

# Top 10 Things

You Must Know Before Choosing a

# Piano Teacher



DANA MARTIN  
STUDIO



*Play Without Limits*

# Introductory Letter from

# Dana Martin



Dear Friend,

If you're researching piano teachers for yourself, your children or a loved one, you're in the right place. Just like every person is different, piano teachers are different.

In your search for finding the right piano teacher, you'll most likely find similarities; however, not all teachers are the same.

At Dana Martin Studio, our mission is to help students reach their music goals. **Play Without Limits** is more than a tagline. It's what we do. It's nailing your SCAPA (School for Creative and Performing Arts) audition, playing for the school jazz band or church worship team, or learning a favorite piece and performing it with poise and confidence. There is no better reward than seeing students achieve their dreams of playing the piano, whether you're a beginner, need a refresher or want to reach a higher level.

Our vision is to help make music a part of your life, not just a series of lessons that you'll look back on one day with fondness and nostalgia. Supporting our community is another big part of our vision. Our students love playing at nursing homes and other community outreaches and events.

To help support our mission and to help you choose the right piano teacher, even if it's not me, I put this report together, "The Top 10 Things You Must Know Before Choosing a Piano Teacher."

When you're ready, I urge you to schedule a complimentary consultation so we can meet and you can decide if you'd like to move forward with piano lessons and Dana Martin Studio.

Call today: 859.552.4419.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature of Dana Martin in black ink.







## Number 1: Is he old enough?

One question I'm often asked: **What's the best age to begin piano lessons?**

Some teachers start children as young as three years of age. If your 3-year-old is a prodigy, then he should definitely start piano. Now.

However, this is not the norm. I believe preschoolers benefit from a group music class that teaches the basics of rhythm, singing and dancing, which can instill a love for music that lasts a lifetime.

Learning to play the piano is a commitment that takes work, concentration, diligence and practice. I believe first grade is a good time to start a child that shows lots of interest.

However, some children benefit by starting when they're a little older. Basically, he should be able to sit for a 30-minute lesson, read and follow directions, and be willing to practice at least 20 minutes daily.

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*“Just a quick note to thank you for the way you have inspired Timothy and Daniel. We love the songs they are playing and are just so thrilled with how much they are learning. Timothy played in church this past Sunday! You are such a blessing. Thanks so much again .”*  
—Dawn VanWingerden

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## Number 2: What's her interest level?



Ask yourself, "Is my child interested in piano, or am I interested enough for both of us?"

Your child might be interested if... (read like Jeff Foxworthy's "You might be a redneck if...")

...He's constantly asking to take piano lessons.

...She "pretend plays" on any flat surface.

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*“Olivia and Sarah absolutely love playing piano. They each have their own style. The whole family, including aunts, uncles and cousins are astonished and thrilled with their progress. I want you to know that they both are aware and acknowledge your role in their improvement and enjoyment of the piano. In fact, both often lament how far they would be now had they begun at age six with you as their teacher. So thank you.” —Harriet Allen*

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Here's a little of my story so you'll understand where I'm coming from on this one.

I began asking my parents to take piano lessons when I was about six, and they bought me a toy piano that I played continually. Our church pianist said I had to wait until I was eight to start lessons with her — that was a long two years!

I remember my second-grade teacher calling my mom for a parent-teacher conference because I wouldn't stop "playing piano" on my desk at school.

If your child shows signs like these, then she definitely wants to learn to play piano. However, if you're the one asking her if she wants to learn, perhaps you should be the student. Who knows — your interest could spark an interest in her!






### Number 3: Why does he want to learn piano?

This question may seem a lot like the previous one, but it helps give more insight into *why* he's asking about piano.

If your child is asking about piano lessons, ask him why he wants to learn. Maybe there's a relative who plays that's inspired him. Perhaps he's motivated because of a friend at school who's taking lessons. He may have even seen someone on TV that sparked an interest in learning to play. Whatever the reason, try to find out what it is. When your student has a goal or aspiration to play because of a friend, relative or celebrity, it can really make a difference in his motivation and desire to learn.

