrote a student’s Chopin Nocturne or a student’s Debussy Prelude with the sounds that he uses. That’s I mean, the little pieces are wonderful music, and I just think we’re just doing such a terrible disservice to our students when we say, “Well, learn this piece and we’ll go on for a few more years, and then I’ll show you what *real* music is, you know. I *cannot* buy that. And, I’m afraid that if we don’t hook the students, right from the very beginning, into feeling what they’re doing is something very special, for themselves and everybody who hears that, that they’re manipulating sound in a very special way, we’ll lose them, because that’s not very [pause]. It fun’s for awhile to learn a little bit about that dot on that page equals this note on the, but that runs dry after awhile, and pretty quickly actually. I keep quoting all the time in my workshops a statement that Richard Chronister wrote, and I think it was in the second issue of *Keyboard Companion*, way back then. And he said something like, “We piano teachers have to realize that students come to piano lessons for one reason only, and that is to make exciting sound at the keyboard,” and he said, “Any lesson that does not capitalize on that student’s very natural musical desire, is cultivating a potential piano dropout.” And I think that’s so true, that if you don’t hook these students right away, with their first little rote pieces and things like that, how wonderful sound is and how contrasting it is and such, that I think we’re going to lose them.

I give my very beginning students—I get too lazy with this later on—but I give them all a little composition assignment every week, called “You the Composer,” and they make-up a piece every week. The pieces are calculated to use the concepts that they are learning, but also to engage the variety of sounds that they can make at the keyboard. And we put the pedal on right away! And play all over the keyboard right away! That’s what it’s all about. Frances Clark said, “I want my students right from the beginning to play the same piano that Horowitz plays.” And there are so many people that start out here [gestures to middle C position, with both thumbs sharing middle C], and then they wonder why their students are bored around middle C. Well, there’s all that piano [gesturing to the low and high regions of the keyboard]. I feel very strongly about that, and if you’re picking that up, it is at least, where I am emotionally and intellectually. I hope I am there

pedagogically, but I want those kids to make their little pieces really beautiful and meaningful.

I was interested in a comment that came back from Edmonton. I teacher was publically giving a little reprise of what we'd covered in our masterclasses, and she said that I talked so much about what the music must mean to the listener, and I feel that's what it's all about. You're projecting and you're playing your music not necessarily, or certainly not just for yourself, but for other people to enjoy and to profit and to be nourished by this.

I think a music of meaning [pause]. This is my philosophy; I think a meaningful musical performance nourishes our souls, and I say that in all sincerity. I feel very strongly about that. [pause] And that's I think, I'm not sure that I would have said that at the age of 23 or something like that, because I'm not sure that that was quite where I was at that point. But I believe that there are lots of things that we do in our human journey that nourishes our souls and other things that we do that sort of shrivels our souls—it deteriorates the soul. And it is our job as teachers and friends and parents, you know, to nourish the souls of those around us, and I think that's one of the things that music does. It really makes you a bigger human being.

I, you've also read this and heard this a hundred times, but at Goshen I used to start my piano pedagogy classes out, the first semester of piano pedagogy, asking my students, "What is music?" We're [in] a piano pedagogy course; it's a music education course. What is music? And we would define that, and usually the definition would come out something like, music is the expression of the total human experience through organized sound. And it's that *total* business that I would really like to try to get across to my students. It's not just the happy and sad times, it's everything, it's the extension of that, it's everything in between. But composers have been very sensitive human beings to the human condition, and they write that in their music, and they write it in a very, very craftsman like way. I think none of us really delves deep enough into how are pieces are put together, really built. And I hope that I am at least uncovering a few of the onion skin layers for my students, to help them look more deeply at their pieces.

Ernst: Is that partially what helps you choose repertoire? Is that something you consciously think about?

MB: No. I'm sorry. There's so many things about my teaching that I am not proud of. And, I am not particularly proud of my selection of repertoire; I don't spend enough time thinking and planning. I think my students grow through the repertoire that they study, but I'm just so glad that Frances Clark is not around to peer over my shoulder and say [laughing], "That piece should not be on the assignment at this point." She was really, really stringent about that, about how

you, and I think I'm really sloppy about that. Part of it, if I could beg for a little bit of excuse from Frances and Louise and everybody else, it's that I feel that I'm almost too busy to spend the time to do that. Now, that's a very poor excuse. But, I don't have a lot of time to plan for my students. I think I get by because we cover quite a bit of variety of repertoire, but you won't really find me burning the midnight oil to find exactly the right piece for the student because they need reinforcement on such and such a skill. I'm sorry. What you could do in your dissertation is make a chapter out of the black list. Marvin has a number of things on his black list; he does not plan [laughing].

Ernst: It's a huge task to do because of the time.

MB: I find it is, yeah.

Ernst: You can't always that clearly know your students strengths and weaknesses, all the time.

MB: Yeah, yeah. So, I try to choose carefully, but I am not sure that my choices are wise choices. And then I try to teach well. Infrequently, I would say, very infrequently, we have to drop a piece because it is just not right for the student at that point. And I only feel badly about that if the piece is too hard; I don't feel badly at all if the student can learn a piece fast. And I would say, "Isn't that wonderful, that's what you've accomplished in these years of piano. You can learn a piece in two weeks, that's wonderful!" But if a piece takes a student a year, then it's too hard.

Ernst: I wonder if you might talk a little about, in the past I've heard you say that you pretty much will accept just any student who will audition for you.

MB: Oh yeah.

Ernst: One of the philosophical questions about music is who should study music?

MB: The door is wide open. Because I really feel—Frances says, "There's music in every child"—and I really feel that unless a child really has some kind of mental block, that makes it very difficult for them to perceive the concepts and notation, basically it would be the reading of notation. Because I think of one student that I had that really, really I could not teach basic rhythm to. She's a college student interestingly enough, and she came from a very conservative religious background, and there was obviously no dance in her background, or anything like that. And we would get up and move—she very reluctantly—and we would try the most elementary walking a beat, and she just *could not* keep a steady beat, and she confessed one time to me that her high school band instructor just was beside

himself because he could not get her to keep beat. And we had a terrible time, and in all my teaching, that's about the only student. I had students who did not catch on to rhythm quickly, but we've always been able to do something, with large beat response, that I could get them on a beat. And all of the students have certain little problems with rhythm; I mean no body is rhythmically perfect, that they never come to a lesson without a mistake in some kind of note reading.

But, I would say that if [pause]. I have not had experience with real dyslexic students, and I know there's a way to get them to enjoy the piano and I really, really admire people who are working with autistic children and this kind of thing. I have not had that opportunity, and I'm not sure that I'm bent towards that, but basically, I would say, yes the door is wide open. And you don't have to pass any kind of test to get in to my studio. You come and we'll make music together.

At Goshen I used to audition the kids to get into our class piano program, more from the standpoint of *social* readiness, are you ready to work with a group? And, I remembering having one faculty child at one point who was home-schooled and he just was, I [pause]. He waited a year and was then perfect! One of the best students in the class, and I was so glad that I was able to swallow hard and say, "I think we better wait."

If there's room on my schedule and the telephone rings, I'll say, "Well yeah, you come."

Ernst: If you think of who should learn piano, what is in your mind—I don't know if prerequisite is the right word—for a teacher. Who should teach piano?

MB: Now that is a very good question. That's a very good question. I would say that one of the first requirements is somebody who just really, really loves sound. Have you ever heard my story about Fifi?

Ernst: [nods]

MB: Okay. "I just love the sound of the piano," and she studied in Europe and everything; she is a wonderful pianist. But I think that's a very strong prerequisite. You don't teach piano because you need a little extra money and you've had a few piano lessons yourself, okay. [long pause]

Then I would say that it is truly a prerequisite before you can teach piano to have some piano pedagogy because somebody has to lead your mind to think about the steps of the learning process. And if you open up a book, the material will be there, but that's not the pedagogy. And, somebody has to take you by the hand and say that you don't know about preparation-presentation-reinforcement, you know.

And, you don't know about practice habits, and you don't know about rhythmic training and things like that. And there are a lot of teachers that basically would find it difficult to have access to that, but I think that there are extension courses and summer workshops and things like that that you can do. But, those would be my sort of bottom line things, you've got to have some foundation in pedagogy. If not, what will happen, is that you will teach exactly the way you were taught. Very few people rise above that until somebody kicks them off dead center and says, "That's wrong, and there is a better way." And that's what pedagogy has done for an awful lot of us, and they have shown us. I was very fortunate to have Fern, and she was not trained in pedagogy, but she went to everything that she could possibly go to to learn. And she practiced hard, and nobody loved music any more than Fern did. And she did have a basic understanding of style—I think I'm a lot better teacher than Fern was because I've had more opportunities to learn—but man what Fern gave to us was just incredible. And she did the best with what she had. Maybe I'm talking around in circles, but I just think that somebody has to help you.

And books, now there are a few books that are very helpful; I think Richard Chronister's book is wonderful. And Frances Clark, *Question and Answers*, there's a lot of information there, and you can do a lot of reading and learn. And I think there are a lot of bad piano pedagogy courses too. So what you've got to do is love music and have a *good* piano pedagogy course [laughing]. Go to Oklahoma, go to Missouri, come to Westminster, yeah, you've got to have a *good* piano pedagogy course. But that's a very good question, what are the prerequisites for teaching?

I have seen very poor teachers who really wanted so much to give to their students be surprisingly successful with their students simply because of their own love of music. I think of an adult Goshen student that I had, who—I think she actually enrolled for a degree course for a while and took a few courses, but she was busy with her own studio—and she was a horrible piano player. She just—it was just really embarrassing, and I just cringed at the thought that she was there teaching. And she would bring some of her student's pieces to me, and we would discuss and this kind of thing, but she was so eager to learn, and she would conduct studio projects. They would get so excited about women composers, you know, or something like that and they would have the whole studio you know (they are [student name] and her dad), working on that kind of thing, or do Brahms, and everybody would learn a theme from a Brahms symphony and be able to play with one finger on the piano. There is a lot that can be done with sheer gut desire.

## Interview No. 2

Tuesday, November 20, 2009

Interview No. 2 is largely biographical in scope.

Ernst: How did you come to work for Carl Fischer?

MB: We moved to New York City from Hayes, Kansas, so that I could do some piano work in New York. I'd never studied in New York, and I wanted to get that experience. And [pause].

Ernst: Was it for a specific teacher or just the region?

MB: By the time I got there I knew who I was going to study with—he was a private teacher in New York—but a number of Julliard kids were coming to him for extra coaching. His name was Wolfgang Rosé, and he had studied with Schnabel, and had worked some with Geiseking in Europe, and he was a nephew of Gustav Mahler. He toured a lot as an accompanist to a violinist; Mischa Elmen was an old violinist, and Wolfgang Rosé was the accompanist for him on tour for years and years. He was a wonderful musician and very sensitive guy, and I had friends at Julliard who were coaching with him and they said if you are coming to New York you ought to study with Wolfgang, so I did.

It was literally within weeks of our arrival in New York that I got a call from a friend of mine in Topeka, Kansas, who was a very, very fine pianist and he said, "You may not know this, but I am under contract with a Canadian manager for some concerts in Europe and he phoned me and said that he had some bookings in Europe for concerts and the person who was supposed to play the concerts had become ill," and the manager had asked Lawton if he knew anybody who might fill these dates. And so Lawton called me because he knew that I was in New York for awhile, and I thought not too long about that because all I wanted to do in New York was to study and play. And that's why I was there, and I thought, why not play some recitals in Europe if I had the opportunity. And so he made the introduction to the manager in Canada, and I went up and met him. And he said it was fine, but the arrangements were that on this first year of this tour, you had to fork over a lot of money to pay for the promotion and things like that, and so I sent him *thousands* of dollars. I don't even remember now how much it was, but to make a long story short, he left Canada under the cover of darkness with all of our money. He had money from a number of other people too, and so there we were in New York and our savings with which we were going to live in New York and sponsor our year or two in New York was all gone. And I just couldn't believe that anybody would take



advantage of me like that, and I have often thought, even to do this day, if I would see him, I would love nothing more than just to smash in his face. I need the physical relief of hurting him because of how much he hurt me. I've never felt that way about any other person in my life, but he took such advantage of me.

So all of a sudden, we were basically without money. I had friends in Kansas who had told me, they were actually from the Federation of Music Clubs, they said if you need help in New York, go see Merle Montgomery. She had been national president of the Federation of Music Clubs and she was a composer and she was, kind of, an officer at Carl Fischer. And so, I contacted her and went down and interviewed [with] her, and she... I didn't necessarily spill out my hard luck story, but I basically applied for a job. And I met her, and she said actually, "I don't know of anything here at Carl Fischer that's available right now," but she said, "I'll take your name and we'll stay in touch." Actually, it was within a couple of *days* that she called back—it was just really almost the next day. She called back and said, "You won't believe this but my assistant in the orchestral rental library has resigned and is going to take another job," and said, "You can have the job if you want it." So I went to Carl Fischer to work with Merle Montgomery, and what we did—you may not know that when an orchestra performs a work, especially a contemporary work, that work may not necessarily be in print. You have to rent it from the publisher who owns that. And the orchestras write Carl Fischer and say, "We want to do this Howard Hanson piece and we need [the parts]." And I was responsible for pulling all those parts and sending them to the Dallas symphony and then check them back in.

Ernst: Sounds like you started in the trenches of the publishing company.

MB: I was working for Merle [Montgomery] for a while and the job got a little bit bigger, and the people at Carl Fischer began to hear that I could play the piano and the director of promotions said, "How would [you] like to go out and do some workshops for Carl Fischer on our piano catalogue?" He said, "You could select anything [Carl Fischer piano music] you want and just do workshops." And that was a beginning of a very long career of workshops. They sent me all over the country. By that time I was preparing to play a Town Hall debut recital. So my colleague who was arranging these workshops would contact the sponsoring music stores and ask if they would like for me to play a recital. Frequently I would give a morning workshop, play an evening recital, and go on the next day to do another workshop. And I was all over, everywhere. They sent me everywhere. I got acquainted with so many people.

Ernst: From what I understand, that's how you met Lynn Freeman Olson, at Schmitt Music.

MB: Sort of. And, it was just quite amazing what that opportunity afforded me, and I got so much experience at doing workshops. As I told you, I'm about 90 percent a used car salesman anyway, and that was kind of fun for me to get out and try to—and I had enough pedagogy and interesting teaching, that I could really talk to the teachers about why this material would be good for their students. And I could select basically anything from the Carl Fischer catalogue that I wanted to, and it's such an old firm, and they have a pretty vast piano catalogue, that I could find some pretty descent stuff. But, you're right that I did meet Lynn. Lynn was living in New York. It may have been [pause]. I think this is the right chronology. I was asked, and I don't know how they ever heard about me, to do a presentation for the New York Piano Teacher's Congress (and that's one of their local associations—it's just private teachers), and Lynn was a member of that. He had happened to be at that presentation. We went out for lunch afterwards, because I think he knew that I was going to do the Schmitt clinic and he was sort of the lead guru of the Schmitt clinic. It was almost like it was something that he was in charge of, and he kind of checked me out to see whether I was good enough to do the Schmitt clinic. Well, anyway we met about that. There was a connection there. When I did the Schmitt clinic, I don't recall (this was so many years ago) that he was actually present at that. I think he wanted to kind of know that I knew what I was doing before, and he kind of gave me the low down of what the teachers expected and who would be there. And then, we had an acquaintance, and interestingly enough, I already knew about him because when I was teaching pedagogy in Kansas, I had run across *The Menagerie* [that] Lynn wrote. It was his first publication.

Ernst: Was it really!

MB: Yeah, it was, with Oxford. And I thought that was just wonderful, the illustrations and everything. So I worked with that in my pedagogy classes and was really excited to meet him. Was quite convinced that he had a real talent. So, at Carl Fischer, they said, "If you know of people who should be in our piano catalogue, please let us know," and he was the first person that I suggested. So, Lynn was in need of a publisher; when you're that young, you don't have publishers coming at you very frequently, and so he was very eager. I invited him to submit some things, and they were immediately accepted. Lynn sort of came on board with a lot of fanfare because his compositions immediately sold well. And that led to an invitation by one of the vice presidents, "Why don't you guys get your heads together about a major piano publication?" So, you know the rest of that story.

Ernst: I understand that when you were in New York, you taught some at the Stecher and Horowitz school.

MB: Stecher and Horowitz were a pretty active and successful duo piano team. In fact, for awhile, they were the duo pianists that toured with Fred Waring.

Ernst: Are they still living?

MB: I think so.

Ernst: I'm pretty sure I heard a story on NPR about Stecher and Horowitz.

MB: They ran a little piano school out on Long Island. Oh, this is a part of the whole story, the scenario about the Canadian who ran off with my money. He was actually Hungarian. And, so I was desperate for work, and I followed an ad in the New York Times, which Stecher and Horowitz had placed there for a piano teacher out on Long Island. I interviewed for the job and got the job, and we became very good friends. They actually wanted me to stay and take over the school and all kinds of stuff, but it was just another job to earn a little bit of money. I was so hard up in New York that when it came time for coffee break, I would have to really think very hard whether or not I had enough money to buy a cup of coffee, because I had to buy my train fare out to Long Island. And the first thing you had to do was pay your rent on your apartment.

Ernst: It isn't cheap in New York.

MB: Uh-uh. No, that was slim pickings. And, I had to pay for my piano lesson.

Ernst: Did you have a good experience with that?

MB: It was wonderful. Do you have the review of my town hall recital?

Ernst: I don't know that I do.

MB: It was really good. It was just amazing. I've got lots of copies at home. That was just amazing. Wolfgang coached me on that recital.

Ernst: When you went to New York did you have that goal of that recital?

MB: Not necessarily. No, it just kind of developed. I already had the job nailed down in Chapel Hill, knew that I was going to leave New York. In a way, the recital was a farewell to my New York years and friends. Another one of the blessings of my life, my guardian angel is just so active [laughing]. And, somehow or another, I got a good review in the New York Times.

Ernst: That's amazing.

Ernst: Did you do any teaching as part of your undergraduate work at Oberlin? You had a pedagogy course there, right?

MB: I'm not sure that that was the very first lesson that I taught, but you're right, that is some of my first teaching. Yeah, I took. All piano majors at Oberlin at that time, were required to take pedagogy in their senior year.

Ernst: I am actually impressed with that. At a school like Oberlin, I wouldn't assume that.

MB: We didn't like it, and the teacher, in many ways was not very effective. But the one thing that we did, she found beginning students for all of us, and it was just kind of [laughing, pause]. You know me well enough, you just put me in a room with a kid and a piano, we just had a lot of fun. The kid was bright. He was the son of the oboe professor at Oberlin at the time. And so he learned very quickly, and I thought it was a lot of fun. I'm trying to think [pause]. I suppose my next teaching experience would have been my graduate assistantship at Indiana. In between Oberlin and Indiana, I went to Europe for a year. But no teaching there. I came back and went to IU and had a graduate teaching assistantship where we were basically preparing kids for piano proficiency exams, and I don't remember any of my students, but they were music majors. And that wasn't nearly as much fun as teaching the kids.

Ernst: Did you teach in high school at all?

MB: No, I don't remember that I did, at all. And, if I did, it was nothing regular. No.

Ernst: Do you remember who your first pedagogy teacher was?

MB: Oh yes. Janet Russell Owens was her name. It was kind of an awkward position because I didn't really like the course very much, and all of the other piano majors did not like the course. But she was kind of personal friend because I went to the Quaker meeting on campus and was very active in that, and she was a member of that meeting. And so, here we were on Sundays, good friends, and then I had to do work for her. I didn't like her assignments; she made us look through old repertoire and do file cards, so we would get acquainted with the materials. A lot of this stuff was so old it was out of print. And then she had us do readings in music education, and I thought that was ridiculous—I'm still quoting some of the people that I read [laughing]. You've heard me in the last couple days quote some of these guys. She really tried to do a good course. She did what most of the rest of do in a piano pedagogy course. You examine materials and you do some outside readings and you teach students; and in a way, that was a very good course. I don't know why, what about it was that I didn't like.

Another interesting thing. That was such a long time ago, but the Frances Clark books were just new, and she was very excited about that. We learned about Raymond Burrows. She showed us all those books and things like that. And so I think there are a lot of courses now that don't introduce their students to sort of the historical pedagogy stuff like I got with her. There were a lot of good things about it. No, I knew about *Music for Young Americans*, or something like that, by Raymond Burrows, and he of course was the teacher of Robert Pace. And then she was so excited about the Frances Clark books. So, I have been informed about Frances Clark almost since Frances Clark was published.

Ernst: Do you think it had something to do with the culture you were in, being around a lot of performers? At that point, did you think that you would be teaching?

