

# FROM PEDAGOGY TO GERAGOGY:

HOW TO TEACH MATURE ADULTS AND GAIN 50+ EAGER PIANO STUDENTS

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## What's SO GREAT about teaching adults over 50?

- **They practice!** Choosing to take lessons themselves, they are motivated to learn.
- **They have time!** If their kids are in high school, or away at college, or they are retired, they have time for new stimulating and enriching activities. Retired adults can take morning and early afternoon lessons. You can teach more lessons on weekdays, and take weekends off.
- **They are interesting!** It's true, older adult students are very often wise and wonderful.
- **They are fun!** They are able to laugh at themselves, and make us laugh.
- **They are appreciative!** Many CAN'T WAIT for their lessons.
- **There are lots of them!** By 2015, adults 50 and older will represent 45% of the U.S. population (AARP). And they have heard that piano lessons are great for the brain, many times.
- **They have a developed ear** for music and rhythm, which helps them to learn more quickly.
- **They can afford lessons!** Adults 50 and older own over 65% of the net worth of all U.S. households (U.S. Consumer Expenditure Survey), and they like to spend it on healthful activities.

## What's DIFFERENT about teaching adults over 50?

The **PEDAGOGICAL** model is teacher directed. We choose repertoire that is appropriate to the child's level, and teach them musical concepts in a preconceived sequence.

The **GERAGOGICAL** model is student directed. Lessons are driven by student needs and goals. Older adults often come to lessons with the desire to play a particular song, or piece, or style of music that they love. If they want to learn the *Rhapsody in Blue* on their first lesson, we say great! We write out or find a simple arrangement of the theme they can play right away. If they haven't learned to read music, we write letters on the page and help them to play the rhythm by ear. Or we show them the keys and let them imitate. We don't say, "that's too difficult," but rather find a way to make the music they love accessible to them. We refer to ourselves as piano *coaches*. We keep an open mind, and encourage, respect and facilitate their musical dreams!

THE KEY IS TO PLAY!

Older adults come to you to learn to PLAY the piano. Get them to PLAY right away, and teach them music theory and technique gradually. Make it FUN to play in your studio! It's ok if the rhythm isn't perfect. WE ARE NOT MOLDING VIRTUOSOS! We are nurturing piano lovers.

Please LIKE our FACEBOOK page to get free downloads, tips for teachers, support, blog and discussion about teaching older adults.

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## SPECIAL NEEDS of Older Adults

- **Eyesight issues**- They usually need glasses, and appreciate larger notes and lyrics.
- **Hearing issues**- If a student is hearing impaired, we point to whatever we are referring to, and face them as we speak so that they can read our lips. We speak a little more loudly for some.
- **Memory issues**- Unlike children, they appreciate and have the patience for lots of drilling, and repetitive practice. We review in various styles, such as playing an exercise forte, piano, largo, allegro, staccato, legato, forwards, backwards, parallel, contrary, and with eyes closed, to access multiple areas of the brain, which boosts memory retention and brain power.
- **Psychomotor skills** (Fine-motor skills mediated by the brain)- If the older adult is a first time beginner, finger control is a big concern and can be a sensitive issue. We play lots of exercises slowly, evenly and loudly to develop stronger muscles. Students are encouraged to practice before going to sleep, to help embed new psychomotor skills into long-term memory.
- **Insecurity**- Research shows that the greatest impediment to musical progress is an older adult's lack of confidence in his/her learning abilities, due to a perceived age barrier (National Association for Music Education). Without being disingenuous, we are very encouraging, observing all the things they have improved upon, and the progress they have made so far.
- **Health issues**- Disabilities such as arthritis make it more difficult for the older adult to move their fingers, but playing the piano can help increase flexibility and lessen pain. Empathize!
- **Performance anxiety**- Some older adults are terrified at the notion of performing. We host fun *Piano and Poetry* parties quarterly to help them become more comfortable playing in front of a supportive group of peers. If they don't want to play, they can recite a poem, and try playing the next time. The parties are optional, and we never make them feel guilty for opting out.

### How to acquire older adult students

- **Volunteer** to perform or lead a sing-a-long at Senior Centers, Retirement Communities, Parks with Adult Recreational Programs, YMCAs, local Silver Sneakers or AARP events, and let it be known that you specialize in teaching older adults. Always bring your cards or flyers with you.
- **Advertise** inexpensively in the local free community newspapers. Older adults read these papers and respond to ads. Offering a free first lesson guarantees a lot of interest. Write a weekly music or piano column for the paper, including your specialty, website and email in your byline. We advertise in classical and jazz concert programs. Subscribers are often over 50.
- **Donate** a couple of free lessons to silent auctions for charities, clubs and organizations in your area that attract older adult members. Join your town's Women's Club, Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, etc. Accompany or join a choir and let them know you teach piano.
- **Social Network** with the older adults in your life. Set up a business page and ask them to LIKE it, and suggest it to their friends. Older adults are the fastest growing group of social media mavens. In 2010, *Pew* found that half (47%) of internet users ages 50-64 and one in four (26%) users age 65 and older were using social networking sites. The numbers are much higher now, and are continuing to grow at a staggering pace!
- **Spread the word** to everyone you know that you teach piano to older adults, and they'll gift lessons to a senior they know has always wanted to play, but thought they were too old.
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