Remember my church pianist/teacher? I would sit in a pew at church where I had an excellent view of her hands when she played the piano, and I "played" the back of the pew in front of me. I loved watching how she touched the keys and made music come out of them! She had a huge impact on my becoming a worship keyboardist and my love of teaching others to become the pianists they long to be.

My dad also played a big role in my love of music. Even before I started piano lessons, he would teach me songs to play. Ray Charles was a big inspiration to him – he saw him in concert when he was a teenager.



## Number 4: How much should she practice?

How much time is this REALLY going to take? When you enroll your student in music lessons, practice and class time must be a priority in your schedule.

First, you'll need to clear your schedule for the agreed upon lesson time each week — typically 30 minutes plus travel time. Next, you'll need to carve out 20 minutes each day for practice time. This doesn't sound like much, but when you factor in homework and other activities, you'd be surprised how hard it is to find an extra 20 minutes a day.

That's why it's important to set aside a specific time each day to practice. Typically, before, after or as a break during homework are excellent times to work in piano time.

Decide on a time that works for your family and make it a habit.

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*“Thank you so much for instilling a love for the piano and the passion for music in my sweet girl! You've played such a vital role in her life, and your leadership and kindness has been such a blessing.”*

*—Courtney Abughazaleh*

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## Number 5: Piano or keyboard?

A piano is a big investment, and what if my child doesn't stick with it?

A keyboard is perfectly okay for beginners and even early intermediate students. However, an 88-key keyboard with weighted keys and a damper pedal is a MUST. Weighted keys have the "feel" of a traditional acoustic piano, which is imperative for all students.

It's also important that students have a full-size keyboard so they get the full effect. And students begin using the damper pedal within a few months of lessons, so that's a necessity as well.

Once students have been playing for a few years, a traditional piano may be an investment you're ready to make. And by then, you'll know for sure if he's going to stick with it.

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*“I can't tell you how thankful I am that I've had you as my piano teacher! You've helped me grow so much, not only in my piano skills, but as a person as well. I can't thank you enough for helping me truly enjoy playing piano and using my talent to serve God and others. My life would honestly not be the same without you.” —Josephine Law*

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## Number 6: How many activities is she already doing?

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*“I just wanted to let you know that I loved playing with the church worship team this morning! A bunch of people asked me how long I had been playing. When I said 6 weeks, they wanted to know who my teacher was! I did not hit any wrong notes!! Yay!!! Thanks so much for teaching me! I am loving it!”  
—Madison Dressler*

*“We want her to be well-rounded. She takes clogging and ballet, plays basketball, golf and tennis, as well as chess. We have Sunday at 8 pm available for piano class.”*

First, let me say that I believe children should have lots of different experiences in their lives. After all, how can they ever know if they like something if they never try it?

However, I don't believe playing piano is something you “try.” You either have interest in it or you don't.

Remember, piano is a big commitment. And if your child is overextended already, adding one more activity is only going to exhaust and overwhelm her. (I'm not a child psychologist, but I am speaking as a parent who raised two kids of my own and are now independent adults with families of their own.)

I don't mean to sound harsh, but I do encourage you to step back and really examine what (and how many) activities your children are involved in before you consider adding piano lessons.



## Number 7: How do I find the right teacher?

Some teachers are no-nonsense, “classical music is the ONLY music” teachers. If your child is a serious student and aspires to be a concert pianist, that may be the teacher for you.

Others are fun-loving, “I just want her to enjoy lessons” teachers. If you want to “try” piano lessons and your child is involved in lots of other activities already, this might be a good fit for you.

I believe I’m a little of both. I’m no-nonsense in that I believe your student should take music lessons seriously — she should practice the recommended time each week and come to lessons prepared.

I’m also fun-loving in that I want to get to know your child personally — find out what makes him tick, his likes and dislikes. Understanding your child helps me make the best choices for music he would like to learn, rewards that motivate him, getting him involved in performance, etc.

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*“I have enjoyed playing piano the last two years. I’ve learned so much from you and hope to learn more. Thank you for everything.”*

*—Cadance Abughazaleh*

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# Number 8: How can my student stay motivated?