MB: I didn't. I didn't know what I would be doing, but it didn't really occur to me that I would be a piano teacher [laughing]. I often say, I'm sure that Janet Russell Owens is up in heaven just laughing and laughing because here I am getting these awards for being a piano teacher, and that was the last thing I was going to do! [laughing] Interestingly enough, she said quite frankly that she thought that I had a real ability to teach. She saw me relate to this kid and how we worked together. She said, you've got it.

Ernst: Did you agree with her?

MB: I enjoyed it. And don't you find that with some of your students too, there are some students that are such natural teachers, you just don't want to get in their way. And others, are so awkward at the relating, can't quite figure out what they should do next, and you wonder if can ever really make them into a good teacher. And I think she saw that there was something natural about my work.

Ernst: Did you have, any other formal pedagogy training?

MB: Can I crawl under the table now?

Ernst: I'm actually surprised that you had that at Oberlin.

MB: I'm so embarrassed about this. I really am embarrassed about the fact that I have had *one year* of piano pedagogy my whole life. But I told you that working with Lynn and Louise was like a major piano pedagogy course. I learned so much. But no, at Indiana there was no pedagogy offered.

MB: When people call me Dr. Blickenstaff, I just laugh.

Ernst: I first made that mistake, too!

MB: When I finished my Master's, I turned right around and applied for doctoral entrance at IU, and I'll talk about that more later, and I was accepted. They could hardly deny me acceptance because I got all the awards at IU. I got performance awards and was a straight A student. So, that was kind of formality, but I had to do a doctoral audition, and I got in. But, Dr. Nagy my teacher, chose that moment to leave IU and go to Boston. I had a job in Kansas anyway, and so I wasn't going to start it right away. Had Dr. Nagy stayed at IU, I would have gone back summers and studied and done course work, but he left for Boston. It's a hell of a long distance from the middle of Kansas to Boston, and I was married; it just didn't seem right, and I had a job. Never really pursued that. Obviously nothing too disastrous has happened to me. I will tell you about the one door that was shut in my face because I didn't have a doctorate. But most of the doors have been opened, I've gotten jobs and all kinds of things.

I can only think of this one thing. When we wanted to move back East, eleven years ago, one of the letters I wrote was to Westchester University. It's just down the road in Pennsylvania. It sounded wonderful. It's a well known University, and it would be within easy commuting distance of Harleysville. And the gal wrote back and said, well yes, "We have a job opening, would you like to apply for the job?" And I read the description of the job and I thought, I could have written this for myself. They wanted applied music, they wanted some piano pedagogy, maybe one section of class piano. I've got the job. So I had Nelita and Richard Chronister and Jane and a bunch of bigwigs write recommendations for me, to get this job. And I remember Nelita wrote, she sent me a copy of her recommendation, and she said now, "You may notice on Marvin's resume that he does not have a doctorate," and it's almost a literal quote, and she said, the question is, "Where should Marvin go for a doctorate, the doctoral student should come and study with him," and just left it at that. I would phone down to Westchester, and say, "How are things going? We got your transcripts and letters from this person and that [pause], and phone again a few weeks later, because I was really on pins and needles; I really wanted that job. And one time, she said, "Yeah, we got everything." I actually knew the Dean of the School of Fine Arts, and I would phone his office to try to find out was going on, why was I not hearing, and they would not let me talk to him. It was so strange. I could not get through to him. After awhile, I just gave up and realized I had to make other arrangements because Westchester was not going to be coming through. About a week before we left Goshen—van was packed and everything—I got this very short letter from Westchester that said, "Dear Mr. Blickenstaff, we appreciated your interest in our opening," and said, "We could not consider your application because you don't have a doctorate." End of discussion, "Sincerely yours." Wow, I deserve that because I don't have a doctorate? They have the right?

I've not heard the final story on that but evidently there was quite a little storm that was brewing in the piano department about me and whether they should bring me on their faculty. I think there were people who were really threatened by that. So, it didn't happen.

I really believe that the good Lord has been looking out for me. Had I taken that job at Westchester, I wouldn't be over working with Louise, I would not have this contact with the Frances Clark Center. My life would be *completely* different. And if that is a department where there is a log of professional jealousy and back biting, I would be a very unhappy man. I just have to sit back and say, "Well, somebody else is in charge here!" Moving back here was not without its trauma because of needing to put the jobs together and not selling the house in Goshen. [personal information omitted] I've had a great life. The big, big blemish on the whole thing is Sarah Faye's illness. You can't control that.

Ernst: Your teachers before Fern. You mentioned somewhere that there was a neighborhood teacher and another.

MB: I hardly remember them. Lauren and Wayne took lessons from a lady by the name of Mrs. Hochstedler, a lady in Nampa, and I started out with her, and then I don't remember why we changed, and I don't remember if Lauren and Wayne changed, I went to a Mrs. Buhler, or something like that. Then there was a better teacher, who was the pianist at the Baptist Church. Mom had grown up with her husband. Her name was Mrs. Morris, and she had a real grand piano and a record player.

I played my first [pause]. I gave two public recitals when I was about in the 6th or 7th grade, and that was before Fern, that would have to be with Mrs. Morris. One was at our church, and I played both organ and piano [laughing]. Our church got an electric organ, a Wurlitzer, and Mrs. Morris taught me a few organ pieces, and so I gave a recital when I was in 7th grade. And I played all of the Moonlight Sonata and several organ pieces, the Juba Dance. I don't remember what else. I played all the Moonlight Sonata when I was in the 7th grade. When I was in the 6th grade I gave a recital at a Women's Club meeting where they had a Baldwin grand. And I remember I had a friend at school who sang some solos, I accompanied her as part of my recital. I don't remember any of the pieces I played on that recital. And I'm not sure where those programs are. And then I switched to Fern.

This would be kind of interesting to you. I switched to Fern when I was in the 8th grade. And I remember when I was in the 8th grade, I played the Revolutionary Etude in some contests and things. And Fern did not exploit, she challenged. I could play it. I don't remember a lot of other stuff right at the beginning. And Fern entered me into a number of competitions, Federation of Music Clubs, and a bunch

of stuff, and Fern had another student from a neighboring town, who was equally as good as I, if not better. I think he in many ways was a more natural musician. She teamed us up, and we became kind of a duo piano team. In high school, each of us would give a solo recital and we would do a duo piano recital every year. Isn't that something, the repertoire covered.

Ernst: Did you play with the same boy each year?

MB: Oh yeah. And we actually [thought] as naive high school kids might think, that we were going to be a duo piano team. And one time, Whittemore and Lowe came through and played on the community concerts, and we arranged to play for them. The next day we went over to Boise and we played a whole bunch of pieces, and they were kind of tickled, I think, at what we were doing, and they gave us some little hints. I remember they were talking about the fact that when they start, they have these dove-tailed grand pianos, and you can't say 1-2-3-4 ready go, and they started together by breathing, and they got really good at that. We really had stars in our eyes; we were going to be a duo piano team. [personal information omitted]

But Fern was good at motivating her students. Fern never exploited her students. She had good students and they won an awful lot of the competitions and things, but she was far from a competition teacher. We did the Guild auditions with Fern. That's an interesting story about her. When I first came to her, all Nampa was abuzz because Fern Davidson was going to play in Carnegie Hall. So I started out with her for a few lessons, and then a former student who was a wonderful pianist, she had a former student take over her studio for a couple weeks while she practiced and went to New York and played in Carnegie Hall. The occasion was sponsored by the National Guild of Piano Teachers—they used to have contests for teachers—and she won that contest. The prize was that the Guild would present you in Carnegie Hall, and I think there were two or three other people on that program. But she played. She did the big Haydn E-flat [Piano Sonata in E-flat Major, No. 52].

Ernst: I heard you talk about these masterclasses that Fern took you to. I can't recall the name of the pianist. Was that the first time you heard a truly great pianist?

MB: Or certainly a great teacher. This was an old Russian guy by the name of Sergei Tarnovsky, and he was Horowitz's early teacher in Russia. Can you believe that?

Ernst: That's amazing.

MB: I don't know how he got to this country, but he—you're just bringing up so many old memories—ended up at DePauw University in Chicago, and he was one



of their main piano teachers there. That guy knew everything and could sit down and play anything—I mean, he was *old school Russia*. He would come out, Fern was not responsible for bringing him to Boise Valley, somebody else had the contact with him. She certainly carted us over. The first summer, she went by herself, because she was not going to subject her students to anything that she didn't think was good. But, he *knew* the repertoire and he knew the Russian way of performing. He taught pedaling, and voicing, and fingering habits and everything. He would come out every summer, for what, a week, maybe, and every day we would go over to what is now Boise State University—it was called Boise Junior College at that point. And we would sit up on the stage with the grand piano and he would teach away. Elman [Anderson] and I went. I remember one time, we took a whole bunch of duo piano repertoire and he thought it was kind of cute to hear us play, and a couple of the other teachers were incensed that we would take so much of the time from the others at the masterclass. We shouldn't have done that, but he was perfectly capable of telling us that that was enough. That was very interesting. And I was so taken with this guy, I was dead set to go to Chicago and study with him as a college student.

And, I still remember in the old days, we used to get gallons of ice cream in round, big, thick cardboard boxes, and we called them gallon ice cream containers. And in my closet, I kept a gallon ice cream container with a slot in the top, and on the outside, I had drawn in crayon, "The DP Fund." I was going to save money for my college career at DePauw. I was going to study with Tarnovsky. He ended up in California, he married a young beautiful blond, and they went to California, and he died out there. I don't know that he had much of a teaching career in California. That was dealing with the big time in little Idaho. Because he was really a substantial teacher. Russian trained, taught Horowitz, came to this country. In the most famous biography of Horowitz—or is it in the Schonberg book—but it talks about Tarnovsky being Horowitz's teacher. I was surprised it was in print.

Ernst: Did you stop pursuing DePauw because he left?

MB: Yes. Oh, man.

Ernst: That would have been a big change for you.

MB: Oh, yeah, that didn't even enter my mind when I was finishing high school. I didn't know where I wanted to go. I bet he had left DePauw. I was being faced with a decision about what I am going to do about military service and all that kind of stuff. I had a full ride at the College of Idaho. I think I went to my freshman year of college on two hundred dollars for the whole year of expenses. I lived at home and commuted back and forth. It was not much of a college life, commuting from home. I didn't even study with one of the college teachers; I studied with Fern.

### Interview No. 3

Wednesday, November 21, 2009

This interview included a discussion of former students and colleagues to be interviewed; these portions of the interview have been omitted. The transcript presented below is the significant biographical portion of the interview.

Ernst: I was struck with the high-caliber roster of people [in the Goshen College Piano Workshop]. It was impressive.

MB: It really was. People were eager to come. We really had quite a roster. Our teachers, oh they were devoted. Still, when I go to the Midwest, and I do a workshop, people come up and say, "Oh, we were at the Goshen Workshop." They came from all over. We had a huge contingent from Michigan and Illinois. A lot of the Indiana teachers said, "Well, this is what we do in the summer time." And they brought their students. I instituted something there that Beverly is continuing, and that is, we commissioned a work, every summer. It was a piano duet, and it received its premier performance. We had Vandall and Paul Sheftel, and Nancy Faber wrote a difficult three-movement duet called *Chinese Dragons*.

Ernst: I have seen that piece. So they were published?

MB: Part of the deal was that I would contact the publisher and say, "Now, we want to commission; do you promise that you'll publish it?" and they said "Sure." And, actually what they did, is get it published before the workshop so that people could buy it. Yeah, that was really cool, I was really proud of that.

Ernst: Did Kathryn Sherer start that?

MB: Kathryn Sherer and John O'Brien started the Goshen College Workshop. John O'Brien was a Frances Clark trained man who actually lived in South Bend and had a private studio there with his wife Edith. He was invited to join the college faculty part time, and he and Kathryn got the pedagogy program started, with the input and advice of Frances and Louise. So the Goshen College Prep Department was really modeled after the New School. And that's why we had class and private and all this stuff.

Ernst: So when you got to Goshen there was already the standard to have the pedagogy class have a demo class?

MB: Yep, that was all worked out. The one thing that I did—John and Kathryn had actually put on the books a four year program, and I really disagreed with that because of the freshman were just so unsettled. And so, Kathryn and I agreed that we would not allow freshman into the program and started them as sophomores. And I taught the beginning semester, and then Kathryn took them for a semester called private teaching. And the second year I had a course on class teaching and the final semester was this SULM, Survey of Upper Level Materials, which was my piano lit. course.

Ernst: Was the class teaching [course] group piano for adults?

MB: For adults. And so we felt that we covered our bases. We gave them, their initial baptism was to see group teaching with kids, and already they got started teaching, and they continued on with that student as long as they were in college.

Ernst: That is so fabulous.

MB: A lot of those little kids had the same teacher for 3 years, and it was a good program.

Ernst: Often that kind of continuity isn't felt from either side. Little kids, taught in a group for just a year.

MB: Continued it for two years. And then they had repertoire classes.

Ernst: I meant the little kids.

MB: Yep. Wait a second. I think I'm not telling you the truth. I think we kept those kids in classes for three years, class plus private, and then in the fourth year, they had private only, and with no repertoire classes.

Ernst: Is there anything that when you think of yourself as a teacher that you think "I am doing this because of Fern?"

MB: To a certain extent my chronology of literature. Fern had very, very firm ideas about for instance, Bach. She started all of her kids out in *First Lessons in Bach* by Walter Carol and we had to do a number of those dances, they're just selected dances. And then, she put us in short preludes, and then we did inventions before we did preludes and fugues. We didn't do much with suites at all. As far as Classical literature is concerned, we did *tons* of sonatinas. I knew practically every Clementi and Kuhlau sonatina. It was great sight-reading stuff, and she felt it was very important foundation work for the Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven. And then she taught them in that sequence. She would never jump directly to Beethoven—you always

had to do a number of Haydn sonatas before you could do Mozart and then you could finally get into Beethoven. And when I went to college, I had so much literature in my background, it was just incredible. Just incredible. So that has been a Fern impact.

Ernst: Is there anything about your teaching style or how you interact with students?

MB: I don't think too much, no. Fern sat to the right of the piano, pretty much like I do. And I remember she'd sit so close, I'd almost hit her with my elbow. No. No, I think a lot of the teaching style has just sort of evolved. I don't feel that I imitate any particular teacher when I teach, or words that I use or anything like that.

Ernst: Is there anything in your playing that you would trace back to her or other teachers?

MB: I could say this, that Fern really kind of redid my hand. She was really for very basic rounded hand position and playing on your tips and things. And, I've never in all the other teachers that I've had, gone to Oberlin and gone to Indiana University and studied in Europe—the guy in Europe wanted to change everything. But when I got to Oberlin, Dannenberg ran me through a few exercises that all of students go through, but he never said one diddly-squat about how I play. And so I would have to say that Fern set my hand and nobody [pause]. I often wish I had gone to Julliard or someplace like that, and somebody would have said, you have to learn to play the piano all over again, you're not doing it right. But, nobody's ever done that.

Ernst: So would you say that you had a natural, ease in your approach to the piano?

MB: I think there was a certain naturalness about, because I really covered advanced repertoire as a kid. Like I said, I did the whole Moonlight Sonata when I was in the 7th grade and the Revolutionary Etude in the 8th grade and went on from there. I did Rondo Capriccioso, but I don't remember how old I was. I remember working on the Mendelssohn; I did the whole Mendelssohn G Minor Concerto when I was in junior high or high school.

Ernst: That's amazing.

MB: So there had to be a certain natural affinity. And sight reading, I always played for the church choir. I was not involved in the choral program in high school, I was involved in the band program. First I started out trumpet, and then I got braces on my teeth, and I was just tearing my lip apart. So the band instructor said, "Well, we want you to stay in the band, why don't you switch to tenor saxophone." I put a tenor sax in my mouth, learned the fingerings, and away we went. And I got really

bored with tenor sax, and so he switched me to oboe. And I went through high school as an oboist.

Ernst: You know I was an oboist as well, and learned trumpet later.

MB: There are lots of parallels. [laughing] I was oh-so-glad to get rid of the oboe when I went to college and I've never unpacked it since. At one time I was really, really fascinated with oboe and thought I'd drop piano, but that lived its way out. But, it's interesting to try to think about the impact of different teachers on your life, and it may be that I'm a little insensitive to what they really did. I would say that Fern really turned me on to music, in a way that maybe nobody else did. Dannenberg turned me on to the necessity for reading the score accurately and I think that Nagy sort of opened up a whole world of the wonder of sound and the variety of sound and the emotional color of what we're doing. I had great respect for all of my teachers. I think I'll leave it at that. And Sebök was so different. As a teacher I would sit in those masterclasses, and listen to people play, and I would think, surely he's going to address himself to such and such, and I never, never could out guess him. He always went someplace that I wasn't even aware of. But he was an amazing intellect and an amazing pedagogue and an amazing pianist. We were there for three weeks. There was a three week masterclass, and the kids would come from all over Europe and the states and play *big* repertoire. And he always played a recital on the final night of the masterclass, and he would wait until the final day to decide what he was going to play because he didn't want to duplicate any repertoire that was played during those three weeks. Can you believe that?

Ernst: I can't imagine.

MB: He'd wait to the final night and say, "Oh, nobody's played *Carnaval*, I'll play the *Carnaval* tonight." The masterclass had such a reputation in the area of Switzerland there, that the church where he had the concerts, it would just be packed out. The masterclass itself would generate a series of concerts; there would be solo piano concerts and chamber music concerts, and then his solo recital. The church was truly packed out. A lot of people, in Europe, vacation at the same place, year after year after year, and there was always a steady stream of Dutch car license plates that you would see. They would all come and hear Sebök's masterclasses. Those are the main teachers that I've had. The person I'd really like to coach with is Boris Berman. He's the main teacher at Yale, and he's just fabulous.

Ernst: As a kid, were there other activities that you did? Or, was music your only activity?

MB: During the school year, well, I was busy and sort of the preverbal extracurricular activities. I dropped out of athletics pretty much in high school because I just was not good enough. In grade school and junior high school I played basketball and football a little bit. It was okay, I didn't enjoy it particularly. I certainly wasn't very good, and I wore glasses and that was kind of an impediment. I am very near sighted. I've had Lasik surgery and am doing great. As a six-year-old already, I was starting to wear glasses and they just got thicker and thicker every year; I was really, really near sighted. And that impeded the sports. And I was involved with church groups. In high school I was president of a couple of our clubs, the Key Club and Honors Society, and Senior Editor of the school annual. I was really so glad to get off to college to get rid of all this extraneous stuff. And then in the summer times—you may be interested—I worked on my uncle's farms, and became a farmer in the summer time, and that was good and earned a little money. My parents made it really clear to us that summer was not for relaxation, summer was for work. They helped us establish saving accounts in the bank and we'd deposit all of our money in the bank—it was for college. They were good teachers. When I was really young, like in 7th grade, about the only job you could get in the early summer was to pick peas. These farmers would plant big fields of peas and they didn't harvest them with any machine. They hired crews of pea pickers. And you'd go out, I'd get up at about four or five o'clock in the morning, and Mom would take me down to a parking lot of a grocery store and truck drivers would take you out to the fields and you'd pick peas, and the fields were wet with dew and your Levi's would practically fall off because they were so wet. You'd pick your hamper of peas and have to take it in to the weigh station. I could hardly lift it up. It was *hard* work. And you got something like 60 cents for a full bushel of peas. And I'd come back home with my couple of dollars, and I'd say, "Do I have to go out in the morning Mother?" She'd say, "Yes, you won't have another opportunity to do much work this summer. You've got to go." It was really interesting, Dad earned a good living, and they taught their boys to work. It was also interesting growing up, we were allowed to sleep in on Saturday mornings to a certain extent, but when we got up, Dad would have a list of chores for each one of us to do that day. Marvin, you're going to have to weed the barberries, Loren, you are to mow the lawn, Wayne, you have to clean out the chicken coop. All of this is ultimately very helpful for you. Mom was really busy, and as a young child, I would go to the grocery store with her. I knew her whole routine—I knew what she liked, I knew how she picked out her fruit, what she said to the meat counter guy—there was a routine established, so that when I was in high school I guess, I would ride my bicycle over to Fern's and take my lesson, and then stop by the grocery store, and buy the groceries for the week. Mom would make out a list and I would go up to the meat counter, and say I'd like a roast for 3 pounds the way Mrs. Blickenstaff likes it. I knew what brands of condensed milk she bought. So, I was a grocery shopper at a pretty young age. What I really hated was that my Dad's office was very near the grocery store. I'd ride over and put the groceries in his car and I would then go in

to the office and I had to be his nurse for the rest of the afternoon because he let his girls off Saturday afternoon. And I felt so dumb because I didn't know really what to do. And what he was trying to do was to get me involved with what generated the family income, and what he does as a dentist. And I actually, if it weren't for Fern, I'd probably be a dentist. And then, he'd put my bicycle in the back of the car, and we'd come home when he was done with his work on Saturday afternoon. Then there were a couple of summers toward the end of my high school career where I was a soda jerk at the local drive in. [laughing] And that was actually pretty hard work too because the crowds would come in after a movie, most especially after the rodeo. And it was a drive-in curb service kind of thing, and the curb service gals would ring the bell and give you their order and you had to get the hamburgers up. [laughing] The first summer I worked there, they hired me as a dish washer and potato peeler for 50 cents an hour, and I worked so fast, that they said, I had to wash the dishes—there was no dishwasher—I was the dishwasher. Part of my job was to peel the potatoes for French fries. I worked so fast as a dish washer and French fryer that I didn't have anything to do, so then they assigned me to make the hamburger patties. They found out that I could make potato salad, so they added that to my job. I ended up covering the jobs that had been divided between two people, and they fired the other guy! I was fast enough that I could do everything [laughing], and they raised my salary by 10 cents an hour. On Saturday nights they were open to at least midnight, and then I had to mop the floors and do the waxing, and I wouldn't get home until one o'clock or so. But that was no excuse for not going to church the next morning, so I'd get up and go to church.

