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*“RMM teaching is more like a sharing experience than a teaching experience. It has filled a void I didn’t even know I had.”*

—RMM Teacher

## Chapter 2 TRADITIONAL VERSUS RECREATIONAL TEACHING

*Barbara C. has run a private piano studio for the past 18 years. She loves her work and her students, but can’t help but notice that many things have changed. Her students, who were always distracted by extra-curricular activities at school, now spend additional hours each day sending messages and updating their profiles through online networks. Video games, which had become less intrusive in recent years, have roared back with a vengeance—stealing precious hours with new games that simulate real-life activities with amazing accuracy.*

*Her students seem less focused. They’re practicing less, and it shows in their playing. Barbara feels the increasing stress of trying to satisfy parental expectations despite decreasing student commitment. She tries to shrug off feelings of disappointment and failure when students—especially the talented ones—quit lessons to concentrate on other pursuits. Reflecting on all these changes, Barbara confesses that piano teaching just isn’t what it used to be.*

These are the struggles that afflict many piano teachers in today’s hectic world. Forced to compete with an ever-growing list of alternative choices, they have grown frustrated—weary of fighting a constant battle against everything else that vies for students’ time. Much of this pressure and frustration is brought on by the requirements of traditional teaching, requirements that set high expectations for both student and teacher.

Although definitions of traditional teaching may vary widely, the following attributes provide a general description. In traditional piano teaching:

- Primary emphasis is placed on achieving a high level of performance.
- A structured curriculum is employed.
- Teaching occurs primarily through private/individual lessons.
- The teacher prescribes the direction and style of the lesson.
- The teacher appraises the student’s level of success.

This is a good methodology that continues to serve the needs of many aspiring and accomplished musicians today. However, it fails to meet the needs of millions of potential music makers who find the traditional learning style too solitary or who cannot live up to its standards of achievement.

As a worthy alternative, RMM teaching holds the promise of creating millions of *new* music makers who could not only transform the music teaching profession, but also elevate the importance and impact of music making in our culture. RMM teaching can be described by the following attributes:

- Performance is not emphasized or required.
- The curriculum can bend and adapt at any time.
- Teaching occurs primarily in *group* lessons.
- The student and teacher participate *together* in prescribing the direction/style of lessons.
- Students learn from the teacher *and* other class members.
- The *student* appraises the level of success.

RMM teaching is, above all, designed to be fun and social. It makes music making accessible for anyone, and puts as its first priority the needs and desires of the student.



*“RMM teaching is the most rewarding of my entire career. I feel as though I have found my calling—a way to give back.”*

—RMM Teacher

## Chapter Three GETTING STARTED

*John S. received his bachelor’s degree in music two years ago and is now a full-time piano teacher in a small town. He has a private studio with 18 students that keeps him fairly busy. With plans to marry next year, however, he needs to increase his income.*

*John heard something about “RMM adult teaching” at a music conference and thinks it might be a good way for him to teach during daytime hours when his current students are in school. He remembers studying some group piano concepts during his pedagogy classes in college, but he wasn’t very interested at the time. Plus, that instruction was geared toward younger students rather than adults. Now, he has many questions...and isn’t quite sure how to get started.*

The next two chapters were designed for John. They will provide answers to a range of practical questions that any new RMM teacher might ask, including:

- Where should I teach?
- What instruments should be available?
- What ages should I teach?
- How much should I charge?
- What materials should be used?
- What replaces recitals?
- How can I partner with a retailer (if I’m not teaching in a store)?

The following answers will provide a solid framework for building a successful RMM program.

### WHERE SHOULD I TEACH?

Teachers who have sufficient space for group lessons in their home studio will probably decide to teach RMM at home. But for others with smaller studios, group lessons can present a challenge. Fortunately, there are many alternatives. RMM can be taught in a variety of other venues—music stores, senior centers, places of worship, retirement communities, community/recreation centers, schools, colleges and universities to name just a few. Each of these locations has pros and cons, some of which are listed below.

#### Home Studios

Teaching in a home studio is convenient and provides complete independence for the teacher. However, the size of the studio can be an issue, as it may limit the number of people who can participate. There may also be parking and zoning issues. Still, the home studio may be the easiest first step for a new RMM teacher.

#### Retail Music Stores

Music stores can be ideal locations for RMM teaching. Most retailers are happy to accommodate teaching programs that can help create future customers for their store. If they have confidence in a teacher’s desire and ability to create more music makers, they will often partner with that teacher to make RMM classes possible.



*“My students are more receptive when I am receptive to what THEY want and need first. It’s like a breath of fresh air to help people make music just for enjoyment.”*

—RMM Teacher

## Chapter 4 NEXT STEPS

*Mary T. feels she has acquired a pretty good understanding of the RMM philosophy. She knows what it is, why it exists, where it can be taught and whom she wants to reach. But to turn the concept into reality, she needs answers to many questions that begin with “how.” Since her home studio is too small for group classes, how should she approach the possible outside locations for RMM classes? How can she recruit adult students? How should the classes be organized? How should she prepare for the first class? Mary is ready to dive in, but wishes she could talk with a teacher who has done this before.*

For the teacher who feels like Mary, this chapter will provide answers to the critical “how to” questions that can help to get an RMM program started.

### HOW TO APPROACH AN OUTSIDE FACILITY

After identifying one or more favorable locations for RMM classes, schedule a meeting with the persons who direct or coordinate programs for these venues. Be prepared to cover the following list of topics during a meeting:

#### What is Recreational Music Making?

The Introduction and Chapter 1 of this handbook will be useful in answering this question. If the facility has a DVD player, show the 10-minute “RMM Documentary DVD” available from the National Piano Foundation (NPF). The DVD can be purchased from NPF for a nominal fee or viewed online at the NPF website, [www.pianonet.com](http://www.pianonet.com).

