

Students/Teachers/Parents

I'm wearing both hats as I write ... parent and teacher...

Parent : Each week when #2 son comes home with his piano bag, I delve in to have a look at his notebook to see what the teacher has said. It's a clear, concise list of what he played for, and with her, and a few brief pointers about improvements needed - mostly "counting" in his case.

Teacher: When each student comes into their lesson, I'm racking my brain to remember what we covered in their last lesson ... I generally grab their note book, and have a quick update (... there is a list of what we played and a few pointers...) and I'm back on track. As I'm doing this I often say 'right... What did we do last week...' My students know that while I love them dearly, I have a lot of music in my head, and that their repertoire or learnings are not necessarily at the forefront of my mind when they turn up to the lesson, but that I get online again very quickly and we're away.....

Parent: (often bellowed from the top of the stairs to young pianist down in the studio) "Your variations on the theme of Game of Thrones sounds great I haven't heard you play that new piece Mrs Keys mentioned in your note book"

Child : mummmmmble (flicking of pages, new tune commences)

Teacher: "hmmmm... We started learning this last week There's not much progress..."

Student: insert any number of reasons/excuses (head down, red face)

Ok - I could go on - I'm not the perfect parent, nor the perfect teacher, and I've yet to meet the perfect student (it certainly wasn't me!), though I do have some that have very close to perfect stretches of several weeks at a time. It can be hard to maintain with so much else going on in our lives!

My boys are no different from anyone else's children. I forgot to add that #2 son is 12, and I also still check that he and big bro have done homework, and all number of other little chores that they need to do. They *never* make their beds or tidy their rooms unless under duress, but they *never* forget to charge up their ipads or top up their phones - how ironic!!!! They are learning to take care of things themselves, but it's a work in progress, and each time we master a skill (either in the real world or in their education), a new one appears and needs mastering I've always said I have a 12 and 14 year old in training and after the next birthdays I will have a 13 and 15 year old in training - it goes on and on. And they have a mum in training!!!

I have to admit here, having to repeatedly hear young musicians practice is my worst nightmare – particularly hearing my boys laboring over their new tunes..... Enough said. Onwards.

Parents don't have to practice FOR the child, but I do think that if we want the child to potentially have all the chances at success (in whatever skills they are learning), as parents, we need to help them clear some space, be in the right space, and use the right skills to reach their potential. Kids are also REALLY, REALLY busy too, and still learning to manage their time.

What can we do to help them out???

Make a space where their harp stand....music lives out permanently – then there is no hassle for finding the right equipment.

Schedule in practices – even in a busy family, a ten minute practice 3 or 4 times a week is better than none at all. But it has to be considered too – if the child/family is already so busy, is it in the best interest of anyone to be attempting to learn a new skill when you are time poor? Little chance of success if you can't schedule in practice time!

Help make the child accountable – know what they need to be playing – if you can't attend the lesson, read the notebook ask the child to read the notebook or read it with them. Make sure they know what they need for their lesson and for their own practice at home. Check in that they have the right equipment – just the way we do for school (“do you need any pens/pencils???)

Engage and encourage – young musicians don't have to have musically talented parents, or parents who know how to teach them – my 14 year old son's maths is beyond my understanding, but I can help him see how to break down problems, and encourage him to get it finished (this sometimes requires a yummy reward as a goal) and he can tell me what he's doing I think he's quietly pleased that he knows about stuff that I don't know about!



Even if you don't know about music, you can often hear if your child is playing something really nicely (*encourage!!!*) or needs to put some more time in (*encourage!!!*) ... it doesn't have to be something they have to master by themselves!!

I admit to resorting to devious means to get my boys to do a mock theory exam every now and then – no complaints if they are set up with snacks!

On Tuning Harps! Allow the child to tune it! Micro movements are a really great skill to learn, and with a little initial guidance young people can tune their instrument. My boys learnt young (even though neither play the harp) 2.5 years for the youngest ... and he has never damaged a harp or broken a string or dropped the key on the soundboard or dropped my tuner (I have other adult students who have done all these things). If the young harpist knows how to tune the harp, you have given them a knowledge and independence with their instrument.

Away from the instrument - find some you tube clips or a CD of harp music that interests them Let them see what others (often you can find other young harpists online) are playing... and on what kind of harp. It was cool to see my nieces watching ballet on you tube with their Dad ... I'm sure he would rather have watched surfing, but he can steer his girls into watching things they may not have found if he's got his hand on the mouse!
Even changing one or two little learning habits can make an enormous difference in outcome.
It's worth it!

Anna Dunwoodie