Ernst: Was your household a musical household? Did you have music playing in the house?

MB: No, no. Mom played the piano, and I don't even know where she learned to play the piano because they were kind of poor farm people. But she did play the piano, and that's one of my early, early childhood musical memories is mom playing the piano and we'd stand around and sing.

Ernst: Was it religious music?

MB: No. Kind of pop stuff. Sheet music from those days. And she sang in the church choir, but she was truly an untrained musician. She could never have taught piano. But, we had an old upright piano. I learned on that piano and studied on that piano. It was a Brewster piano, and then, when it was pretty clear that I was going to go on, and they [my parents] built a larger house, they bought a Baldwin grand piano. My dad had a cousin in Boise who was the Baldwin dealer, so he gave him a good deal. Do you know what S&H green stamps are?

Ernst: No.

MB: It was a promotional device where so many different stores would give stamps according to the amount of your purchase, and you would fill up your books with your stamps. And then you'd go in and claim prizes. You could get electric appliances and things like that. We got green stamps for the grand piano! [laughing] The whole family gathered around for hours, licking the green stamps for buying a grand piano.

Ernst: That must have been a strong sign to you that your parents were supportive.

MB: Oh yeah, and I think they probably talked to Fern, but it was clear. First of all, they had room in their new house in the living room for a grand piano. And then they gave that piano to me, and I had that for a number of years, up until I bought the Steinway. Our family was not particularly musical. I remember the folks bought, at one point, a console radio that had a record player in it. But they had no records. I remember our minister gave them their first records and it was the Ferde Grofé Grand Canyon Suite. So I grew up really loving the sound of the Grand Canyon Suite.



### Interview No. 4

Thursday, November 19, 2009

The content of this interview is biographical and philosophical in nature.

Ernst: For the record, would you state your birth date and location?

MB: I was born in Nampa, Idaho, on May 19, 1935, in the Samaritan Hospital on a Sunday morning, and Fern's father was the attendant physician.

Ernst: That's so amazing. I have a couple of follow-up questions on some of the things you've mentioned. One is that you've often referred to *Music Pathways* as your pedagogy doctorate. And I was curious if you could expand upon what that process taught you about teaching, especially teaching beginners.

MB: I would say that by and large the main thing that transpired is that I was really influenced by the experience of Lynn and Louise that they brought to the table. Louise was a very, very experienced and long-term teacher; she taught a lot. Louise was so prominent in Dallas that when SMU wanted to start a prep department they simply put their finger on her and said, "We want *you* to be the head of the prep department." And that bespoke a lot of practical experience and very strong reputation in Dallas, which is a very competitive piano town. Lynn was kind of genius, Lynn did just everything right and very well. He taught, well actually, Louise would say that Lynn was not necessarily the greatest in private teaching, that what Lynn did very well was interacting with groups. And Lynn composed very well, and Lynn understood the psyche of children and what they would like to do, and what they could do with their arms and hands, and I think he really capitalized on that. And Lynn actually had a degree in music education and so he had thought through very carefully the learning process and had been educated in that. So the *Music Pathways* experience was an experience of sitting at the feet of Lynn and Louise and learning a great deal from them. There was a lot of talk about pacing and timing, and Louise frequently would say, "No, we can't do that piece right now because they've not had enough experience and preparation for that." And it was during those years that I really had hammered in my head about preparation-presentation-reinforcement. It's a [Frances] Clark concept that we all give lip service to, but they really believed in that and we really try to work that in as much as possible. The interesting thing about writing a book is that it's very difficult to do preparation in writing because once you have written something down it almost becomes the presentation.

Ernst: Absolutely.

MB: And it's one of the things that I try and bring out in workshops, is that there is this big empty page that is for the teacher to fill in, and that is the preparation, and you can't teach by just leafing through books. You have to think about what's coming up and what needs to be done, weeks in advance. And I would tell my pedagogy students that if there was *one thing* that I really felt was most important in the first year of pedagogy, it was that concept. And I would make them do lesson plans that drew that out, our lectures were based around that a lot. I would drill them after class of everything that I did that constituted preparation for something. And tried to guide them to the observation that nothing was done without thought and without pedagogical purpose. We weren't just there to have fun and games, and things looked like fun and games but they weren't. They were preparation for concepts that were coming up. So that's something that I learned from Lynn and Louise. I think I also learned quite a bit about *teaching* beginning students, when several of us taught a preliminary form of *Music Pathways*. We sort of cut and pasted and put it together—I'm sure I don't even have copies of that any more. But we had kind of a trial first book, and we farmed that out to probably six or seven of our friends who were good teachers and asked them to try that and then they were asked to write rather extensively what they felt worked and what went to fast, et cetera, et cetera. So, in a way, when *Music Pathways* was first published, it was almost like going through a revision already because we had piloted it. I had done that teaching myself with a couple of students, and I think I learned a lot about timing, and pacing, and preparation.

Ernst: Did you use that UNC, when you were teaching.

MB: No.

Ernst: No.

MB: Because it wasn't published yet.

Ernst: Oh.

MB: Okay.

Ernst: What students did you use it with then?

MB: I had a few private students. Basically the answer to your question is yes. [laughing] I was thinking that in the pedagogy class, at UNC, we did Frances Clark, we did *Music Tree*.

Ernst: Oh, okay.

MB: Yeah. But, because *Music Pathways* was not published yet. In fact as kind of an interesting peripheral story, I was eager that my pedagogy might have further contact with Frances and Louise, and I wrote them one time and I said, “Could I bring my pedagogy class up to the New School?” And they were kind enough to say, “Yes we’re having spring break at such and such a time, if come on such and such a day, we’ll give our whole day to you.” And indeed they did.

Ernst: Wow.

MB: It was just really wonderful. So we had three car loads of students, and Michael Zenge and Sherrill Martin drove their own cars; I think there were three car loads of us and we did tandem driving up to Princeton. We stayed overnight in a motel and then met with Frances and Louise and [saw] video tapes; it was in the very early days of videotaping, and they showed us video tapes of some of their classes and they gave us pedagogy lectures and demonstrations. They took us out to lunch at a tea room, and we had an afternoon session, and then we all said goodbye. It was really, really remarkable. Louise still remembers that. But, no, we were doing, I was using Clark as a method for my demonstration class at the University of North Carolina, but we were working all this time on *Music Pathways*.

Ernst: Is there anything that you can pinpoint that really changed in your teaching as a result of going through that process of writing the book and revising it?

MB: Very definitely in my class teaching. I used to sit—it’s probably exaggerated to say this—although Sara Faye always used to say, “Why are you working on lesson plans, you’ve taught this stuff for years and years?,” and my answer was always, “Well, I just hope I can do it better this year.” And I would spend a lot of time on weekends preparing for those classes of the following week, knowing that every word I said and everything I did was not only impacting the kids in the class but the pedagogy students who were there observing me, and so it’s sort of like being—well you’ve gone through this yourself, you know what that feels like to teach a demonstration class in front of pedagogy students. And they were really wet behind the ears; they didn’t know anything. And they thought it was really—I have heard from Erica McClellan and stuff, she said recently at that luncheon, that they would sit at the back of the room and just drop their jaws at what was actually going on with the kids, that the kids were learning and having so much fun, and playing so nicely, and this kind of thing. But you have to work at that; you don’t do that casually. And so I think one of things I learned, was that to be an effective teacher, you really have to work and you have to plan. And, I confessed to you that one of the great weaknesses in my teaching now in private lessons, is I do a terrible sloppy job of literally planning *the lesson*. I give them an assignment sheet for the next week, but I spend very little time other than the selection of new repertoire

that goes on their assignment, in really thinking carefully about what we will do first and how will I prepare for that. I think, and you've seen this, I spend time in the lesson getting started on pieces because I feel that that's my responsibility; I feel very guilty ever saying, "Go home and learn a piece." We look at it and I try to help them with easy in roads and to check on rhythm and things like that, especially the younger ones.

Ernst: You know that actually reminds me of another question I had down. When you think of a successful lesson in your mind, what components would go into a successful lesson?

MB: That's a very good question and I'm not sure that my answer would differ much from a lot of other people. You've seen me teach a hunk of a lessons, and you notice that we always start with technique. I feel that if I'm gonna get any technical work done at home, I've got to model that at the lesson, and I know good and well, what is not covered in a lesson, *will not be practiced*. Okay. So, I would like, the fact that we start out with technique at the beginning is also to a certain extent a model for how I want them to start their practice. And, on their assignments, as you've seen lots of times, these are the warm-ups, and these are the steps for warm-ups. Right now in my life, I have a fairly clear-cut feeling in my mind that warm-ups start with stretches and then goes to rotations and does some finger independence and then goes on to maybe some scales and arpeggios and things like that. I feel quite strongly about that. At a good lesson, I think that one of the components of a good lesson is to help the student practice more efficiently, in every lesson. Problem solving, and working on practice. And I would hope that every lesson has some moment of thrill, where the student really feels like this is wonderful, and if I don't document that and get excited about something, that will sort of bypass them. They may feel that they have done well, but if I don't react to that, then that kind of gives the impression as to whether or not they've done that. I also tell teachers that one of the most important components of a good lesson is that there be summary at the end of the lesson, and you hear that I don't do that very often [laughing]. Every now and then we'll get around to saying now well, "What are you going to do with this and what about that?" But I really think that especially for a young teacher—well, for any teacher—that it's really helpful for the student to kind of go over in their minds, "Now what do we do today, and how am I going to practice on that?" Summary can be done also as you go through a lesson, after you've worked on a piece, and then say, "Now let's think about what we've done and how that's going to impact your practice this week," and do that. But, I really like the idea of sitting back at the end of a lesson and saying, "Okay, that was fun. Now what did we do and how are you going to practice that?"

Ernst: One of the things I have been curious to ask you about, is when you think about the student-teacher relationship, what in your mind defines a healthy relationship, and what do you do to make that part of your lesson atmosphere?

MB: That's a very good question. I think it's possible for teachers to get too involved with their student's lives, and then there's no, in a way, there's no differentiation between my friend and my teacher, and the person I can really cry on her shoulder and the person that makes me go home and really try to achieve. I think the relationship basically is built on affirmation. I know as a human being that I thrive on affirmation, and I know that that is true for most everybody else. And, if a student comes to a lesson and all they get is criticism and a list of things that they haven't done correctly, that's not a very healthy relationship. I feel that if I affirm my student, and they know that I like them as a human being, that then I've earned the right to get pretty strict sometimes and say, but you are *not* meeting your potential or you're not practicing. And I can be critical about a certain section of a piece, if I need to be. I don't find lots of occasions where I need to be sort of hard-nosed about something. The thing that probably upsets me the most is when mistakes are not corrected week after week; I'm forgiving for one week, you know, and then after awhile, I think, "Now wait a second, there's really a lack of attention in that, and my markings and my comments are *not* being taken seriously at home." And, so, I talk to the students a little bit about that, but I can't tell you how infrequently I get upset in a lesson; it's just not my style too much. I'd much rather be able to find a place in the piece, and you've actually seen me do this in some of these lessons I'm sure, that we'll go to maybe one measure that was really good and we'll focus on how that was good and why that was good, and then, try to draw connections to other places that were not up to that standard and make repairs *that way*, rather than saying, well, you didn't do this and you didn't do that. And even with rhythmic mistakes, you know, if we can clap it and experience it that way, and experience it correctly, we can back and make repairs. I am not interested, I am not in the business of damaging human personalities. I just don't believe in that. And, I think that as an authority figure in their lives, I have the potential of doing that; if I were really mean, I could really *hurt these kids*. And I am much more eager to build them up as human beings and therefore opening them up to the possibility of what a wonderful role music can play in their lives. If they're open to my relationship with them, then they're open to the subject matter, and on and on it goes. You understand what I'm saying.

Ernst: That's very eloquently put.

MB: Thank you.

Ernst: But I wonder if you might just articulate what it is that really motivates you to continue teaching? Even today you just said you can't imagine stopping.

MB: Yeah, I don't know when I'm gonna stop. Yeah, I don't. It is a love. If I were truly independently wealthy, and just had all the money and never had to earn another cent in my life, I might consider doing less teaching [laughing], but I'm not sure that I would ever give [up]; I would do less teaching and a lot more practicing. The one thing that's really missing in my life is that I just don't get enough time to play the piano. And, I have played the piano for nearly seventy years, I mean I started when I was six, we're talking about sixty-eight years, that I have played the piano, and most of those years, it was really quite serious. When I was a college teacher, I gave a new faculty recital every year. I really practiced hard, and it was not easy stuff necessarily. And then when I would go to new schools, like the switch from North Carolina to Goshen, I would repeat some repertoire there, so they were not always new rep, and same thing at the College of New Jersey. I'm not sure, some piano faculty people at the College of New Jersey have played concertos, but I was the only one who played solo recitals. And, I just thought that's what we do as piano faculty people. And so it's really a difficult pill for me to swallow, in these years of my life, I could excuse a couple years because of Sara Faye's illness, but teaching is really getting in the way of my playing the piano. And, the requests for lessons, keep coming, and so I'm teaching about as much as my daily schedule will allow, you know. I [laughing], who was it who called? Oh no, a guy who's graduated from high school. I got a call last year from a mother, and she said, "We have friends who are studying with you and we hear wonderful things and I'd like my son to study with you." And, I laughed and said, "I'm really sorry, but the only way I can possibly accept any new student, would be if they're home schooled and come during the day." And she said, "We're home schooled and we can come during the day." [laughing] She caught me at my own game! [laughing]. So I had a great year with him, and he's finished high school.

Ernst: That's funny.

MB: We're home schooled and we can come during the day! But, what motivates me to teach! Well, I'm ninety percent used car salesman and ten percent missionary. And, I think that's kind of it. And sort of one hundred percent musician [laughing].

Ernst: What exactly does that mean?

MB: It means, when I say I'm ninety percent used car salesman, it means that I just *love* to try to convince other people of my ideas. I know that that's why I give a fairly decent workshop, is because I stand up there on stage and I want them to become believers in what I'm saying. And, I feel that I have been at it long enough that I know ways that I can help them, and I know I am too, [hushed voice], because people come year after year; "We remember when you, I'm still using

things that I've learned from you ten years ago or fifteen years ago," or something like that. And people are also still coming up and saying, "Why don't you write a book?," you know.

Ernst: So what is the ten percent missionary, what does that mean?

MB: Oh, it's kind of the same thing. I want to *give* music to these people, you know, the gospel of music. And that's more than ten percent. In fact, I think in a way, it's kind of the whole thing. I want to do that for teachers and I want to do that for kids. And, you know I think that impacts my repertoire choices, because I don't care if these kids are playing some pop tunes and things like that, because it's expressive and it's fun for them, well why not! And the little Christmas carols, I thought it was so cute this morning that [Phoebe] just, oh! Just thought that was so great! So, it, [pause] I'm still teaching because it's an easy way for me to finance my lifestyle. It's not particularly easy, but it's the thing I do and the thing I'm good at. It is fulfilling what is, sort of my life's mission, and that is to be a music teacher, and I feel I am doing my students good by giving them the gift of music, if you want to say that. That's why I still teach. As we were talking about at lunch, I don't know when the sign will come or how it will come that I shouldn't teach any more. I'm a little worried about that, because I might be so naive, although I don't know whether you and Louise talked about it, but she will tell you that I am ridiculously kind of self-effacing and questioning about my effectiveness, and things like that, and I have lots of reservations about who I am as a musician and even as a teacher. I just feel that there is so much more that I could be doing better, and there's so much repertoire that I don't know and I feel should know, and this kind of stuff. And, Louise hears me unload now and then on that. And they just laugh at me, and nobody really takes me seriously when I tell them that I think I'm just kind of an average teacher. But, I have lots of reservations about my teaching effectiveness, and I see people, like Elvina, I see her teach at conferences, my goodness, I can't even come close to that, and the way her students [pause]. I don't have students who go off and just knock off competitions and play Prokofiev sonatas when they're eight years old and things like that, and there are those people around. I feel if I were really a good teacher, I should be producing those kind of students, and then, you know, you kind of say, "Be thankful that your students love what they're doing and you have fun with them in their lessons" and things like that. And maybe that's better than playing a Prokofiev sonata when you're eight years old, but I just don't know quite how those teachers do that. The little [Olivia] yesterday, with the Kölling Fluttering Leaves, her fingers fly because she was with one of those Chinese teachers. And I think she presses too hard in the key and I don't like her sound sometimes, but her fingers really move. But, they didn't like the pressure any more, and so they came to the New School, and Amy assigned her to me because she was so advanced, for her [age]; she came in playing the Mozart sonata in [MB goes to piano and plays an excerpt], and she just knocked it off, and

here's this little girl! So, I've not tried to take her on from that level and we've backed off a little bit.

Ernst: Do you think, though, that a complacency in your teaching or a desire not to better yourself. I just kind of wonder, if having that desire to always become a better self, if that's partly what would keep you teaching.

MB: Well, I have often said, and I really mean this quite sincerely, that before I die, I wish I'd really learn how to teach the piano. [laughing]

Ernst: But you do it so beautifully!

MB: I feel quite a bit the same way about playing. I wish that I were a really beautiful pianist, and I've played a lot of really good recitals and when I play, people comment that it really kind of touches them, and this kind of thing. But I have felt really all my life, this *desire* to be such a much better pianist. I haven't thought about this for fifty years, I remember one time I was in my twenties and I went home and played a recital. And a dear friend who was really an excellent musician, was commenting about how wonderful the recital was and stuff, and I said, "Uh, but I feel I am so far behind that I should be so much better at my age." And she said, "How old are you?," and I said, "24." And she laughed and she said, "You have your whole life in front of you." But, there is, I think that you really hit on something. That there is, I really am not satisfied with so much of what I do and that sort of one of things that keeps me at it, cause I just would so, I really would like to be able to close out life feeling that I was good. And so you know, I get these awards and things like that, and that's just really wonderful, and it tells me that it's not been all bad [laughing], but I feel that it's not good [laughing], so anyway that's my particular psychological hang up. I'm not sure where that comes from. [personal information omitted]

Ernst: It made me think about the families that come into your studio. How do you view your connection to the parents and to the family, in the larger unit?

MB: Yeah. We're [pause].

Ernst: Especially with siblings.

MB: We're certainly not social friends. I have no social friends in the studio, but I feel like there is a warmth. I mean my families are really concerned about me and Sara Faye, and they saw me nurture her here, and she would come in the lessons and they were so kind and understanding. And they still ask about her, so there is that kind of concern and sort of mutual, I don't know what I want to say, there's a warmth there. But, I've never been invited to any of their homes or anything like



that, you know. And, some will bring me food, and well that's ok. I actually don't want to get that involved. Actually, I have been invited to the [Family name]; Sarah Faye and I were invited for supper one time. And when the older brother graduated, well I'm invited to all the graduation parties. But, no, I like it the way it is. We're open and we're friendly and we support one another, but we don't mess in each other's lives. Does that answer [pause]?

Ernst: I think it does. Do you, with your students, do you see a way in which your role changes for the student when they are moving through their years of study?

MB: Yeah I do. [long pause, sigh] My first response to that is I almost naturally—I guess there is a little button I push, now relate to a seven year old, and now you're relating to a middle school student. And I'll be very interested in talking with you, yet during your stay, to see if you feel that I'm doing that effectively. I would hate it if somebody would tell me that I was too childish with a young student. I have received comments, very specific comments in masterclasses, that they thought it was kind of amazing, at the way I adjusted to the personality and the age of the student. And they just see this in living color throughout a morning, you know. And there's something kind of natural. If I do it well, it's not calculated; I do it because of my respect for that person and where they are. And so, I guess that's the most obvious way that I can answer your question, do I change? I think I adjust to their personality and their growth. As they're getting into high school, there is obvious advice about career choices and choices of schools and things like that. I have impacted some students decisions about schools, or opened up the possibility of places that they can apply, like [Greg] and St. Olaf.