#### Why would an RMM piano class be beneficial to the facility?

The following talking points will be helpful:

- Most adults wish they could play music.
- Music making can reduce stress and improve health.

For churches:

- RMM can produce sight-readers for the choir.
- RMM can be an outreach to adults in the community-at-large.

For music retailers:

- RMM will build repeat traffic in the store.
- RMM will create future customers.

For retirement communities and senior centers:

- RMM is a valuable social networking activity for seniors.
- Music making engages the mind and body in healthful ways.

If, after discussing the above benefits, the program director agrees that RMM teaching would be valuable and appropriate for the facility, ask the following questions.

#### What instruments are currently available at the location?

Play all available instruments to see which ones are in satisfactory condition. The quality and number of available instruments will generally determine the format used for class sessions. Be sure to ask whether the facility would be willing to have the pianos tuned prior to the start of classes (four times per year is ideal).



*RMM's best facilitators are NOT just talented musicians—they are caring, compassionate and intuitive guides.*

—Karl Bruhn and Barry Bittman

## Chapter 6 RMM TEACHING ON TWO PIANOS

Teachers who are unfamiliar with group teaching may automatically assume that it occurs only in a piano lab setting with multiple instruments (usually digital pianos). However, it may be a surprise to know that some of the profession's most influential teachers—the likes of Robert Pace and Richard Chronister—could teach group lessons on just *one* piano. Chronister once wrote, “*Students learn as a result of what and how they are taught, not as a result of how many students are in the room.*”<sup>1</sup> That same wisdom applies to the number of instruments.

RMM classes can be taught with great success on two pianos sitting side-by-side. Many teachers using this format like the way it gives students opportunities to observe others and take notes. Others say it makes their classroom teaching easier, since students often focus more on the teacher than on the pianos. Once a teacher knows how to rotate the students at the pianos to ensure equal participation, classes of six or more can be easily taught with two pianos. This section will explain the step-by-step elements for success.

### WIDE RANGE OF VENUES

Perhaps the greatest advantage of two-piano RMM teaching is the variety of sites where it can take place. Any location that can hold two instruments and enough chairs for class members is a viable venue. Options include the teacher's home studio, places of worship, senior centers, retirement communities and recreation centers. Even when music stores and colleges have piano labs, these locations can still be appropriate venues for two-piano teaching if this method is better suited to the needs of class members.

If an ideal location has only one piano, the teacher should contact a local piano retailer to explore loan, rental or purchase possibilities for the additional instrument, as discussed in Chapter 3. Remember that piano retailers will usually be quite happy to support any RMM teacher who has demonstrated the desire, ability and vision to create and retain new music makers.

### INSTRUMENTS

When teaching with two pianos, there are three possible configurations:

- Two acoustic pianos.
- Two digital pianos.
- One acoustic piano and one digital piano.

The third configuration (one of each type) is optimal because it gives students playing experience on both types of instruments.

<sup>1</sup> Richard Chronister, “The Irrelevant Controversy: Group Teaching vs. Private Teaching,” *Keyboard Arts* (Spring 1992), 17.



*“RMM classes are absolutely crucial to the future of our industry.”*

—RMM Retailer

## Chapter 9 PARTNERING WITH RETAILERS

Chapter 3 described ways that teachers can partner with piano retailers when RMM classes are taught *outside* a retail store. This chapter will examine the natural alternative: partnering with a retailer to create an RMM program *inside* a music store. It will rely upon the insights of active RMM retailers in providing answers to the following questions:

- What do retailers think about RMM?
- What do retailers see as their greatest challenge in establishing RMM classes?
- What traits are retailers looking for in an RMM teacher for their store?
- How is compensation determined for in-store teaching?
- What resources can a retailer provide to assist the RMM teacher?

### THE RETAILER PERSPECTIVE

Four successful piano retailers were invited to provide their perspectives on in-store RMM teaching. The participants were:

- Bill Dollarhide, Dollarhide’s Music Center (Pensacola, FL)
- Christi Foster and Deborah Story Carter, Foster Family Music (Bettendorf, IA)
- Robert Scott Richardson, Reifsnnyder’s (Lancaster and Mechanicsburg, PA)
- Wayne Reinhardt, Schmitt Music Company (Minneapolis, MN)

All of these retailers were early adopters of the RMM concept. The following information is based upon their comments and experiences.

#### What do retailers think about RMM?

Not all piano retailers have music education programs. But the savvy ones understand that education is vital to their existence. Specifically, they see RMM teaching as the critical link to a huge segment of the population (adult learners) that has been underserved by the musical community.

One member of the retailer panel, Robert Scott Richardson, commented, “RMM classes are absolutely crucial to the future of our industry. Obviously, I want to sell pianos, but RMM is bigger than that. As I’ve talked to students and have seen their excitement, I’ve learned that my ‘home run’ is seeing students who are genuinely happy about playing the piano. As they enjoy music making, they become our friends...and, eventually, they become our customers.”

Christi Foster of Foster Family Music said, “It would be fairly quiet in our stores without a thriving lesson program. Because of the RMM classes, students come in early. We have the opportunity to socialize and get to know them. Our goal is for our teachers and sales staff to become trusted experts and advisors to our students. The increased store traffic from in-store lessons has not only increased sales, but also the awareness of our store in the community as RMM classes have generated a buzz with the local press.”

These types of comments are quite common among retailers who have experienced