Practicing piano can be a lonely activity, and students need motivation and inspiration to keep moving forward. Here are some things we offer at different times throughout the year to help:

- ♪ Students earn weekly stickers for practice, completing assignments and memorization toward choosing a prize from the treasure box
- ♪ One-Minute Club — over a few weeks during their lesson, each student strives to name and play note names from flash cards in one minute or less
- ♪ Piano Bingo — students complete different activities on a Piano Bingo sheet to score one or more bingos and earn Beethoven Bucks
- ♪ Summer Piano Challenge — students choose different activities such as attend a live concert; teach a friend to play a song you've learned; put on a mini-concert for your parents, complete with program; practice every time you're wearing pajamas...
- ♪ And an annual favorite is The Practice Competition — students compete for recognition, prizes, and a pizza party by practicing as much as they can toward several categories and levels



## Number 9: Is the teacher successful?

Of course, success can have different meanings to different people. My definition of a successful teacher is if her students are successful.

Students who play a sport understand that they must practice, but the fun part is playing in the game. Playing the piano, for the most part, is a solitary endeavor. You practice for hours to improve technique and skill, and only get to “play the game” occasionally.

That’s why I encourage students to perform as often as possible. Many of my students play in their church or youth worship team, accompany the choir, play in the school jazz band, etc. We also have two annual recitals as well as community performances (e.g. nursing homes). Some students also play in competitions and/or school recitals.

I challenge my students to aim high, never holding them back when they want to challenge themselves. I also appreciate when students need more repetition to grasp new concepts and adjust the pace accordingly to fit their learning style and abilities.

Not just a few, but many of my students have gone on to make music a way of life. Many of my former students are now music teachers, professional pianists, worship keyboardists and even recording artists. I attribute much of their continued success to keeping them focused on their music goals and aspirations, getting them involved in performance from the beginning and encouraging them to learn various styles of music to propel them toward a music lifestyle.

Again, my goal for my students is to make music a part of their lives, not just a series of lessons.

# Number 10: What about lessons for adults?



- ♪ Always wanted to learn but never had the chance before?
- ♪ Want a refresher to help you reach a higher level of playing?
- ♪ Have a desire to play for the church worship team, a wedding or other performance?

I'll let some of my adult students do the talking:

*"It's my great pleasure to learn from Dana. She is very talented, supportive, patient, and non-judgmental. She allows me to work at my own pace. She is the go-to person for worship music and she is willing to tailor the program to meet my specific needs. People in my church can tell the difference!" — Yizhe Chen*

*"I've been taking lessons from Dana for a few months now, and I can say she is the BEST teacher I've encountered. I was nervous starting later in life—but she is so encouraging and is so clear in her teaching. I truly enjoy my lessons. She has ignited my love of music and given me the confidence to use this for my church and my own personal worship time. Thank you Dana!" —Hope Thompson*

*"I've only had three lessons so far but OH MY GOODNESS! Dana has taught me chords and progressions that I never would have thought to do. I look forward to my lessons because I know that I will learn something that will not only help me personally, but help my church in praise and worship." —Greg Hamon*



# In closing



Music for me is a way of life. I'm a worship keyboardist and music teacher; I've played in recording studios for hire and my own projects; I've accompanied vocalists and other musicians in professional settings as well as ministry; and I love playing for family and friends and even when I'm alone. I count it a privilege and a joy when I can play a part in instilling a love of music in a student.

Have you ever heard anyone say (or perhaps you've said it yourself), "I wish I'd stuck with piano lessons." On the other hand, I've never heard a pianist say, "I wish I'd never learned to play piano." Everything I do as a music teacher is meant to challenge my students to strive for excellence and to instill a love of playing for a lifetime. I can't begin to describe the joy of watching a student excel when he memorizes that 3-page piece for a competition, accompanies the choir, or auditions for the school jazz band and makes it!

Thanks again for downloading my free report. I hope I've answered most of your questions. If you still have some questions, I'd love to meet with you and help you make an informed decision about lessons for yourself or your child.

Contact me today to schedule a free consultation: 859.552.4419.

I look forward helping you make music for a lifetime!

Sincerely,

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