Ernst: When you think to the adult students that you have now, is there anything that you think of specifically for an adult student, that's more a hobbyist pianist, that you feel that your role is in a certain way?

MB: Yeah, definitely. I try to be sensitive to what that student wants from their piano lessons. Yesterday you saw a lesson with the wife of the chair of the Princeton University Music Department, an eminent musicologist, and she is a well-educated musician. In college she was an oboe major and has played a lot of piano. And, she obviously from a very, very different stand point than the lady who played the second movement of the Schubert; the gal who played the Andante Spinato and the Schubert, she just picks up stuff and brings it to the lesson. She says, "I'd like to learn that." "Well, go for it, baby," you know. If they don't have ideas—now the wife of the Princeton University Music Department, I basically assign her her music; that's very interesting. She would be in such a position to pick [it] out, and the other lady, then she kind of comes, "Well, I heard this on the radio, can I play this?" And so we do. Well, I would never in a million years [laughing] have assigned her the Chopin Andante Spinato, but she just thinks the

melody is so beautiful, and so we will work on it, you know with that. I just feel so touched that they're taking time out in their lives to play the piano. I am just so touched with that! And, so, I want it to be as enjoyable as possible.

Ernst: Can you—maybe this isn't a good compare and contrast—but when working with adults as college students, how does then that change?

MB: Oh, changes radically. A college student is a babe in the woods, as far as their piano education is concerned. They've got all this literature that they *must* cover, should cover [laughing]. They've got so much technique that they should be covering, you know, but it's mainly literature. The thing that just drives you crazy about college students is that they get all bogged down with playing this jury exam and they have to play a sophomore committee and then they gotta do a junior recital and stuff. And you don't get *near* the repertoire covered that they really should cover. That's really frustrating. Now, with my adult students, they don't have any musts and shoulds. And so we just do what we want to; oh, it's a *very* different situation. Now, one of the things that I'm really not good at, and that is fostering a student's independence. I have a little bit of too much of a tendency to tell them how it is supposed to be done. I'm pleased if I can ever get to a point that says, "Well you go on and decide." You've heard a few instances of that, but that doesn't happen enough. I remember at Goshen, a couple of times, I would take my whole studio, and they would be divided pretty nicely between underclassmen and juniors and seniors. And I would assign pairs of students, an underclassman and an upperclassman, the same piece. And the underclassman had to learn the piece to play and the upperclassman had to learn the piece to teach. Isn't that a neat idea?

Ernst: Oh, it's fabulous.

MB: Yeah, so we would spend some of our repertoire class hearing those demonstration. The underclassman played and the upperclassman taught. And, it was very interesting that the underclassman always were better at preparing the piece than the upperclassman were at teaching. They had just such unformulated ideas. Now that would be just great to work into a pedagogy class sometime. It's hard to simulate that, but it's frightening to think how vaguely our students think about music. And they well say, "Play it sort of louder maybe." [laughing] I tell my pedagogy students that they can never say sort of, and okay, because it just doesn't mean anything. Or, a little bit, is another phrase they are not allowed to say in a lesson [emphasizes each word with his fist]. A little bit louder means absolutely nothing [laughing].

Ernst: Do you feel like at all that process for your students, having to be put in a teaching situation, would help them formulate, did it get them to a point where they learned?

MB: In several ways. First of all it helps them to realize how stupid they are.

Ernst: [laughing]

MB: How inept they are at articulating a musical idea, and that's a big step in the right direction, and then from that we can go on. But it was just so interesting almost without exception, the upperclassmen were just sort of groping around, and they wouldn't have clear ideas, and they really didn't know what they wanted to do with the piece, and things like that. Now, I didn't follow up well enough, and help pick up the pieces, and go on with that. Because you cannot learn anything from just one experience like that. We should have done that many, many times, but I thought that was kind of a neat little way to organize a repertoire class.

Ernst: Is there anything then that changes in your mind as you worked with several graduate students?

MB: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

Ernst: Is there anything that changes in your role or your mindset at that level?

MB: Well, I think it should because the graduate students are just one step away from becoming musicians and teachers themselves. So there should be a lot of work with the graduate student on building that independence. Lessons, I think should [have] a lot of discussion about different possibilities and making choices. And as I say, I don't really do that well.

Ernst: Are you talking artistic choices or technical or all kind of [pause].

MB: All of the above.

Ernst: Okay.

MB: Actually because within a few months they're gonna be out faced with that, and I think that there should be a difference. The difference that I usually made in mind was that, by and large, they should be playing a different level of repertoire as a graduate student. So, we covered some pretty difficult repertoire. But, I think I did not really deal well with them. My graduate school teaching was almost exclusively at North Carolina, and they played difficult pieces, but I am not sure they necessarily grew in their independence. Most of those people at that time were also teaching and sometimes we would discuss about their teaching.

Ernst: Did you as a pianist yourself feel your independence grow?

MB: I told you. Ha! The year in Germany.

Ernst: Oh!

MB: When I couldn't trust my piano teacher, and that was the most frustrating and the most [pause]. It's another one of those points where God said, "Well now Marvin, it's time for you to stop being a good little boy and have to think a little bit." In a way, that's what every graduate student should have to do, go through a period where you don't trust, and you have to come back to yourself and say, "What do I really think about this?" And that happened to me that whole year. Cause I didn't like the things that the first professor was telling me, and then I got so little help from the second teacher because the lessons were very irregular. He was a very good musician, but we didn't meet frequently enough. [personal information omitted]

Ernst: Your wife was social worker and psychologist, right?

MB: Yeah.

Ernst: I believe in an interview you spoke briefly about how you would talk with your wife about your students.

MB: Some, some.

Ernst: Some?

MB: Not a lot, not a lot.

Ernst: I just wondered if there was anything—she obviously had a very interesting perspective on human behavior and relationships.

MB: Very, very. [pause, sigh] I'm trying to think of specific instances and I'm not coming up with anything. [pause] One thing, Sara Faye had very strong feelings about a relationship between teacher and student, and she was always really careful and almost critical about my getting too close to my students. And there was a little tension between us, well, I just never fought about the issue. Sara Faye was very reluctant to entertain students in our home. I was embarrassed at Goshen that we had my students in our home so seldom. There were almost whole student generations would go by and they had never been in our home. And she really, really drug her feet on that and it was this whole thing about she didn't want the students to get involved in our private life, and I felt very differently about that. I thought that the minimum that we should do is have a dinner party for my

students at our home each year, and all the other people did, and much more frequently than that. So, that was one thing, and it was always kind of a negative thing from Sara Faye's angle saying, "You can't do that because you're getting too close to your students." As far as helping me deal with the sort psychological relationships with students, that wasn't very frequent. She knew quite a bit about growth stages and the psychology of children and this kind of thing and I'm sure there were discussions about my work with kids in the class. Oh I remember, I'm not even going to say that about an activity we did in class that she felt was a little bit too childish, and I knew that it was doing good rhythmic reinforcement and so on. And she didn't see me teach; I didn't teach at home and she would never come into my studio. And here, now that's kind of interesting, but she was never in on these lessons, because she was always busy elsewhere in the house. And until she was so encumbered that she would need to sit here because I needed to take care of her, but then she was not aware enough to respond to any kind of relationships, what's going on. That's an interesting question, and I would have to sort of down play. It's seems like a real natural, but kind of down play the impact that Sara Faye had on my relationship with my kids.

Ernst: One of the things that I often wonder, is how do you build that relationship?

MB: With a student?

Ernst: Yes. I mean, do you have concrete ways [laughing].

MB: No, no.

Ernst: It's a silly question [pause], but [pause].

MB: Other than the fact that it has been rather easy for me to regard every student as a precious human being. Little kids come in, and I think at first they're children, and then rather readily, they turn into be human beings, that have small heads [laughing]. You know! I think that's how, I really think it's a relationship issue, and as you have seen, I go way out of my way to affirm and tell them it was good. And, that's how you build a relationship.

Ernst: How did you develop that?

MB: I don't know! Other than the fact that at home we got a lot of affirmation. Now our parents were—especially my dad—my dad was a little bit Germanic, obviously born in this country, from a Pennsylvania Dutch background. And the father figure was strong, and my mother was in a way, a more—dad was a loving human being, mother was a little bit more the maternal loving part of the family. And there was a lot affirmation at home, and so there's a kind of a natural—I had a colleague at

Goshen who was a fabulous baritone, and in high school and college, he was a wonderful athlete also. And he told me one time that his father had never told him that he was proud of him or that he did anything good. And, I just, I mean that took my breath away. When I was living in Chapel Hill, during those ten years or so, I think of that, but it was also in New York before that, and after, my parents would write to me every week, and I would write to them every week. We didn't phone; we wrote. And, every letter that they wrote ended, "We're so proud of you." And, [becoming emotional, with tears in his eyes] that just has to impact you, "We're so proud of you." And, you know, I was going through a divorce that they didn't think should've happened and all that kind of stuff, and still, we're so proud of you. Boy, that's fuel for your life. And I think, I don't know, I think that affirmation is something I believe in so much and it comes naturally to me because I received it. [pause]

Ernst: Can you think of any of your teachers in music that were particularly affirming of your desires?

MB: In a way all of them, in a way all of them. I think the genius of Fern was that she affirmed and she had very high standards. And maybe that's a little bit where I get that because Fern never told us that we were the greatest thing that hit the keyboard, but she also let us know—I'm not the only one—that she was really proud of us, and thought our accomplishment was significant and this kind of thing. But she had these *very* high standards; I think that's the thing that really turned me on to music through Fern was that it's something that I could aspire to. It was up there that I had [laughing]; maybe that's why I mean Fern, left her indelible step [points upward while still laughing], I'm still trying to get there Fern! Never put that together. Fern affirmed. I knew that Danenberg was proud of my work; he was kind of gruff, and really dry sense of humor, but I knew that he was proud of me. And I knew that I was one of the best in his studio too. And Dr. Nagy, I heard him say, in front of other students, "Well you know Marvin comes to lessons with everything memorized." And Sebök, would take me aside, on a couple of occasions, and confide in me things that were happening in his personal life, some honors that he was getting and things like that. And so I think he liked me too, and so I got a lot of affirmation. And sometimes, you know, that award [pointing to the Canadian award], I think I'm undeserving of that, but anyway. I have gotten a lot of affirmation in my life, maybe I just feel like I need to pass that on. I just think that my life has been very blessed, and I truly feel undeserving of such [laughing]. [personal information omitted]

It's very obvious that I was, it wasn't black sheep, but I certainly did not march to [Lauren's and Wayne's] drummer. Because they were in medicine, and you know the story about dad saying, "Yes I think we'll let Marvin major in music." I made a decision that was very different; and I'm not even too sure but that wasn't

stimulated by that fact that I just was *not* going to follow in their footsteps one minute longer. But, if dad had not given me permission, I wouldn't have majored in music. Our household was not such that would go against your parents' judgment and wishes. And our household not—I hardly understand, I hear from my students all the time now, "Well, we just want whatever you want," you know, and they don't give guidance. Whatever will make you happy. Children need more than that, they need to say, "Well your strengths are so obviously here, why don't you follow your strengths?" I understand parents' reactions, but I also am a little bit upset with parents who say that you must select the most financially secure profession. That's not following your passion, and I think there are an awful lot of people who are in pharmaceuticals or something like that who just [wish] to high heaven they could play cello. [laughing]. But if dad had not laid down his fork at the breakfast table and said, "I think we'll let Marvin major in music," I wouldn't have, and I could have made in medicine. I'm reasonably intelligent and you know.

Ernst: So your father was a dentist.

MB: He was a dentist.

Ernst: Your mother, was she a home maker?

MB: My mother did not go beyond, that's an interesting story. When their family moved to Idaho from North Dakota, she was an eighth grader, she had finished eighth grade. And they came to Nampa, and her parents heard that a couple girls in the Nampa High School had had to get married the year before, and they wouldn't let mother go to Nampa High School, they were so afraid of the moral condition at Nampa High School, and so she never, she stayed home for a few years, and got a job in town. Isn't that sad? Mother was not as bright as dad; she was a loving, caring woman, and she took care of our house like nobody's business. She ran the family, but dad was a bright man, he was valedictorian of every class he was ever in. Hard worker and innately bright. That whole family was. The number of valedictorians in that family is incredible. They were bright people and had very kind of ordinary parents. There was just something extraordinary about that whole story of coming out, homesteading, grubbing the sage brush off the land, going to church, working hard, you know. There was something so character building about all that. So anyway, dad made the major decisions and he was the guiding force in the family as far as major decisions.

He was a dentist and he was a very good dentist, and he was a very—dad probably did more free dentistry in Nampa than anybody in the history of medical practice in Idaho [laughing]. Every minister in town, he would do their dental work free of charge—missionaries coming through, poor people. I remember during the late years of the depression—well when would this have been—I suppose I was about

four or five years old, and that would have been nearing the 1940s, but we would have big, five gallon tins of honey up in the attic because the honey man could not pay for his dentures, and so he gave us honey, that kind of stuff. That's the kind of guy my dad was. Dad had a soft heart, and dentistry for *him* was a *service* profession; he felt he could help other people by being a dentist. And if that meant not charging people, then he wouldn't charge them. He was great guy. He was just a fabulous model to have as a father.

Ernst: Do you think of piano teaching as a service profession?

MB: Yeah in a way I do. Yeah, it's service like a school teacher or something. We're *educating* people, and we're educating them in the arts. I think what I'm doing in a way, and this sounds pretty highfaluting, but in a way, what I'm doing is educating their souls. I think if I can turn a student on to sensitivity, and broaden their view of life's experiences, and emotional experience, that I am helping them grow as a human being and a soul, you know.

Ernst: That's beautiful.

MB: My dad used to use the phrase sometimes of ennobling one another. I think that's what music does, if you can really grab on. Those kids yesterday in the PEPS class, I think music is ennobling their lives. Maybe before you leave we'll have a little chance for you to read over some of these statements of what music means to me; it just breaks your heart because they are so heartfelt. I purposefully told them that they could not sign their statements, but they had to make copies for everybody in class. So everybody in class has a little sheaf of statements from the rest of the classmates of what music means to me. And, doing them anonymously obviously meant that they could be more freely expressive. It was very touching. As a piano teacher who comes and says, "You are supposed to play F-sharp there," I don't realize that these kids say, "Oh, music is the thing that I grab close to my heart, and it's just mine." I don't realize that it means that much to them. That's where we want them to be.

Ernst: So in what ways as a teacher can you help them get there, or help them find that with the piano?

MB: You go the music. You go the music. Every piece has a little message. I am so tired and really impatient with teachers who just teach notes because you're bypassing an opportunity to bring the music alive. And I think that just really very important. So you go to the music, and say, "What does this music have to tell us?" And it can be as superficial as is this happy or sad, but I don't do that. Well I'm sure that you've heard a little bit about, "Well what time of year is this piece?" You open



up their imagination of what *sound* can convey. And that's where the magic of music is, what it does to our minds and spirits.

Ernst: In your past or present do you read philosophy at all?

MB: No I don't. See, I'm not sure that we [laughing]—I have so many reservations about who I am as a human being and you've just touched on one. Because I feel that I am poorly educated; I just feel that I am poorly educated. Oh, I do! I feel like I really should just go back to school and start all over again. And, one of the things I've longed for all my life is time to read. Because I know that I could educate myself a little bit more if I could have time to read. But I don't and I never have. I've practiced, you know.

Ernst: Of course you do.

MB: And I used to say every Christmas vacation, I'm going to read a book, and I'd sit down on the couch and start reading, and then Sara Faye would get a bit upset and say, "You're not helping me with this and that you know, and how can you just sit there and read," and even then, see, I was not given the opportunity to read. We never in our marriage, really just sort of propped ourselves up in bed and read ourselves to sleep; we just never did that. Now for the first time in life, I go to bed and read a little bit. I've got a whole stack of books up on my lamp table that I'm trying to read, and I hear things mentioned at church and I Google it and get something from Amazon.com. Michael was here last week and told me about two very important books on classical performance practices and one came yesterday, and I'm sure there's another one waiting out in the mailbox, and I'll try to read those. Becky Martin, in her recital, she sang "Sure on This Shining Night" by Barber, and it is so gorgeous, and Jens Lindemann plays this on this CD we have still not heard, you know, and I wrote Jennifer and Jens and I said, "I think that you have to come and play for my funeral; that's the piece you have to play." I just love that piece, and his sound is wonderful; I wouldn't mind if Becky would come and sing for my funeral. Well, the words are by James Agee, and I got really all tied up accompanying *Knoxville Summer 1915* one time, and he wrote that whole thing. It's the epilogue to *Death in the Family*, or something like that, it's a novel he wrote. And I was so struck with that, and then, "Sure on This Shining Night," and so I recently got a book of Agee poems and a novel that he wrote. Now I'm sensing that when Sara Faye's not here, I have a little bit more time.

Ernst: I've been struck with how you are, there are certain things that are just so formed in who you are and how you teach, what you do and what you say about teaching, do you think that has just grown from the years of doing it?

MB: I do, I do. There was no point in my life when I sat down and said I'm going to be this kind of teacher, or something like that, or got a piece of paper and said this is what I believe in, no, no. It's just development, and it's longevity. I've taught an awful long time. You know, and I would pray that I'm a better teacher now than I was thirty years ago, and a different teacher. And I'm sure there are some similarities, but I looked around that table at the MTNA luncheon and thought but you guys were with me thirty years ago, what in the world did I have to give you thirty years ago, and how could you have possibly thought I was a good teacher? I wrote—when Arlene was here last summer—I said something to her like that, something about “What did I possibly teach you, way back at Goshen?” And she wrote me a most beautiful email. I know I've saved that; I could look that up and give that to you.

Ernst: If you do think back, is there anything that you can say has or has not changed about your teaching?

MB: Oh that's a really hard question.

Ernst: Our growth is so slow over time.

MB: Yeah, I know. [pause] I've been a technique teacher for an awful long time. And there again, see, I don't know that I'm doing it right; I think I have been influenced somewhat by a few video tapes and I saw Dorothy Taubman in action one time and I've heard Edna Golandsky. I think the rotation thing is part and parcel of who I am right now, as a teacher. I pick up bits and pieces, well no. I look back over some of my Goshen notes and realize that I taught a lot of technical routines and stuff at Goshen, and that was a long time ago.

Ernst: Do you think you were always so affirming?

MB: Pretty much, yeah. Maybe not, well I think so. I don't think I as a human being have changed that much. I think I sort of am who I am. I think if there's anything that's changed a little bit it may be that I am more readily focused on what the music is supposed to mean as opposed to how you do it specifically. Danenberg didn't—as far as I can recall—didn't talk very much about the gut reaction to it. It was, “That was not loud enough because Beethoven marks,” and that kind of thing. And I think I have turned that bend a long time ago. But if anything has changed in my teaching, it may be more along the lines of how you do things correctly as to how you do things effectively [laughing]. Also, I find my ideas, especially about Baroque performance practices, I think I'm a little bit more pedantic about certain things in Baroque performance practices because I find it so prevalent. For instance, I think you heard me say that “You're supposed to lift after a tied note.” I would never have said that ten years ago, and I just find it so true and so helpful all

the time, and why not make a little rule of that because it helps the kids. I've long since been a believer in detaching before a syncopated note, but that's just part of my credo right now in Baroque performance practices.

Ernst: You have highlighted something about the rule based or principle based kind of approach that you have, is something that has grown?

MB: That has grown, I think, over the years. Actually, my first MTNA presentation was in Atlanta on the Transfer Student. I was just biting my nails, I was so nervous. [laughing]. And, I think it was probably my second MTNA presentation was on interpretation, or something like that. And I had a handout on Rules of Thumb, about phrasing and on rhythm and on harmony, and they were just things that I just teach, you know. I am still using that. A lot of teachers will come to me, "I got this from you 20 years ago." And it's the sort of Marvin sermon, well the I 6/4 chord, and things like that. But, I've heard a lot of teachers say how helpful it has been to them for me to articulate my *rules*. There are teachers here in this area, over in New Jersey, who have a little list of Marvin's rules in their notebook. You know there are so many things that we do; don't you always play a dominant seventh louder than you do the resolving tonic? Well those are rules because they happen all the time. That's what that is. I'm sure you've got that handout. And so the rules keep growing, and if I need one, I'll make it up on the spot. I am not adverse at all, to telling my students, just to strengthen a point, "You know pianists all over the world agree that. Like pianists all over the world agree that you play the piano [showing hand position]." And it just strengthens the point. I am a firm believer in exaggeration, and I tell my pedagogy students that that is the one word that you carry in your hip pocket into every lesson with a younger student is exaggeration. You exaggerate all your points. You cannot get very far starting with a subtle manifestation of a point. You exaggerate it and then you pare down. I feel really strong about that. And I hope that I get my students from an exaggerated level to something that is more subtle and refined, but they got to start with the exaggeration. And I am not adverse to saying, "as loudly as possible," or "so quiet that we can't hear you," or something like that, just to make a point. That's exaggeration. I think I can get results a lot quicker if I can teach from that standpoint.

Ernst: So what in your mind defines or makes a performance? What separates the good from the amazing, do you think, in terms of your own performing or others?

MB: [pause] Well, a kind of a glib answer is how much I as a listener am impacted, as a human being am impacted by that music making. Am I attracted just to the facility, or is there something about that? You know, Murray Perahia can play a Mozart concerto or a Beethoven sonata or a Beethoven concerto, and there's something about the shaping of the sound and the timing of his playing that makes

you think that you've never really heard the piece, certainly never heard it like *that* before. And, that's the kind of thing, he does something that really reaches out, that makes you listen, makes me want to go with the sound. I'm certainly not ever concerned, in a good performance, I lose all concern about, are they going to make it? And then, since we're musicians, I think you also think a little bit about how this performance brings you closer to that composer, and you know a little bit about Schumann and you know Schubert, and Mozart, and there's something about a great performance that that person becomes kind of a bigger person in your life. But the first thing is just right here [he touches his heart and pauses], and I guess that's why I really try to talk with my students. I was interested that one of the teachers who sort of summarized what I did in Edmonton, said something about how often I talked about the listener, what you want the listener to pick up and to understand about the music. And I think that something that's kind of a new articulation in my teaching vocabulary. I don't think I talked about that very much before. I have for a number of years, tried to work with the idea that the performer is really responsible for form, getting form across to the listener, and I've talked about that for a long time. But, and to a certain extent about sound projection, did this really get out to the hall and this kind of thing. But it's a much more frequent point of conversation.

## Interview No. 5

Friday, November 20, 2009

The content on this interview is Blickenstaff's professional activities beyond his work as a piano teacher and collegiate faculty member.

Ernst: One of the things we could talk about is your work as a clinician and presenter. What influences your choices?

MB: Good question. I'm not sure I can answer that. Sometimes, teachers say to me, "We want you to come and talk to us about," so that's one of the ways these things can go. And then, one of the reasons I have a rather substantial list of workshop topics is because the International Workshops. I was hired on for a week of lectures, and year after year I would go, but year after year the same teachers would also go. And so I knew that every year I had to think of different topics. And Nelita would always ask us around November or December what our topics were for the next summer. So that, first of all, it gave us lead time, but you had to think ahead. And so I'd look over things that I hadn't talked on before and would think of things that I thought would fill in gaps for the teachers, and that would be of help to them. So there are things like teaching sonatas, and in your teaching and in judging and things, you hear pieces and you think of topics that might be of interest. For instance, I thought having studied with Fern, that I knew just about every sonatina under the sun, and then I'm not too sure if it wasn't from one of Jane's books, I realized that there was a volume of Kuhlau Sonatinas, Volume II, that I didn't know, opus 60 and opus 88. And so I got those and I thought well if I don't know these, a lot of teachers don't know them. So I've done workshops on that second volume of Kuhlau sonatinas, a number of times. There are things like that. One year I was scheduling some of the Poulenc Impromptus for recitals, and I thought, well this would be an interesting thing, and we were in France. Oh that was another thing that would stimulate some thoughts; a lot of the faculty would try to think of topics that dealt with the country in which we were having.

Ernst: Oh!

MB: Yeah. And so I remember Jean Barr doing things about Haydn performance practices, or something like that, when we were in Austria, and I would do a little bit of that same kind of thing. And we were in France one year, and I thought well this is perfect for Poulenc. And so I did quite a bit of research and prepared some of the pieces I'd played, because I'd played them on recitals, and others I prepared snippets that I could illustrate, and I had lots of overheads for them to see and did some real analysis and did some pretty intense work on Poulenc. Just things like

that, but I would attribute the pressure of the International Workshops for having developed my workshop topic list enormously because I couldn't repeat myself. I remember one year—I'm so fond of the F-sharp major Chopin Nocturne, Op. 15. It is just such a beautiful piece and the way he notates things and the B section where he goes into quintuplets and then goes into dotted figures and things like that, to me that really is quite ingenious and very careful composition. So I gave a workshop at the International Workshops one time—I think that's probably the only time I've done this particular topic—on the, I think I called it, "The Anatomy of a Masterwork," and I played the piece, talked through, showed overheads about some of the special notational things. There are a few places where Chopin very deliberately writes two downbeats, one in an alto part and then you roll and the soprano part comes in on the downbeat also, and you never quite think about that because you just kind of play it. It's very, very interesting. So sometimes my own recital playing or student repertoire would inspire a topic. I've done my fair share of technical topics. One time I took Czerny Op. 299 and talked about all the different ways in which you could teach a bunch of those pieces, and obviously we didn't get through all of them. But, my purpose there was to show different practice ways and different technical gestures and that was fun. I've done any number of times, a workshop on warm-ups, because I think everybody should warm-up and nobody does.

Ernst: What about some of the pedagogical topics, that address the learning of children, did those grow out of your teaching or pedagogy classes?

MB: Pedagogy classes, yeah, I think a lot. You know, I'm no child psychologist and I have not studied Edwin Gordon's stuff, but I'm kind of a school-of-hard-knocks teacher that I observe what my kids do and what works with them and formulate some ideas. I've read some, but I think that my observations and my sort of very direct you do this and then you do that has been helpful to teachers.

Ernst: It's definitely apparent to me through everybody I've just encountered that your workshops are something that teachers just always say, "Oh yes, they've just helped me so much." I've heard that from so many people. Is there any [pause]?

MB: I get that too, and like on the evaluations of the NCKP, you know they'll say, "And we went to Marvin's workshop and he's always the best," or something like that. It's kind of funny thing that's happened. Teachers wouldn't say that if they didn't have some feeling about that, but when I give workshops, the rooms fill up.

Ernst: Do you have any insight into the secret of your success?

MB: I think it's practicality. I hear this all the time, that they say, "Your workshops give us material that we can go home and use that very afternoon." And I think that

is it, I speak from the standpoint of practical application, more than just highfaluting theory, or something like that. Do this, and it will work for you. I think that is it in a nutshell that what we talk about, teachers can use, and it sort of makes sense. My mind works in kind of practical logical ways; it has never been very difficult for me to think about the steps of a learning process, because I think my mind sort of says, and I just look in the mirror and just say, "What is the first step here, what do they need to know before they know anything else?" And I can think through that kind of thing. And I think another thing—I've also heard from teachers in workshops, that my workshops are so easy to take notes from. And I think—well, first of all, I would never give a workshop without almost every word being—well, you have a copy of all this stuff. I type them out! And, I've always admired people who could just stand up and do it, sort of from memory, and I can't do that. I don't trust myself to do that. But, that kind of logical approach, what do the teachers need to hear first so that then we can go to this point and that point? That's kind of the way I operate, and I don't know where that comes from. I really don't know. But, I am blessed with the ability to think through process, and that has really served me well in teaching, especially with the little kids in classes in the first year because man *that* is process.

Ernst: The masterclasses you give are also very well-remembered. When you think of masterclass teaching versus what you do in a private studio, is there things that you really think of as distinctive differences?

MB: Well, I told you the other day that masterclass teaching is easy because you can prepare a little something that teachers think you're great. It's the day to day teaching that's hard because that involves planning and the development of skill. But, when I listen to a student play in a masterclass, I rather consciously think, "Now what is the one thing that would change this performance the most?" And I think there's a certain amount of that that is a ripple effect in my teaching at home too; I usually try to focus in on something that I really liked and start off on a positive slate there. I used to do that so much that I actually had a couple of students, I would say, "Oh now this was lovely and now this was really great," and the student would say, "But!"

Ernst: [laughing].

MB: [laughing]. And so that caught me at my own game. But I don't think that is so apparent in the kids anymore, and I don't get that response. So anyway, in a masterclass, I will review for the student what I really liked about the performance and then we get to work. But instead of just going through the piece measure by measure, I really try to think what would change the performance the most. Sometimes it's just tempo. I know a lot of the teachers think that it's kind of magic that I can get so much more excitement out of the student performance, but it's

obvious that they have really prepared those pieces and they're ready to play faster; it's just that they never have been encouraged to do so. And I've had some really stunning responses sometimes where they've almost not doubled the tempo, but get so much more excitement. And, I have an energy on stage and so working together with a student we really do get some real excitement going, and that's fun. Or, beautiful lyricism or something like that, and so many kids don't know how to play a good tone, and I'm not sure that I know everything about it, but I can really change their sound.

Ernst: You mentioned the excitement in your presentation style, is that [pause].

MB: That's the used car salesman! [laughing]

Ernst: Is that something that came naturally to you to have that kind of persona?

MB: Yeah, yeah. And I don't know where that comes either. Our parents were not that kind of hyper; Dad was nice and friendly but not excitable. Lauren is very upbeat and energetic, Wayne is rather quiet, and I haven't purposely modeled my personality after Martin, but I would say my personality matches Lauren's a little bit more. You will be a little bit surprised to hear me say this, but I basically socially am rather shy. People just drop their jaw and say that's not true; you get into a group and the place just livens up, but I don't really feel very comfortable in large groups. I think Lauren does. But when I'm the focus of doing a workshop, it's easy for me to really turn on the lights. And, I think that is sort of the used car salesman, that I realize that in a lesson, I've got to be a 120 percent, and in a workshop, I've got to be 150 percent in order to get my ideas across.

Ernst: Can you recall any moments in masterclasses, or workshops for that matter, that were particularly memorable to you?

MB: That's interesting you say that; I've given hundreds of masterclasses. I remember years ago, I was out in Wyoming, and a little junior high school boy came—I think it was a Wyoming state convention. And I was doing a masterclass, and a little boy came up, and he may have been playing a Gillock piece. I don't remember the piece now, but it was a sad piece. I don't even know where the idea came from, and I said, "I just want you to close your eyes, and think of the saddest moment in your life, and then when you're ready, I want you to play the piece reflecting the sadness you felt." And the teachers just cried; it was so stunning! This kid really could go inside and the piece was just so changed, and I didn't even need to do anything with that because it was just so remarkable. And I've used that some with my own students to try to get them in touch with their own feeling that could be reflected in the music. I don't pull that card out of my deck very often, but that was just an amazing experience. And it was due to the talent and the sensitivity of



the child; it was nothing that I did. That child could really tap into a feeling and associate that with sound, and a lot of kids couldn't do that. But he sure could; it was just a *remarkable* moment. That's about the only specific [pause]. I've had masterclasses where things really clicked with most of the kids, and the teachers felt that it was really a pretty substantial occasion. That happened a year ago in Ohio at their state convention. I gave a couple presentations and then did a masterclass, and several of the students were Nancy Bachus's students. And they're obviously well-prepared; they're like clay in your hands. I really changed those performances and Nancy herself was just really very pleased. And the teachers—they just thought they hadn't heard anything like that for awhile. So sometimes it works, and sometimes I don't think I have much to offer the kids; the kids didn't catch on or something like that. But I think the clue is truly to go after one or two points that really make a difference in the piece and need to be addressed. And it could be that the teacher's laid the ground work for it and you're just capitalizing on that you know.

Ernst: How do you know what those two things are?

MB: Oh it's in my mind. It could be a rhythmic issue. It could be balance. Another thing that I sometimes try to do is to try to change my focus in a masterclass; work with rhythm now with this kid, now let's work with technique with this, this one we'll work on pedaling. So I'll try to change my focus if that is available rather than just always doing technique and hand position and stuff. That gets old. But very, never, do I just calculatedly say, "The first student is gonna get pedal, and the second person's gonna get balance." I never do that, you can't do that. But it is a rather conscious even sometimes that I say well now, "They've heard us talk about balance here, now let's go on to something else here." It's just gut reaction; it's like all teachers do. You hear students play and you say "well now"—but I do think that this is something more teachers should try and do in the studio. And I talk about this in workshops that when you hear a piece you really should hone your pedagogical skills and ask your own self, "What *one thing* can we talk about that would change the performance the most?" I think that's very good advice for all teachers. And that's what I try do lots of times in masterclasses.

Ernst: I find that it is not always easy to know what that one thing is.

MB: You're right, and sometimes you'll shoot wide of the mark and sometimes you hit a bulls eye. One must take some consolation in the fact that no matter what you talk about you're probably going to help the performance and help the student. So it doesn't matter if it's *the* most. Obviously that's hard and probably there'd be no two people—I told you that Sebök, I could never out guess what he was even gonna talk about—it was always something different. He was really unusual [laughing].

Ernst: You've done quite a bit of publications, such as the Carl Fischer editions of Beethoven, Grieg, Bach. Was there a name to that series?

MB: Oh, what was that called? Piano [pause]. There was an overall title. That was a project that Paul Sheftel and I started, and we thought it would proliferate into lots of lots of books. And actually it's kind of interesting that Frederick Harris with Sam and Reid Alexander and Andrew Hisey and Mark Woodrow up in Canada; they completed the project that Paul and I basically wanted to start, and they did it just *superbly*. I love [pause].

Ernst: Those books are great.

MB: There are too many misprints in the books, but just incredible.

Ernst: Really?

MB: Oh it's just awful. I keep writing emails up to Elaine Rusk, and she says, "I like you very much but I just hate receiving emails from you because I find so many misprints." But, they finished the kind of project that Paul and I thought that we would like to start. So that got started and then I just get too busy to carry through with things like that. I did three volumes of Beethoven, Grieg, and the Bach. And Paul and Phyllis did Chopin and Debussy. Well Phyllis did Chopin by herself and Paul and Phyllis did Debussy, and then LeAnn House did several things. And then it came to a halt. One of the problems with Carl Fischer is that they never had anybody in their company who would put the pitchfork in say now, "You guys have to get this done, let's come and have a meeting in New York and plan this out, and we'll do a schedule, and you've got to have this book in by that time," and they never had that kind of leadership. From the very beginning that I have known Carl Fischer, there has been such major gaps in their administration, and they way they run their company.

Ernst: I came across also the six volumes of *Progressive Repertoire* that had recordings with it.

MB: That's just a one shot deal.

Ernst: I love the repertoire. I was looking, there are so many pieces there that I don't know!

MB: Well I'll tell you about those. They came from Australia, and they were books from Australia for their examination series, and somehow or other, Carl Fischer had rights to those; I don't understand all that. Lauren Kaiser, the main editor of

Carl Fischer said, “We want you to do a project, we want to publish this under your name, and you take these.” There were a lot more books from the Australian syllabus than what we ended up with, so I dovetailed and took those things. And I put those books together and they gave me a onetime payment. I don’t draw any royalties, and they don’t advertise. That was just kind of a one shot deal. The recordings, I’m sure are done by somebody in Australia; I think those were not done here, and those were certainly not me.

Ernst: It was a little vague. It did not say.

MB: I’m sure those are Australian. I’ve only used those books a little bit myself. I thought there were interesting pieces in there. And what I tried to do was to combine, make a healthy combination of some of the familiar and some of the less familiar. But see they have the advantage—just like Frederick Harris does in Canada—they have the advantage of supporting and promoting their own composers, and we don’t know those people here. And one of the things so valuable about the *Celebration Series* is the Canadian composers are so good!

Ernst: They are.

MB: And we don’t know them here. You would think, sharing borders like that, that our musical tastes would be a little bit more alike, but there is such a difference between Dennis Alexander and Clifford Poole.

Ernst: Oh, yes, there is.

MB: It’s just so interesting how substantial their contemporary compositions are. I’m really, really taken. There are so many things about Canada that I really admire. I just think there’s a quality and a standard that they represent up there that we don’t hardly even touch here. [personal information omitted] I really feel very strongly about that that the Canadians have their act together. And they say, “We’re an educational institution, and we have the mandate to educate the musical tastes of our students, and we’ll get our best composers and they will compose for these students,” a little bit like Bartok and Kabalevsky.

Ernst: And David Kraehenbuhl.

MB: Well that’s something else.

Ernst: I wonder if you could talk a little to the *Handbook for Teachers* and how that came about and how the team was assembled.

MB: I would like to talk about that because that has involved years and *untold* hours of work. We have done it three times and I will never do it again. I'm just too old, and I think they need to—and they hear me up in Canada and they've asked me to do something else for the *Celebration Series* and I said no. I just have to cut down on all these obligations that I submit myself and give myself a little bit more time for what I want to do, and that's play the piano. They came to us. They, meaning Frederick Harris, in the form of their main editor Trish Sauerbrei. She was a humble, quiet-spoken genius. Well educated, she had her doctorate in musicology and she knew all this literature and she knew a lot about performance practices and she was their main editor out there. And under her egis, big projects got launched. I mean she really was quite a powerhouse in her own very quiet way. But she came to [pause]. Well, I'll tell you how that got started. Reid and Cathy had published an intermediate repertoire guide with Frederick Harris.

Ernst: I'm familiar.

MB: And, Toronto was rather impressed with how much Reid and Cathy seemed to know about pedagogy and intermediate level materials and things like that. And, I'm not sure how they knew about me. [pause] But, anyway, they put the three of us together and said, "We would like for you folks to write a teacher's guide to help American teachers understand the *Celebration Series*."

Ernst: Oh!

MB: It was basically an attempt to get the American teachers on board. And, so we thought that was kind of interesting because we all loved the books. It was great literature. I've been aware of the precursors of the *Celebration Series* for years and years and years. Frederick Harris has always published the examination repertoire for the Royal Toronto Conservatory, and I've got old, old copies upstairs that still have wonderful repertoire in it. It's just such great stuff. And I have gone on record as saying that I think this is the finest set of repertoire that's available to any teacher today. The reason that—I think you understand—the reason that revise these things every seven or so years. Seven or nine, it may [pause], anyway. Is the teachers get so tired of teaching the same repertoire there because they're not absolutely required to teach *Celebration Series*; they can go beyond that, but everybody does. And so, we addressed ourselves to the topic, and we had very, very fruitful conversations that were never any fights or anything like that. How were we going to organize that? And one of the things that we did was really break all this stuff down so that the teachers could really say, "Well this a group of pieces that I will use first and this and this." And Cathy was especially helpful in being able to get modules or units of study put together that combined both the studies and the repertoire books; you've seen that. And then we wrote the articles.

Ernst: Did you just divide those up?

MB: Sort of. [personal information omitted] So the second time around was really rushed and we didn't feel comfortable and we wished we had more time. And so on the third time around, Elaine Rusk who was in charge by that time gave us a very generous time schedule. She thought way, way ahead of time, and we pretty much met those, and we felt much more comfortable with the time to revise and work it out. One of things that they do with the *Celebration Series* is to pledge to themselves that there will only be a certain percentage of new pieces added, and so we can repeat some of the articles or revise them. And then some new writing, but they would sometimes extend their percentage of new material, and that meant new work for us. And sometimes they would have us write—they would get us started writing on things for which they didn't even have copyright permission yet and then the copyright permissions didn't come through—and then say we're not going to do that piece, we'll do another Christopher Norton jazz piece. And we just got so tired of Christopher Norton. But it drew Cathy and Reid and me very closely together.

Ernst: Is that the first time you had worked with Reid, or did you know him?

MB: With Reid? Oh yeah, I had known him, but this is the first that we had worked together. Cathy is a former student, and so, it's very interesting; I was Cathy's pedagogy teacher at UNC and then she went to Louise Bianchi at SMU and so that was just a double barrel of *Music Pathways* and stuff, and so we really think alike. And actually *Celebrate Piano* has so much *Music Pathways* in it.

Ernst: It does.

MB: [personal information omitted] But anyway, we really thought alike, and we'd approach a piece from very much the same standpoint. When you write about 472 pieces you know, you tend to repeat yourself. And that was one of the things that I really was uncomfortable with. All these that say, "Well now analyze the form;" I just really got tired of that. So what I would really try to do in the writing or in the editing of what they had written, was really to take a fresh look at the piece and not rehearse the same old stuff. And try to keep in the forefront of my mind that every piece is different. Now, how can we help the teacher see how different this piece is and what are the unique features of that. So, we've gotten some pretty good response from that and teachers say that it's helpful. But I actually think that publication projects like that are almost doomed to failure because teachers don't read. Teachers will teach the pieces. But even in a course book, it is so frequent that we go to the pieces; we don't read the introductory material or introductory activities, we overlook and this kind of thing. So anytime that you write to a

student or a teacher, you have to realize that about 90 percent of that is not going to be read.

Ernst: Well I'll tell you from my own experience when I first had my piano studio, I was using the *Celebration Series*, and I used that handbook.

MB: You did?

Ernst: Oh I did. I had very young students, I was using maybe levels 1 to 3, but [pause].

MB: But you're an unusual teacher.

Ernst: Well, it was very helpful to me, the layout, and the [pause].

MB: Well we really worked hard. We all really invested very heavily. But I think Cathy is to be credited; we would take a book and Cathy was the one that really, really did the break down into sections and modules and this kind of thing. Reid and I wrote. Indeed we did. We would take a—well in the last round, what we did was to take a list A of the Baroque pieces and we would assign them out. A lot of time Reid would assign them, and say, "Marvin you take this piece, I'll do this one, and Cathy you take that." So it wasn't that one person wrote on the Baroque, and one person wrote on the Classical, and that was healthy, and I think that gave a better blend to the writing, that last time around. I think that last book's good. It was—I in workshops say that my teaching really changed through that activity because it's almost impossible to *not* have a different pair of eyes after you've looked at 495 pieces, and you ask yourself, "What is unique about this piece?" You start to look differently.

Ernst: Just to find variety in the process.

MB: Yeah, and to find composer's emphasis. What is a composer trying to do? I used that question really frequently with my students in different guises, using different terminology sometimes, but try to get the student to say, "Why did the composer write this piece?" And especially with little exercises and etudes, I do that all the time. Open up a piece and you'll see 5-finger patterns, "Why did the composer write this piece? What was he trying to get you to do?" [pause] There is a pedagogical chapter in my life that is called *Celebration Series*. We really worked hard, under a lot of pressure. The first book was written in the days before email, and I tell you the overnight express mail that passed back and forth between was really quite something, really quite something. And I remember even at Goshen trying to paste up sample pages of that, and Trish says, "You don't have to do that, that's our job up here." Then the second book, we all had email, and so we could

share back and forth. But that first book was just really, really a tremendous project, collaborating with three people and not having—and we would gather regularly with phone conferences. And Frederick Harris had a conference call number that we could use, so it was on their bill, and we would call and say, “We have to talk over level 5.” We would have discussions about the leveling of a certain piece. I would really acquiesce readily to Reid and Cathy about whether one piece was harder than another. I think Cathy has a much better, keener insight than I do on those kind of things. And Reid is no slouch. So, we got along famously; they’re good friends. Never any—and I really credit both of them, and most especially Reid, because I took his writing most seriously to task. And bless his heart, he would just take it on the chin, and I really stepped out of line a lot of times. I thought it was in the ultimate best interest of the book, but I really had no real business of revising his stuff as thoroughly as I did, but I felt that needed to. And he was very, he was a good sport about that. I think sometimes he realized that my ideas and insights were probably the better, but that’s hard to take constantly from somebody else saying, “Well that’s not right or you should have done it this way.” That’s not an easy position to be put into.

Ernst: Quite a project.

MB: A big project, and I will never do it again.

Ernst: You just have so many components to your career! It’s just really fascinating. *Keyboard Companion*.

MB: Oh!

Ernst: It started in 1990, how did—did Richard Chronister approach you? How did you become part of that group?

MB: Oh definitely, yeah. I really didn’t know Richard very well. And I didn’t go to the initial conferences, National Conferences on Piano Pedagogy. I didn’t get on board until a conference in Ann Arbor, and then I drove up and went to the conference. I don’t think—I didn’t have any particular responsibilities at that particular conference that I recall, but I enjoyed the conference very much. And then after that I was constantly involved with it in one way or another. He would say, “Well we want you to do that.” And I will tell you, now this is not *Keyboard Companion*, but this is NCPP. There was nothing that made me more nervous than my presentations at the National Conference on Piano Pedagogy; I felt so inadequately prepared to stand up in front of a sea of piano pedagogy teachers and teach. But he kept asking me to do things like that. One conference, I can’t even tell you where this was, I can still see the stage, but I can’t put it in the right venue. He asked about three of us, Barbara Maris was one, and I was one, and who was the

third [pause], to play. He wanted to illustrate meaningful pedagogy involves also meaningful performance, and so he asked—I think it was three of us—to give mini-recitals.

Ernst: Were they teaching repertoire or full-blown repertoire?

MB: Oh, no. I played Liszt and tons of stuff. Yeah. You talk about pressure! [laughing]

Ernst: I can appreciate that [laughing].

MB: What is this all about! And then one year he thought it would be very important to have selected graduate students come to the conference, and they would be nominated by their pedagogy teachers. And then these pedagogy students would play, and they would teach and be critiqued. It was almost cruel. And then he would get people like John Perry and Nelita and me to do the critiquing of their teaching. Richard was a nice guy, but I don't know how he ever came around to that because that places the teachers as such vulnerable, young kids.

Ernst: Especially if it'd be the other way.

MB: Yeah, exactly.

Ernst: I guess you experienced that to a certain extent with Robert Duke.

MB: Exactly. I was just shaking in my boots for what he was gonna get up and say. So, one time, I was—well, I think the year where the people just got up and critiqued was in Ann Arbor when I didn't have to do that. And then another conference, he teamed a graduate student with a pedagogue, and we met together and worked together and heard the students. And then the student would teach, and the student that I was associated with was a Korean gal by the name of Shonae Lim from Illinois, and we're still great friends. We see each other at conferences and hug and kiss. She's still teaching, she's teaching [pause] at Northwestern, I think. No, she's teaching at Wheaton. She's teaching in the Wheaton Prep Department, and she has a big private studio. She's lovely and she teaches very well. I've heard her students play a number of times, and she used to then come to the Goshen Workshops. We're good friends. That was a little better because we could work together in advance and then discuss after the teaching, but those were just really scary things. I've professed to you too many times that. I had the one piano pedagogy class at Oberlin and so I feel like what I've accomplished as a teacher comes from a desire to teach and sort of maybe a talent or something like that. But I've had no formal training, and to stand up in front of a conference, so



that was just really punched my button of inadequacy and those conferences just really make me sweat. And so now I'm in charge of it! [laughing] Maybe that's retribution! [laughing] We'll get back to *Keyboard Companion*.

Ernst: When you think of *Keyboard Companion*, one of the questions that just came into my mind as I looked through your first columns on Rhythm and Repertoire, I recognized a lot of the people who wrote for your section. How did you choose people?

MB: Oh, you just go out and get them. You were responsible for finding these people, and sometimes we would have meetings of the associate editors and we would share some ideas. And if you were running dry, it was very helpful to have Elvina say, "Well I know this lady over here and this teacher down there," and that was very helpful. And Richard had contacts all over the country. But, as associate editor, you were responsible for finding those people. And the format was a little bit more rigid in those days, and now it's much more flexible. But, I was highly complimented that he asked me to come on, so I was one of the original associate editors. And stayed on probably longer than I should have, but I just got too busy and I thought I've been on, and I think when I quit, I think I quit after Brenda quit, and I was probably the only original associate editor still on the staff. And so it was high time to turn things over.

Ernst: Did you also, in the process, create the focus question that would lead to the next responses?

MB: It was your responsibility. Richard would help, but one of things that both Richard and Elvina did was to make us formulate our questions a *whole year* in advance. And even—this may have been more Elvina than Richard—but we were supposed to pinpoint our writers also, *way* in advance. And then there was tremendous lead time. Those people would get their articles in a half a year before they ever came into print.

Ernst: So did you do editing in the sense of reading and revising articles as well?

MB: Absolutely. I couldn't believe—and I'm no trained writer—but I couldn't believe how poorly some of the people wrote. And so I did. But one dare—we were never allowed to put into print something that—in fact we have special forms to sign that they agree that that article now is ready to go. The article had to have the writer's approval before it be put into print. Yes, I would edit, and then Richard would edit, or Elvina would edit. And so it went through quite a process, and that necessitating the considerable lead time. But see all this stuff was on top of an already busy schedule. You know you just wonder how far you can stretch, and I was playing recitals. At Goshen, I had the reputation of being the first person who

would come in the morning and the last person who would leave at night. And my students would also vie to see if they could beat me to the music building in the morning. I was always there first, [laughing] practicing! We had a piano at home and eventually we had a good piano at home, but I didn't want to disturb Sara Faye. And I felt that my practicing at school was a model to the students, you know. And, I think I got a lot of extra work out of my students just simply because they knew that I was working, and they still talk about that. And piano pedagogy, and writing up all those comments. I really worked *hard* at Goshen, and it was part time! Can you believe that.

Ernst: Are you serious?

MB: This is a long story, Goshen College is a Mennonite school, and in the early days they were very, very careful that only Mennonites would be on their faculty, or at least on their full-time faculty [pause]. Let me tell you a story [laughing], not too many people know or not too many people remember. Sara Faye and I married, while I was teaching at North Carolina, and she came down for her master's degree. [personal information omitted] Well, anyway all of her family was north, and she had two sons who were living north, and she really missed that very much so. And, she was a good mother, and so at one point, I left the University of North Carolina. Why am I telling you all this? Where are we?

Ernst: This is actually the next thing I wanted to talk to you about, so please continue.

MB: It was becoming really clear that Sara Faye really wanted to be closer to her family and to the boys, and so we tried it out. And I'm not sure actually how this came about, but Oberlin had—one time when I was living in New York, Danenberg went on sabbatical and so did Koberstein and Danenberg, he wrote me and said, "Would you be interested in and could you take a semester and come and take over my students?" And so that was great, and so I did. And then, I think Oberlin contacted me once again because there was a faculty—maybe I made the initial offer—but we decided that it would be good before we made an ultimate decision, it would be good for us, to try out living in the north, like Oberlin, [a place that] would put us in close enough proximity to the boys that they felt like we were there and could be of help to them. And so we spent a whole year at Oberlin. I'm not sure whether I taught both semesters or just one semester, but we were indeed in Oberlin for a whole year, and decided, and I think it was probably the hardest personal decision I've ever made in my life. It really kind of broke my heart to leave North Carolina, but then the question was, where?

Sara Faye and the boys had lived right on the outskirts of Goshen for a number of years, and Goshen really felt like home to them. And so, I wrote friends at Goshen; I

knew most of the faculty there and they wrote back and said, “Well we don’t just have an opening here,” and I wrote to IU South Bend, [and they said,] “Well maybe some part-time teaching.” And I think it was on the basis of the part-time teaching at South Bend that we really decided to sever ties with the University of North Carolina and go. And I was actually in the office of the head of the department at the University of North Carolina that I really was going to resign, and a phone call came through for me from Goshen saying that John O’Brien had resigned and the position was mine. Incredible—I mean, once again, it just is incredible. And so, but John O’Brien was Catholic and so he had only had a part-time job at Goshen because you couldn’t be a non-Mennonite and have a full-time job. So, we thought that was just incredible timing, and so I had a part-time job. Sara Faye could work, she had her Master’s degree, and that was great. So, we went up to Goshen, at one point, and started looking for housing and things like that. [personal information omitted]

Anyway, the Sherers really went to bat. By the time I arrived on campus, I had tenure. But it was still a part-time job, but I think they hired me with a full professorship at a tenured position, and that was because Lon and Kathryn really went to bat for me with the administration. So, that was a—it was sort of, but the initial shock was just incredible. And the provost really went to bat for me, and in the second year that I was at Goshen, Goshen College sent me on a concert tour around to all of the countries where Goshen had these kind of junior year abroad programs. They were called the study-service trimester. And, all the Goshen college kids, sophomores or juniors, would elect what country they wanted to go to: Honduras, Haiti, and Belize, and [pause] Costa Rica. And so I went on a concert tour of all those places.

Ernst: What an experience.

MB: What an experience is right! And in each of those countries, the particular leader of the Goshen College faculty person who was down there, they would arrange for very interesting things for me to do, meet with local piano teachers, or give masterclasses. It was an incredible experience. So I prepared repertoire that represented America. It was interesting. Basically my years at Goshen were really good years; I worked my butt off, as you can see. I was doing stuff off campus, like for Frederick Harris and *Keyboard Companion* and had all that pressure, and the pedagogy, just teaching of my students. And handling the pedagogy courses in the way that I did, was more than a full time job. But what I tried to do out of that to show Goshen College that I knew that I was only a part-time employee was tried to dove tail my teaching schedule into four days a week instead of five days a week. I think I was pretty successful at that most of the times, so I had Fridays off.

Ernst: That’s actually what I’m doing now too.

MB: And some of my life's best friends are now the Beverly's, and the Arlene's, and the Becky's, who were my students there, and the Karen's. When Mike and I were talking last Saturday night, I just thought it is incredible what—Goshen College is a little Mennonite school—and we had no right to produce such outstanding students. And here we've got Karen who's the president of Longy, Becky who's a successful opera singer in Europe, Marty Hodel who's one of the best trumpet players in the country, Mike Ruhling who's the president of the American Haydn Society, all of this. Tim Stalter who sang with Robert Shaw, he's on CD's with Robert Shaw, and he's the head of choral activities at the University of Iowa.

Ernst: That's amazing.

MB: *Incredible* products out of that little department, and I thought somebody really needs to write up what the music department did produce in those years. Brad Layman was a *brilliant* kid; he played the Goldberg Variations on harpsichord for his senior recital. I mean [pause].

Ernst: Wow!

MB: Give me a break! And he was a double major with math and harpsichord, and he's so brainy. He was looking really carefully one time at the title page, manuscript title page of the Well-Tempered Clavier. Do you know this story?

Ernst: No.

MB: Up in the corner are a bunch of numbers, and nobody's ever figured out, before Brad Layman, that that was the temperament that Bach used. Those were the ratios of the temperament that Bach used for his tuning for the Well-Tempered Clavier. And here's this little Goshen grad who unlocked the door of what the real temperament was for the Well-Tempered Clavier. And he got to thinking about and tuned his harpsichord and stuff like that, and started publishing papers, and people said, whoa!

Ernst: Wow.

MB: You're really on to something. And so the Goshen College organ is tuned to this tuning. That's great, and all these kids were there. Most of them ran through my studio in one way or another, whether it was for piano proficiency or whatever. Just amazing, amazing students! And I suppose other colleges can brag something like that, but I am just really so proud of my young friends. It was amazing.

Ernst: The only other question I had about *Keyboard Companion* is there anything that process of putting together these article after article, but did it change or impact your career or teaching?

MB: Oh I don't think too much. It got my name out into the public a little bit more. The hard thing about that was to be creative and thinking of your topics and getting good writers.

Ernst: Your topics were so diverse, everything from addressing rhythm in a Mozart sonata to feeling downbeats. How did you brainstorm?

MB: I don't know. As I said, Richard was very helpful if we needed help, and he made us think ahead. I don't know where all that came from.

Ernst: It just did.

MB: I don't recall—well I do remember that Richard would sometimes send all of us sheets of possible questions. Richard was an *incredibly* creative person. And his mind sort of knew no limits. I feel I kind of operate in a box, but Richard doesn't have boxes. And so he would—I remember these sheets that we would get from him, and for repertoire he would say, "Well have you thought about these possible topics and directions, and rhythm, and parent/student relations," and things like that. That was his genius; he really, really knew very little limitation to the creativity of his mind. He was a very unusual man. And everybody who worked with him, and I tell you, you talk about being humble or feeling inadequate, is really what I want to say. Louise and Sam came to me at an MTNA in Minneapolis and said, "Well Richard is no longer with us, and we want you to join the board of the Frances Clark Center." And I thought that was so cool. I've never studied with Frances Clark, but I really—Louise said that Frances always said that I was one of their gang, you know, I was so close. Having been so influenced by Lynn and Louise and stuff. So I was kind of a natural first cousin to come onto the board, and at first the board really did consist of people who were very close to Frances directly and been trained by her, et cetera. And then, they finished their sentence and said, "We want you to come on to the board as president," and I said, "You've got to be kidding." And they said, "Well Richard's no longer here and we want you to consider that." I went back to our hotel room and I said "Sara Faye, you will never, never [laughing] imagine what Sam and Louise have just proposed," and I told her and she said, "Not as a volunteer." And I really appreciated that, and she was trying to be protective of my time. And she said, "You've just given away so much time to so many different things." She says, "You cannot do this without compensation." And so I went back to them and I said, "I really think that there has to be some remuneration for the job." And Sam was pulling down a small salary for being executive directive of the center and the conference, and so they came up with a

figure that was perfectly comfortable for me, and so I draw a little bit of salary from the Frances Clark Center.

But I am *not* a good administrator. I think I teach piano pretty well but I am not a good administrator, and every position that I've been in, where it called for me to be an administrator—now I can run a piano workshop. I did a good job at Goshen with the Goshen College Summer Workshop, had so many friends that I could bring, and I can plan a good workshop. But to be the *president* of the Frances Clark Center, I just don't feel that I have those skills. At Goshen, we passed around the chairmanship of the department, but they really never asked me to be chairman of the department. I think they just knew maybe that I was too busy, but I just did not have those skills. And I am perfectly comfortable admitting that I have some strengths, but I have obvious weaknesses, and administration is a weakness of mine. Don't need to go there, but—I don't know why that is, a limitation of my mind, or what it is. I get along with people pretty well, but I—what is really uncomfortable for me is to criticize people or to fire somebody or something like that, I do not do that.

Ernst: If you think about the Frances Clark Center, is there anything in your mind that is a vision or a goal for the center? It's been around now for over ten years.

MB: I personally am quite comfortable with the three-pronged activity with the conference and the school and the magazine. And I think that we can't, I'm not sure that we can do much with a fourth prong. We've talked about more publications; the center published the Richard Chronister, *Piano Teacher's Legacy*, and we're very proud of that. That's a substantial book.

Ernst: It's a lovely book.

MB: There is frankly a little bit of talk now about doing some video tapes of me lecturing and teaching. As much as anything, as a fundraiser, because we think that that might sell. We would like to reach more piano teachers in every way, especially through the conference and the magazine. Now those are sort of short term goals, and they're not big expansive things. It's getting more people to come out to the conference because the conference is good, and getting more people to subscribe to the magazine because the magazine is great. There's always lip service paid to the fact that we are also a research center. Well that's not even true. Scott Donald every now and then will do a little research project on practice procedures or something like that. It is true that the conference is a sounding board for research that has already been done; we are not stimulating that research, but we give a voice to some of that research. We should do more with that because we should be maybe publishing, and I think some of that is available on the web. Not an awful lot. So there could be more activity along those lines. The

real vision for the center is that we could be in such a place that we would have a full time executive director. Sam is so obviously a good executive director, but Sam—you talk about busy. Sam is breathlessly busy with all that he has to do. And Sam's in too good of a position at SMU to drop that and become our full time director. So the best that we can do for Sam is to hire a really effective administrative assistant to him, and that is this Jesse, and I hope that that can be instituted really, really soon. Pete needs help.

Ernst: With the magazine?

MB: With the magazine. He's much over subscribed. Pete is a family [man], and he is a full time teacher at the University of Georgia, and here he has a full time job writing a magazine. And he's doing a splendid job, a splendid job.

Ernst: It's been lovely. The last couple issues have been great.

MB: Just great! I took the Louise Goss edition on the plane up to Edmonton, and I just wanted to shout at the end of every article, good for Pete! It's just great. And to even think of the idea of having humor. So, what I see for the center is sort of an expansion, a broader outreach, is what I'm trying to say. But, I don't envision great new projects because we're too small until we find ourselves administratively more secure, so that there's an overall director who can push us in the right direction. The really frightening thing about the center is that Louise is going to have to cease her activity at some point. I don't know whether she has a target date of 85; isn't that something!

Ernst: That's something! My gosh!

MB: Louise is coming upon 85. Louise will be 84 on May the 21st, and she's not well. And she claims that she's getting more forgetful, but what she carries around in her mind is just *amazing*. I'm not quite sure how we're going to handle that because Louise is truly the power house that—she works every day hours and hours and hours on many different things. She's still the caretaker of the whole Frances Clark Library and nobody's helping her with that. [personal information omitted] Louise and Frances never, never took a penny from the New School in salary. They always gave all their time and energy to the New School free, and they lived off their royalties on their books and had a pretty handsome income off of that. You know, there was a time when they were sort of the main show on top, and honestly they were the leaders, and they had a real following. But, the minute, I can tell you this, that the minute that you cease workshopping your materials, they will be forgotten, and somebody else will come and take over. Jane Bastien has experienced that, you know, and certainly the Clark library has experienced that. The books that are selling from the Clark library, are simply these old teachers, or

the pedagogy students whose teachers have said, “Now this is as good as it gets.” But, the Fabers are really coming in and taking over, and it’s good stuff, and I like them both. And so you cannot bad mouth their success because they worked very hard also; you don’t put books together like that without a lot of careful thinking and planning. They’re bright guys.

But the Frances Clark Center is headed actually for a crisis in the form of Louise’s retirement; I’m not equipped to take over. I am in no way equipped to take over Louise’s position. Louise is a real administrator. Louise and Sam are both administrators, and I am not, I’m an educator. I don’t know. In some ways, I think the Center is in a pretty good situation. Pete has put the magazine into a wonderful situation. The school is going great; well you know about that. And the conference just gets better and better. We suffered this summer because the economy of this country really impacted our attendance, but the evaluations were just ecstatic, what people learned at the conference. So in a way, we’re riding the crest of the wave. We’re really good; we’ve got a great show put together. People love the conference. The World Piano Pedagogy Conference is going down the tubes fast right now, and we are the benefactors of that because we look so good in comparison to what they’re doing. And the industry supports us; they think we’re wonderful, and they hate, they just will not support him at all. And I think the teachers feel that we’ve got a good show, and we’re providing artistic concerts, and wonderful pedagogy sessions, and lots of great technology and stuff. We have a solid base of support. The teachers that were interested in supporting us, I mean—the teachers who are really doing a great job in the studio, we have them, sort of eating out our hand I think.

But where we go from here, I don’t know. If we can get good help for Pete—Pete has hired an assistant editor, and the report on that is that she’s almost too good. She’s over editing, and so Pete is trying to train her so that she won’t. She’s a piano teacher but has professional journalistic training, and so we’ve got the right person. And we just have to wait a little bit until Pete gets her whipped into shape. And Pete is obviously the right person, and Sam is just a fabulous director, and he just is too busy. People criticize Sam a little bit for letting things slip through the cracks—give me a break, he’s so busy. It’s a wonder that he keeps his life together. And the New School’s going well, we have a little crisis with Scott’s resignation but we’ll surpass that. But I just pray that with Louise’s retirement we can find somebody with vision who will carry us on further, but I don’t know who that’s going to be. It doesn’t necessarily need to be a former student of Frances Clark; it would be good if the nut does not fall too far from the tree. We’ve got to get somebody in. I think I was one those that fell close enough that they felt comfortable to bring me on board. That’s kind of an open ended question mark.



### Interview No. 6

March 27, 2010, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, at the Music Teachers National Association Conference

This interview covers philosophical and pedagogical content.

Ernst: I wanted to get some of your overall impressions about your teacher in Europe, Sebök. When I spoke with Lon Sherer, he spoke a lot about Sebök

MB: I actually became interested in Sebök because of Jane [Magrath]. Jane went the summer or two before we went the first time. I believe I went four summers, not in a row.

MB: He was [pause] the most unusual and insightful that I think I've ever seen in operation. Lon and Kathryn can relay a number of stories, and I can tell stories also, but you know when you sit in a masterclass as a teacher, you always try to out think what the master teacher's going to do next. And I never, in four years, I never actually nailed it. He would always take a different tact from what I thought was the obvious thing that he was going to work on, and he always made incredible improvements in the performance. He had in a way, an almost an x-ray vision into you as a human being and you as a musician, and into your body. He had an incredible analytical skill about how the body functions at the keyboard. And that even proliferated into his ability to help string players, and he would work with flutists and he would help harpists. One summer there was a harpist that came. And he just had such incredible imagination and sensitivity to how we use our muscles, but pianistically, he was incredible. And he could transform octaves, and he could make passagework scintillate. It was quite amazing. Had fabulous ears. He worked lots with pedaling.

Ernst: Was that experience mainly observing the masterclass, and did you actually work with him?

MB: Two summers I played and two summers I audited. When you performed the masterclasses were three weeks long, and I think, as I recall, as a performer, you got two solo sessions, and they were always an hour, regardless of whether your piece was 5 minutes or 50 minutes. And we would meet in the late mornings for several hours, and take a big break and meet again in the evening for several hours. And, we met in this tiny little Swiss village, where he, for a couple years, went just to vacation because there were some maiden sisters of his Hungarian professor who found this village and thought it was so restful. And so they would go there in the summertime for vacation, and they said, "Sebök, you are too busy

and you need someplace to come and relax, and this is the place.” And so he took his wife there, and after a couple summers, he said, “We have to make music here,” and so he started inviting students there, and it became a piano and chamber music masterclass. So string players would come, not knowing anybody else, and then they would team up and do chamber, and then the pianists would serve as accompanists to the string players. Two summers I played, and two summers I just audited. It was really quite an amazing experience. And then, Sebök taught at Indiana University, and one time at Goshen, everybody on the faculty was given a certain amount of money for personal, professional development. We pooled our money in the Music Department, piled in cars, and bought a day of Sebök’s time, and all of us performed for him. And then his wife invited us over to dinner—I guess it was lunch that we had there, and then we went out to dinner afterwards. But that was really quite amazing. If you were a singer, you sang for him; if you were a horn player, you played horn for him.

Ernst: Lon mentioned Sebök’s empathizing ability.

MB: He was a very insightful person and sensitive. I saw him—he always screened people that were accepted to perform. But sometimes—I mean these were on tapes—and sometimes, he would maybe make a mistake. And I saw him work with people who were not very well prepared; he was extremely kind and worked very intensely with them. And the only thing I ever saw him become upset or angry about was if he felt that you were using music for your own self-aggrandizement and [to] show-off, and then he would just cut you to shreds. Because, he was so devoted to music. Music meant life to him; music was as sacred as life itself, and to have somebody [pause] make music into something that was superficial and light; he just couldn’t stand it.

I remember an Italian facile pianist, show off, who basically was using piano to get his women [laughing], came and flashed off a couple of Chopin etudes and everybody clapped and thought it was quite brilliant. Sebök saw through him like an x-ray and he said, “Would you please play a C major 5-finger pattern,” and the young man went [MB sings a pattern fast], and Sebök said, “No, I’d like it slower and even,” and he went [MB sings slower], he said, “Your fourth finger’s too loud,” [MB sings], “No, the timing of your fourth finger’s incorrect.” And this went a half hour on a C major 5-finger pattern, and everything that the kid did, Sebök could find something that was not quite proper or even or he didn’t like the sound of. [pause] And the young Italian was so embarrassed by that experience that he left town. It was the only time I saw Sebök just really—and he would be humorous sometimes. I remember one time, I think it was a young German who played the Brahms D minor concerto—and we were in a relatively small room—and the guy really overplayed. And he had an accompanist who was a Japanese gal, and Sebök said afterwards [laughing], “Well I would have enjoyed your playing a lot more if I

were deaf.” [laughing] And so they were talking about the overplaying, and the kid was very sincere and was not offended at all. He was there to work, and he knew Sebök was there to teach. And he said, “Well, it was my impression that you were supposed to really project over an orchestra.” Sebök says, “But you’ve got a 95 pound Japanese girl there.” My brother Wayne and Beverly visited in Ernen one time, and I asked Sebök if they could come to the evening classes, and of course. And, Wayne just thought he was wonderful because there was an evening where a bunch of funny—I think Wayne was there for this. I think he said “hard of hearing.”

Ernst: Why did you return?

MB: Well, it was those kinds of experiences where there was so much depth to the teaching, you just know that you cannot absorb that in one summer. I remember, it seemed like every summer, at the end of the first week, how are we going to get through three weeks of this? And then by the end of the second week, you think is it almost over already! It just—I have notebooks filled with notes. He tells interesting stories and gives wonderful, wonderful illustrations. He’s no longer living.

I think actually also I have to say that I’m not sure I’m insightful enough to really understand the profundity of what all of that meant. There was such depth. It’s a little bit like listening or reading Barenboim, when they talked about music. There is such depth to their understanding of the art and the philosophy and the role that this plays in the psyche and the soul of the human being. I can’t go there, as far as they go. Not that I’m unwilling, but I just don’t think I have that kind of intellect or insight. Sebök was that kind of person. He saw music from such a deep, deep standpoint.

One interesting thing about Sebök, he basically knew the whole repertoire. He knew everything, and I actually saw him in masterclasses, get rid of the accompanist from the cello sonata or something like that, and he would play along and wouldn’t even turn the pages. He just knows all that stuff. Oh, so he would go three weeks of masterclasses, not really knowing what people would bring. There would be a *Carnaval* and there would be a Chopin Sonata and there would be Bach suites, and everything from soup to nuts, contemporary and Romantic, and everything. And he would not decide until the end of the third week what he was going to play for his own concert at the end of the three weeks because he didn’t want to duplicate anything the students had played. Now, imagine that kind of repertoire. And then he would get up—there were three concerts that were generated by the masterclasses that were open to the public. One was just piano, one was chamber music, and one was his own solo recital. And over the course of the years, the public there, the indigenous people plus—it was a vacationary world, people for instance from Holland would come there every summer because

it was so beautiful. Hiking, and you could rent a house cheap. And so people would come year after year and they knew about these concerts. The church would be filled. He would get up and play these gorgeous, gorgeous recitals. It was sort of high Baroque Catholic Church, and here he was a Hungarian Jew. His encores were practically always Bach chorales; Sara Faye would just weep. This is so touching, this, everything coming together. Very meaningful.

Ernst: How do you as a teacher keep repertoire and ideas fresh, so that when you present them to a student they are fresh?

MB: [long pause] I think, if I'm successful at that, it is that I realize that it is fresh experience for the student. And I kind of put myself—I think—in the student's seat and realize they're hearing this for the first time, they're seeing this music for the first time, we're talking about it; and so that is a fresh experience. And it's really interesting Sara; I mean, how many times has one taught the Clementi, Op. 36, No. 1? And I [laughing] don't know what this says about me, but I can still get very excited about Op. 36, No. 1. I think the scales in the second part of the exposition are wonderful [laughing] and I think that trumpet call at the beginning is exciting, and if the student doesn't get that, we work on that. I just [pause] I cannot bring myself to think that the music I'm teaching is boring in any way. And I guess that's the answer to the freshness, because the music is wonderful, and I want the student to experience this, and so it's a matter of trying to share the experience with the student. I think that's what lies behind it.

Ernst: Why is discovery for the student within the lesson so important to you?

MB: [pause] Because I think that's how we learn. I really, really adopt the idea of Frances Clark, and I'm not sure that I necessarily learned this from Frances. There are so many things that came to me from Frances via Lynn and Louise that I don't quite where all this stuff comes from. Everybody quotes Frances as saying that "Teaching is not telling." If there's one thing that I tried always to get across to my pedagogy students is this whole business about the discovery. That if you can't lead the student to discovering these musical principles, you're not doing a very good job of teaching because that's what sticks with a student. If you can lead them, and open the door and they say, "Oh, I know this," that's what's exciting. So, I think in answer to your question—I know that in my teaching there are small ways in which I do a lot of telling, but I hope that the big things are things that we gradually discover together because I really feel that's about the only substantial learning mode that goes on. Actually, I think that that's the most exciting for the teacher and certainly the most exciting for the student. If I feel like I can build up experiences and then open these doors, that's really exciting for me as an educator to realize that I have planned that process, and then it's exciting for the student to realize that those experiences have led them to a discovery.

Ernst: How do you know how to break something down to those discoveries?

MB: Well, [pause], for me, it's a thought process and a planning. And I know that I really do go through this step-by-step in my mind, what is the most basic thing that the student knows now that can build us to the next level, and then the next level. If I have any ability in the whole teaching learning process, I think it might be that I do have a knack for being able to think through the steps. I think that's one of the things that allows me to present a fairly effective workshop, is I can think a little bit, what do the teachers need to hear me say in order to get this idea? And it is that kind of a thought process. Most of my teaching life, I have engaged in some of that process, that I think, where are we now, and we may not be any place. You take a brand new student, and they have no particular musical background, they have life's experiences, and so you start from that, and go on from there. But anyway. That's one of the real pleasures of teaching. And I think I do this business about discovery much better with my beginning elementary students than I do with the older students. I don't think I'm a very successful teacher in the intermediate and advanced levels as far as discovery is concerned. We work on repertoire, and we work through interpretation principles, and things like that. Where I'm most successful—and this comes because I had to do this in front of pedagogy students, and they were thinking with me all the way. And if I didn't think clearly, I was messing up their lives and the kids too, and so it was a discipline that sort of [was] thrust on me that I thoroughly enjoyed.

Ernst: If you think of making a lesson memorable for a student, how do you take repertoire and make it memorable so that it impacts the week of practice?

MB: You're barking up the wrong tree!

Ernst: I don't think I am!

MB: [pause] When I teach, I listen to a performance, and most of time, I listen. I could jump right in, but I don't think that's really fair. And so I listen. And then I usually try—I have two basic approaches. One is to try to point something that was really successful and then try to see how I can take that to other places of the pieces and relate that, and make what wasn't so successful, equally successful. The other approach is, I listen to a piece, and then I ask myself, now, what is the most important basic thing to change? Is it rhythm, could it even be hand position, is it dynamic contrast, is it the sense of breath? What is it that the student needs most to change that piece most dramatically? So we pretty much work that way. I don't find myself very often—and I this may not be born out in the tapes, but I sure hope I don't—just say well now play it once again and I'll tell you what's wrong, and so we stop at the first measure and then at the second. I hate that kind of teaching. I

hope I don't engage in that very much. So, I don't know if that answers your question about the memorable part of a lesson. But I think I try to deal with larger concepts because I really do feel that really good teaching actually works with concepts, and if you can get an idea across to a student then they can apply that to other places in the piece, and then they're freer to work more independently on their own.

Ernst: What role does honesty play in the student teacher relationship?

MB: Everything. Everything. Everything. I think one of things that I have to work on—although I don't really, because I just love my students. But I think one of the things in the student teacher relationship is that the student has to know that the teacher really likes them as a human being. And I just pray that all of my students get that message from me because I really do like them. And, I have some students that challenge me a little bit because they may not be working very well, [pause] but even the ones who are limited. I have this little [student] who is—she's not learning disabled, but she is intellectually challenged. And I just find that my heart goes out to her, and am just so grateful for every minute that she spends at the keyboard because she's working uphill all the way. And why shouldn't I honor that? But honesty. The first thing is that I want to communicate honestly to my students that I really like them. And then the other thing—I don't think [pause] that I can accomplish what I need to with my students if I'm dishonest by telling them that something is good when it wasn't. And I don't think—I think that it's very important to be honest with the student about, "Well, you've arrived at this point, and now we've got to work on this." To present a clear picture of what has been accomplished and what yet needs to be accomplished, and those are issues of honesty I think.

Ernst: So how do you go about telling a student something difficult, like if they are not living up to your standard or not doing what needs to be done each week?

MB: I think that we work together for months and years, and that I have, not only the right but the responsibility to communicate those things to the student. My students are busy, and I find it really difficult [pause] to think that I have the right to think that piano is more important in their lives than anything else. I just cannot go there, and I know there are some teachers who are so demanding that—I have a little girl at the New School who changed to me from a Chinese teacher who made her cry at every lesson because she was so demanding. She said, "Oh, I just love our lessons because I have such fun." I am disappointed when my students get so thinly spread with all their extracurriculars that they can't spend any time at the piano or not spend enough time at the piano. And I can talk with them very frankly about the fact that I—I say, "I think the piano has to have a higher priority in your list of activities, you are not spending enough time, and you are not getting the

work done.” Sometimes, I have a very, very talented rising senior next year, and I have told her that if she’s going to give a senior recital and apply for piano scholarships, she has to make time for two hours of practice a day. She’s lucky now if she almost gets two hours a week; she’s so busy. She is so talented. It is scary what she could do on two hours. There are those of kinds of conversations that I have occasionally with my students. I think I should be more demanding about practice time, but I just am kind of grateful with anything I can get out of my kids, you know [laughing].

Ernst: If you think back to working with music majors at UNC and Goshen, does that change your response?

MB: Oh yeah, because they were there—and I know that undergraduate majors at Goshen are probably getting their last lessons of their lives there. And I tell them that, and I also tell them that you will never have more time to practice than when you were in college. I get so many emails from my former students, “Well you told me that I would never have more time to practice than I do now in college and you were right!” I would put the screws on them because we’re working on demanding repertoire. They had recitals that they had to do and concertos to play, and this kind of thing. They would hear from me that they had to practice more, but my private kids now, they’re not piano majors.

Ernst: Do you view your role in a specific way in terms of helping them chart career goals?

MB: No, no. I feel free to tell my students that they have the potential to be a piano major but never that they must be a piano major. No. I think the music world is changing so much. Classic music is changing in our society so much, that I don’t even know what the future of these kids would be if they would stay in music. If they’re interested in music, I will help them all the way with college applications and advice on college and where they could go to get good training and this kind of thing, but I do not push my kids to be piano majors. Nope. I don’t feel that’s my right in a way; it is their life. And, as I started out the answer to your question by saying, I very frequently tell my students, “You could be a piano major and you could get into some very good music schools, you have that potential.” And even a guy like [Greg], that was his decision. And even his family, I think, pretty much left it up to him. I made it very clear to him that he could major in music. And now here’s he accepted into four different schools, and this girl whose gonna practice two hours a day next year, she is so insanely talented on both saxophone and piano. She thinks the piano’s probably a little bit better than the saxophone. Her fingers know no limits, speed wise and flexibility wise. She knows good and well that she can go anywhere.

Ernst: Could you tell me about your good luck rock?

MB: I think this started with my sister in law, I think this is right. My sister, Kathy in Boise, one time gave me a smooth rock that she had found in the Boise River and gave it to me as a good luck rock. And I carried it with me to every concert, and I would have it in my hand as I walked out on stage. And as I took my first bow, I put it inside the piano, and it was right there to guide me through my concert. And then, I started giving it to my students when they would go to competitions or play their senior recitals, so it became a studio thing. And I don't know where it is now. I lost it someplace.

Ernst: Why did it grow to a studio thing?

MB: Well, I know exactly where that's coming from. I wanted my students to know that I was with them on stage and this was a symbol of my being with them.

Ernst: I have heard about that rock.

MB: I don't think about that much anymore because it no longer exists. I half way think that I lost that. I did a little three-concert tour with the North Carolina Symphony playing the Barber concerto one year. I think I left that in a piano in Wilmington, North Carolina. Thus endeth the good luck rock. It was kind of a thing, going on in the studio. But it was really a symbol that I am there with you. That's interesting that the students remember that.

Ernst: Working with studio groups in performance classes in college, what would you do to create morale or atmosphere? What was important to you?

MB: The goals are that students gain performance experience and that students hear a lot more repertoire. Those are the obvious things. Every now and then we would take on some projects. I remember at North Carolina one time, I divided the Chopin etudes up in my studio, and they all learned and talked about a Chopin etude. At Goshen, one time, we learned all of the Bartok Bagatelles. That was fun, and they performed it on a Wednesday morning recital. That was fun for them. Different things. But I think studio rapport—if a performance class like that is filled with lots of criticism coming down from the teacher, that becomes a pretty frightening thing. But if the teacher backs off and lets it become a performance experience or gives some positive input, and asks for comments from the students, you can build a studio rapport that way. You can destroy it pretty easily also. Just getting everyone together once a week that in itself is a building process. At Goshen, I think it was on Wednesday evenings. At North Carolina it was always Fridays at Four.



Ernst: How important is it that your students see you as someone who continues to learn and grow as a musician and pianist?

MB: Very. At Goshen I would make it a very concerted effort to do all of my practicing at school, so that the students would hear me practicing. And I arrived early and left late. Part of that was because a lot of times Sara Faye would have patients at home and so I would need to be at school. That served a dual purpose, because the students knew that I worked. At Goshen and North Carolina, I played a recital every year, and that was part of that whole thing, that the students hear you working and hear you performing. I think that a teacher is a model for a student in sort of every—the way the studio looks and what you do with your time and what they know about your personal life and everything. That becomes sort of an image of what it is to be a professional teacher. I hope I was a good model for my students; I think that's what you're there for.

Ernst: When you think about repertoire and students, how important is it to select repertoire that you know will be very comfortable for the student, versus repertoire that will stretch the student?

MB: I think both things are really important. I think it's horrible; this little girl who cried at every lesson. That teacher had her playing such advanced repertoire. You just would weep because you know that she'd spend a whole year on a movement of a Mozart sonata that she had no business playing for the next five years. And what damage is done because music is such drudgery at that point, and all the repertoire that could be learned in that amount of time. I think it's really—I don't mind it at all if my students tell me, "That was really an easy piece," and we sort of celebrate. If they get a piece done in a week, we celebrate. "You have really accomplished something. Just think, how much you know and what skill you have developed to take this piece and *really* perfect that in a week." And so we celebrate those kinds of things. And, it doesn't bother me too much—I do chastise myself sometimes for not picking repertoire that's exactly right for a student at a given level. And every now and then—it doesn't happen very frequently—but every now and then, we'll drop a piece because it was just a bad choice. But, it doesn't bother me if a student has to stay on a piece for quite a while because I think they're learning something from that also, and the basic lesson is, if you stick with something long enough, you can conquer it. And I don't want that to be the only thing we do, because I don't like this business of just, the uphill battle all the way. But I think there is some value in that because they realize a very important lesson in life, and that is, if I discipline myself and work with a plan, I will accomplish and I will overcome. And then I think they are very proud of themselves when they learn the *Fantasie Impromptu* [laughing].

Ernst: One of the strategies I observed a lot in your teaching was your coaching a student through a piece. You had them play under tempo and talk through all the expressive things, and had them, at a slower pace, get a higher quality of sound. What are your goals in that process?

MB: I think basically, when push comes to shove, the only thing that we really teach is sound. And what we are basically trying to do is open up the student's mind, imagination, and heart to the impact of sound. But, a student comes to you in the studio and has a very limited repertoire of what that means, and so it's our job as teachers to constantly be opening that up and guiding that and refining it. So I think most of our lesson time is really spent on coming to grips with what is the proper sound to yield the desired expression. I think that's basically what our lessons are about. Now, I find so much of the time that my students don't understand (it's probably my fault) that the sense of phrase that grows and then comes to peace and takes a breath. So we talk so much about ending of phrases and breaths because that's part of the sound that doesn't seem to be necessarily natural to our students. Then there are manifestations of that that have stylistic appropriateness. You phrase Baroque and Classical music differently than you would Romantic. And so, we are also working on style and stylistic consideration. But an awful lot of the lesson time is spent on that aspect, what do [you] want the sound to do and why. I think I don't do a good job in getting my students to identify—to get my students to feel that identifying and articulating the emotion is their primary responsibility. I think that most of my students feel that their primary responsibility is to play the right notes. And that's really an indictment against my teaching [laughing]. But, we try to get there, and I think I do talk with them a lot about the feeling. But it would be so nice for students to come—and only a few of them do this, that they come and they say, "Oh but this expresses such and such, oh I have a vision of this when I play this." I am not good at getting that going.

Ernst: I'm a little bit speechless because that's one of the things that I saw so strongly in your teaching!

MB: Oh really!

Ernst: Although they didn't always say it, it was apparent in their sound.

MB: Well, great. That's wonderful.

Ernst: You know, I think, for kids to articulate some of that, it is difficult. If you think of your teaching in the academic setting versus the teaching you have done in the last ten years at the New School and at your home, what has the last 10 years done for you, in comparison?

MB: That's a beautiful question. [pause] I think when we grow up and go through school and get our degrees, again we sort of model our teachers and think that our career goals are really higher education, and we need to teach at a college and this sort of thing. And, so I taught at a major U.S. university at the University of North Carolina, and I taught at a small Christian church school, and I taught at a state school in New Jersey, and this kind of thing. And now here, I'm teaching little kids. And I just, I find that the work with the kids, is in a way, so much more important than the college kids. It's almost like, and this is a little bit over stated, but it's almost like the college kids don't need me. Because they've made their choice about what they want to do with their lives, and yeah, we can learn some Beethoven sonatas, but the little kids really need me, you know [laughing]. Because they need me to be excited about music, and they need me to show them that they have this wonderful skill and potential. And so I feel that actually I've found my life's calling, because I'm teaching seven year olds. And that is somewhat exaggerated. I just *love* the scope of what I am doing now because I've got some amazingly advanced, pre-college students, and I've got some wonderful little kids who are bright. But, I would have to say, because my more advanced students are playing repertoire that most of my college students couldn't touch anyway, that I'm not sacrificing my ability to work with advanced repertoire, but I still feel that there's something so important about sharing music with these young kids. Well, it has not taken me a lifetime to get there because I've always taught young kids, but it certainly comes through loud and clear because I don't miss the college teaching one iota.

And, I proved to myself I could be a college teacher. It's not that I'm going through life carrying this cross, wondering if I could ever hold down a college job. I've proved that. [personal information omitted] So, I'm kind of doing what I think is most important for me as a music educator, and I love the kids, and we have fun together. And I think that I have a kind of a knack, that I don't even know where it came from, that I can talk to a high school student on a high school student's level one hour, and then get down to a six or seven year old level, and we relate, I think, really quite well. And, I don't know—people have told me in masterclasses that I do that well, and it's just something that is sort of natural. Is it a sensitivity to where another person is, and that personality? I don't know where that comes from. But I think that's one of the things that makes me comfortable and successful with my home studio and at the New School is because I can shift gears. I feel comfortable, and they seem to feel comfortable. Nobody has ever told me, and perhaps I need to be told, that I'm too babyish with the little kids or that I speak above them.

Ernst: How do you view the intellect of a child?

MB: As having infinite potential. I am staggered with the minds of my kids, and I know there are certain things within their growth development—words that they don't use and maybe some concepts that they're not prepared to have presented to them—but I am staggered with the brightness of my kids. I have *infinite* respect for their minds. I've got some kids that are just kind of scary. How quickly they absorb and how well they retain and what fun they have in learning. But, I find it sinful to think that a child's mind is limited. That's just not the way God made us.

APPENDIX I  
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FORMER STUDENTS

## QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FORMER STUDENTS

This questionnaire (see next page) was administered through the online service, SurveyMonkey™ (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/>). The online version of this questionnaire was pilot-tested and administered within a short timeframe, December 2010 to January 2011.

Section A was given to all former students, section B was given only to former piano students, the first half of section C was given only to former pedagogy students, the second half of section C was given only to those who observed demonstration classes, and section D was given to all former students. The questionnaire was designed to include only the appropriate sections based upon the user response to a question that preceded each section.

The following graphics were created from a printed version of the complete questionnaire. While participants were completing the survey, one to four questions appeared on each page to facilitate ease of computer entry. In the following pages, solid gray headings delineate where each new webpage began.

## Information Page for Consent to Participate in a Research Study

*My name is Sara Ernst, and I am a PhD candidate in the School of Music at the University of the Oklahoma. I am requesting that you volunteer to participate in a research study titled "The Legacy of Master Piano Teacher Marvin Blickenstaff: His Pedagogy and Philosophy."*

*You were selected as a possible participant because you are a former student of Marvin Blickenstaff. Please read this information and contact me to ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to take part in this study.*

**Purpose of the Research Study:** The purpose of this study is to document the legacy of piano pedagogue Marvin Blickenstaff by collecting information in many forms that, when analyzed, organized, and compiled will provide a comprehensive resource for piano students, teachers, and pedagogues. This study will thus disseminate the tenets of Blickenstaff's pedagogy and philosophy and establish how his contributions and professional presence has impacted the field of piano pedagogy.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to complete this online questionnaire.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:** The study has the following risk: questions will be asked that require you to reflect and share your thoughts on past events and other individuals. The researcher will not ask questions of a personal or invasive quality. The benefits to participation are: you will have the opportunity to reflect upon how Marvin Blickenstaff has impacted your career as a pianist and teacher.

**Compensation:** You will not be compensated for your time and participation in this study.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not result in penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**Length of Participation:** The questionnaire will take between fifteen or thirty minutes of your time to complete.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. In published reports, there will be no information included that will make it possible to identify you as a research participant unless you choose to include your name at the end of the questionnaire. Research records will be stored securely on the researcher's password protected computer. Only approved researchers will have access to the records.

**Contacts and Questions:** If you have concerns or complaints about the research, the researcher(s) conducting this study can be contacted at:

Researcher:	Faculty Sponsor:
Sara M. Ernst	Jane Magrath
smernst@ou.edu	jmagrath@ou.edu
(608) 317-9087	(405) 325-4681

In the event of a research-related injury, contact the researcher(s). You are encouraged to contact the researcher(s) if you have any questions. If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research or about your rights and wish to talk to someone other than the individuals on the research team, or if you cannot reach the research team, you may contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at (405) 325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Please print and keep this information page for your records.

**By completing this online questionnaire, I am agreeing to participate in this study.**

## Section A: For All Students

**1. Where did you study with Marvin Blickenstaff?**

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Goshen College

Other (please type in response):

**2. What did you study with Blickenstaff? (select all that apply)**

Piano, pre-college

Piano, undergraduate

Piano, graduate

Piano Pedagogy, undergraduate

Piano Pedagogy, graduate

Other (please type in response):

**3. Select the options that best describes your current and former musical pursuits.**

	Currently	In past years	Never
I play piano regularly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a career in music	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I teach piano	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I play gigs/concerts at the piano	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**4. Describe the amount and type of contact you have had with Blickenstaff since being his student. Please include any professional collaborations.**

**Section A: For All Students**

**5. When you think of Blickenstaff, what words, adjectives, and descriptions first come to mind?**

**6. Describe the relationship that you had with Blickenstaff as your teacher.**

**Section A: For All Students**



7. List at least 3 ways in which Blickenstaff has impacted and facilitated your career.

8. Describe at least 3 ways in which Blickenstaff modeled the traits of a successful teacher, pianist, and music professional.

### Section A: For All Students

9. According to your own experiences, what do you think are Blickenstaff's strengths as a teacher?

10. According to your own experiences, what do you think are Blickenstaff's weaknesses as a teacher?

11. Describe at least 3 personality or teaching traits that make Blickenstaff unique.

Select one of the following to determine the next questions.

- I took piano lessons with Marvin Blickenstaff.
- I did **NOT** take piano lessons with Marvin Blickenstaff.

### Section B: For Former Piano Students

12. Approximately how old were you when you took piano lessons with Blickenstaff? If during college, what degree were you seeking and what was your major?

Age

Degree (such as B.A.)

Major

13. During what years did you study piano with Blickenstaff?

Years (such as 1992-1993)

**14. Describe the following for your piano lessons with Blickenstaff:**

Learning environment  
 Lesson content and sequence of topics  
 Types of goals or assignments  
 Teaching techniques that promoted understanding  
 Feedback given to you from Blickenstaff

**Section B: For Former Piano Students****15. Describe what you learned during your piano lessons with Blickenstaff. Select at least 4 items from among the following topics:**

Phrasing and musicality  
 Interpreting the score  
 Sound production  
 Technique  
 Memorization  
 How to practice  
 Preparing for Performance  
 Harmony/keyboard theory  
 Rhythm/pulse  
 Repertoire  
 Other topics

**Section B: For Former Piano Students****16. Describe at least 3 skills, techniques, or concepts, that you learned in piano lessons with Blickenstaff that continue to be a part of your own musicianship.**

**17. List at least 3 beliefs that you think are part of Blickenstaff's philosophy of piano playing. In other words, what are at least 3 elements of piano playing that were frequently stressed by Blickenstaff?**


Select one of the follow to determine the next questions.

- I took piano pedagogy with Marvin Blickenstaff.
- I did **NOT** take piano pedagogy with Marvin Blickenstaff.

### Section C: For Former Piano Pedagogy Students

18. During what years and for how many semesters did you study piano pedagogy with Blickenstaff?

Years (such as 1992-   
1993)

Number of semesters

19. Describe the following for Blickenstaff's piano pedagogy classes:

Learning environment  
Format of class  
Types of written assignments  
Types of teaching assignments  
Feedback given to you from Blickenstaff

### Section C: For Former Piano Pedagogy Students

20. Describe what you learned during your piano pedagogy course(s) with Blickenstaff. Select at least 6 of items from among the following topics:

Teaching reading and rhythm	Integration of concepts
Teaching technique	Pacing and sequencing during lessons
Teaching musicality	Lesson planning
Teaching theory	Piano method books
Teaching composition	Repertoire for students
Teaching how to practice	Motivating students
Group teaching (adults, children, or college classes)	Developing a relationship with students
Beginners	Working with parents
Intermediate students	Role of the teacher
Transfer students	Professionalism and careers
How to introduce repertoire	Other topics
How to introduce new concepts	

21. Did you observe Blickenstaff teaching a demonstration class of young pianists?

Yes

No

### Section C: For Former Piano Pedagogy Students

22. Describe at least 3 qualities of Blickenstaff's teaching that made him an effective teacher of children and of groups.

23. Describe the skills and content that Blickenstaff taught in his demonstration classes.

24. Describe at least 3 skills, techniques, or concepts that you learned in your pedagogy classes with Blickenstaff that continue to be a part of your own teaching.

25. List at least 3 of the tenets that you think are part of Blickenstaff's fundamental philosophy of piano teaching. In other words, what are 3 elements that Blickenstaff frequently stressed during piano pedagogy?

#### Section D: Concluding Questions for All Former Students

26. Have you or do you currently use any of Blickenstaff's materials for piano students in your teaching?

No

Yes

If yes, please describe which materials, and how/when you have used them.

27. Have you attended any workshops given by Blickenstaff?

No

Yes

If yes, what distinguishes his presentation content and style from other workshop presenters?

#### Section D: Concluding Questions for All Former Students

28. Describe at least 2 specific events, such as parts of lessons or classes, that are most memorable about your experiences with Blickenstaff.

### Section D: Concluding Questions for All Former Students

29. What, in your opinion, are Blickenstaff's lasting contributions to the field of piano pedagogy?

30. Additional comments or thoughts you would like to share about Marvin Blickenstaff.

### Permission for Use of Name

May I include your name with your remarks?

No

Yes

If yes, please type your full name and the date:

If I may contact you for additional participation in this study, please complete the following:

(\*Your name will not be used in the study unless you selected "yes" in the question above.)

\*Name:

City/Town:

State:

Email Address:

Phone Number:

APPENDIX J  
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

## QUESTIONNAIRE FOR WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

This questionnaire (see next page) was administered through the online service, SurveyMonkey™ (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/>). The online version of this questionnaire was pilot-tested and administered within two short timeframes, November 2010 and January 2011.

The questionnaire was designed to include only the appropriate sections based upon the user response to a question that preceded each section. Participants were asked if they had heard his presentations, masterclasses, and workshops, in order to allow a custom survey.

The following graphics were created from a printed version of the complete questionnaire. While participants were completing the survey, one to five questions appeared on each page to facilitate ease of computer entry. In the following pages, solid gray headings delineate where each new webpage began.

## Information Page for Consent to Participate in a Research Study

*My name is Sara Ernst, and I am a PhD candidate in the School of Music at the University of the Oklahoma. I am requesting that you volunteer to participate in a research study titled "The Legacy of Master Piano Teacher Marvin Blickenstaff: His Pedagogy and Philosophy."*

*You were selected as a possible participant because you have participated in the workshops, presentations, and/or masterclasses given by Marvin Blickenstaff. Please read this information and contact me to ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to take part in this study.*

**Purpose of the Research Study:** The purpose of this study is to document the legacy of piano pedagogue Marvin Blickenstaff by collecting information in many forms that, when analyzed, organized, and compiled will provide a comprehensive resource for piano students, teachers, and pedagogues. This study will thus disseminate the tenets of Blickenstaff's pedagogy and philosophy and establish how his contributions and professional presence has impacted the field of piano pedagogy.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to complete this online questionnaire.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:** The study has the following risk: questions will be asked that require you to reflect and share your thoughts on past events and other individuals. The researcher will not ask questions of a personal or invasive quality. The benefits to participation are: you will have the opportunity to reflect upon how Marvin Blickenstaff has impacted your career as a pianist and teacher.

**Compensation:** You will not be compensated for your time and participation in this study.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not result in penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**Length of Participation:** The questionnaire will take between ten and twenty minutes of your time to complete.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. In published reports, there will be no information included that will make it possible to identify you as a research participant unless you choose to include your name at the end of the questionnaire. Research records will be stored securely on the researcher's password protected computer. Only approved researchers will have access to the records.

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Researcher:	Faculty Sponsor:
Sara M. Ernst	Jane Magrath
smernst@ou.edu	jmagrath@ou.edu
(608) 317-9087	(405) 325-4681

In the event of a research-related injury, contact the researcher(s). You are encouraged to contact the researcher(s) if you have any questions. If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research or about your rights and wish to talk to someone other than the individuals on the research team, or if you cannot reach the research team, you may contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at (405) 325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Please print and keep this information page for your records.

**By completing this online questionnaire, I am agreeing to participate in this study.**

## Background information



1. How many years have you been teaching piano?

2. Approximately how many students do you currently teach?

3. Which best describes you? (select all that apply)

- Independent piano teacher
- Pre-college teacher at a school/academy
- Collegiate group piano teacher
- Collegiate piano teacher
- Collegiate piano pedagogy teacher
- NCTM

Other (please specify)

4. At which levels do you currently teach piano lessons? (select all that apply)

- Beginner, pre-college
- Intermediate, pre-college
- Advanced, pre-college
- Undergraduate
- Graduate

5. What is your highest degree in music?

- Undergraduate
- Master's
- Doctoral
- No degree in music

**Blickenstaff's Publications**

**6. From the list of piano books below, select all the descriptions that apply for each book.**

These materials have been authored, co-authored, or edited by Marvin Blickenstaff.

	I used it as a student	I know of it, but have not used it	I have taught with it in the past	I am currently teaching with it	I do not know of it
<b>Dances by J.S. Bach</b> (Carl Fischer, 1997)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Short Pieces by Beethoven</b> (Carl Fischer, 1997)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Short Pieces by Grieg</b> (Carl Fischer, 1999)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Progressive Repertoire, books 1-6</b> (Carl Fischer, 2003)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Music Pathways</b> (Carl Fischer, 1972-1983)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Celebration Series, Handbook for Teachers</b> (Frederick Harris, 1996 edition)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Celebration Series: The Piano Odyssey, Handbook for Teachers</b> (Frederick Harris, 2001 edition)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Celebration Series: Perspectives, Handbook for Teachers</b> (Frederick Harris, 2008 edition)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**7. Of the items you selected in question 6, why did you teach from and use this publication rather than other similar sources? Please respond for each item that you indicated in question 6.**

### Blickenstaff's Publications

**8. Did you subscribe to Keyboard Companion at any time during 1990-2004?**

No

Yes

If yes, did you enjoy Blickenstaff's sections (Rhythm 1990-1997, Repertoire 1997-2004)? Can you recall any helpful articles by Blickenstaff?

**9. Please add any additional comments on Blickenstaff's publications.**

### Blickenstaff's Workshops

**10. Indicate the approximate number of times you have heard Blickenstaff present, teach, or perform in the following formats.**

	None	1	2-4	5-8	More than 8
Masterclass	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Recital	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Workshop on piano repertoire	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Workshop on piano pedagogy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**11. Indicate the venues where you have heard Blickenstaff present, teach, or perform.**

I have seen Blickenstaff's work at the following:

Carl Fischer Music Showcase	<input type="radio"/>
Frederick Harris Music Showcase	<input type="radio"/>
Workshop for a local MTNA affiliate	<input type="radio"/>
Conference of a state MTNA affiliate	<input type="radio"/>
MTNA National Conference	<input type="radio"/>
National Conference of Keyboard Pedagogy	<input type="radio"/>
International Workshops	<input type="radio"/>
Piano Workshops at Goshen College	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please specify)	

Select the following to determine the next questions.

- I have heard Marvin Blickenstaff give a presentation.
- I have **NOT** heard Marvin Blickenstaff give a presentation.

### Blickenstaff's Presentations

**12. Describe at least 3 of Blickenstaff's traits as a presenter.**

**13. What distinguishes Blickenstaff from other presenters?**

### Blickenstaff's Presentations

14. What have you learned about repertoire and piano playing from Blickenstaff that has impacted and/or changed your teaching or playing?

15. What have you learned from Blickenstaff about teaching and piano pedagogy that has impacted and/or changed the way you teach?

Select the following to determine the next questions.

- I have heard Marvin Blickenstaff teach in a masterclass.
- I have **NOT** heard Marvin Blickenstaff teach in a masterclass.

### Blickenstaff's Masterclasses

16. Describe at least 3 of Blickenstaff's traits as a masterclass teacher.

17. What distinguishes Blickenstaff from other masterclass teachers?

18. What have you observed in Blickenstaff's masterclasses that has impacted and/or changed your teaching or playing?

Select one of the following to determine the next questions.

- I have heard Marvin Blickenstaff perform.
- I have **NOT** heard Marvin Blickenstaff perform.

### Blickenstaff's Performing

19. What was memorable about Blickenstaff's playing during the recital(s) you have heard?

### Summary

20. In your opinion, why is Blickenstaff such a widely respected teacher?

21. In your opinion, what are Blickenstaff's greatest contributions to the field of piano pedagogy?

### Summary

22. Please share at least 1 memorable experience from Blickenstaff's masterclasses, workshops, or recitals.

23. Please share any additional thoughts about Blickenstaff.

### Name and other information

Have you worked as an organizer of a workshop, recital, masterclass, or presentation of Blickenstaff?

No

Yes

If yes, where and when did you work with him?

May I include your name with your remarks?

No

Yes

If yes, please type your name and the date below.

If I may contact you for additional participation in this study, please include your contact information below.

(\*Your name will not be used in this study unless you marked "yes" in the previous question.)

\*Name:

Email Address:

Phone Number: