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## Adult Recreational Music-Making and Its Place in Piano Pedagogy: An Examination of the Value of RMM to Both Student and Teacher

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# **Adult Recreational Music-Making and its Place in Piano Pedagogy: An Examination of the Value of RMM to both Student and Teacher**

## **Annotated Bibliography**

### **Abstract**

This project aims to answer the following research question: *How can the piano pedagogy community embrace the Recreational Music Making movement to expand its reach among adults and transform the piano teacher's sense of professional satisfaction and career sustainability?* I will examine the opportunities that exist within piano pedagogy and the growth potential for RMM as a valuable pedagogical approach for adult group piano classes. As is routinely used in strategic business planning, a SWOT analysis will be conducted to determine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the RMM movement within the piano pedagogy field. A relatively new (and contrarian) pedagogical approach, there exists significant research potential within the RMM movement, specifically as it relates to teaching piano to groups of amateur adults and when considering the extent to which the baby boomer population influences American society and the economy. This project will address the unique aspects of adult learners, the recreational music making philosophy, and the merits of adult RMM group piano classes for private studio piano teachers to consider.

### **Secondary or Tertiary Monographs**

1. Chung, Brian and Brenda Dillon. *The Recreational Music Making Handbook: A Piano Teacher's Guide*. Van Nuys, California: Alfred Music, 2009.

In this teacher's guide, Chung and Dillon, two of the most prominent figures in the championing of RMM, provide a broad overview of the RMM philosophy and how it compares to traditional piano teaching. It serves as a handbook for teachers just getting started with RMM and group teaching, including suggestions for how to design the RMM class, what materials to use, what ages and venues to consider, how to advertise and recruit students and how to keep class members engaged. Though it is a relatively short monograph, it serves as a jumping-off point for teachers exploring RMM and offers numerous recommended resources for further exploration and research. The handbook is cited in the monographs by Fisher and Pike, noted below. Dillon has authored numerous articles on RMM and has developed valuable materials for the RMM teacher's use. Chung produced a highly popular YouTube video, "RMM and the future of Music Making," which argues in favor of the philosophy and suggests that the growth potential for RMM is largely untapped.

2. Coats, Sylvia. *Thinking as You Play: Teaching Piano in Individual and Group Lessons*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006.

Although this resource does not explicitly mention recreational music-making, and the student subjects of her discussions are more often children, Dr. Coats delves into topics surrounding group dynamics and group growth, communication styles and patterns between teacher and student, learning modalities and personality types, the group learning process and curriculum design. These topics are essential for consideration no matter the age of the student and should be factored into the analysis of the value of RMM to adult learners as well as the

value of RMM to piano teachers of adult students. Coats spent twenty-eight years as a professor at Wichita State University, teaching courses in piano pedagogy and class piano. She is an active member of MTNA and has previously served as a board director for the organization.

3. Fisher, Christopher. *Teaching Piano in Groups*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Dr. Fisher, Professor of Piano at Ohio University, offers defining criteria for RMM experiences in this group piano pedagogy textbook. This monograph is one of the only texts dedicated to teaching group piano. He clearly distinguishes RMM from traditional achievement-based music lessons which emphasize outcomes in performance and mastery rather than pure enjoyment of the learning and music-making process. He devotes an entire chapter to “Group Piano and the Adult Hobby Student” (chapter 8) which speaks to the value of RMM for the adult demographic. Fisher addresses various aspects of the adult group piano class: business and marketing, methods and materials, equipment and technology, lesson planning, and the incorporation of repertoire, technique and performance opportunities. Within this chapter, Fisher also touches on the adult piano hobbyist’s motivations and goals, the characteristics of adult learners, and the psychological and physiological factors that may play into group piano lessons. Fisher references Coats’ *Thinking as You Play* in Chapter 5, entitled “Instructional Considerations” when discussing direct and indirect communication patterns between students and the group piano teacher.

4. Pike, Pamela D. *Dynamic Group-Piano Teaching*. New York: Routledge, 2017.

In her book, Dr. Pike aims to provide novice group piano teachers with a practical approach for applying concepts of group theory and teaching strategies to the group piano classroom. She includes vignettes that serve to demonstrate how the group piano teacher would apply certain teaching strategies in a practical way. Chapter 7 explores the category of adult leisure piano students and how their needs and desired outcomes may differ from those of more serious music students. Pike explicitly mentions RMM and describes a number of resources that may prove valuable to the novice teacher of adult leisure students, including Chung and Dillon’s *Recreational Music Making Handbook for Piano Teachers*.

5. Ponce, Walter. *The Tyranny of Tradition in Piano Teaching: a Critical History from Clementi to the Present*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2019.

One might assert that the RMM philosophy is a divergent path toward developing musicianship when compared to traditional, authoritarian piano lessons. An internationally acclaimed pianist and Professor Emeritus at the State University of New York and UCLA, Ponce examines the latter approach in his book, and argues that piano students are better served when teachers allow them to discover and play music they like rather than adhere to a rigid methodology, and to think and express creatively rather than mindlessly repeating lifeless exercises. Ponce’s premise indirectly supports the philosophy behind RMM and offers a plethora of fresh ideas on the damaging effects of traditional piano lessons, while suggesting a better approach.

### **Dissertations and Theses**

6. Chiodo, Patricia Ann. "The Development of Lifelong Commitment: A Qualitative Study of Adult Instrumental Music Participation." PhD diss., State University of New York at Buffalo, 1997.

In her dissertation, Patricia Ann Chiodo makes the foundational assumption that all musicians, whether professional or amateur, share similar values about music participation and should therefore be included in her research about the development of a lifelong commitment to music making. Interestingly, she makes another assumption that the psychological underpinnings of musicians who continuously participate in music are different from those who exhibit discontinuous music participation, or "drop-out behavior," and the latter category is therefore excluded from this study. In contrast, the article by Pitts and Robinson features profiles by discontinuous adult musicians; both categories are relevant to the subject of adult RMM.

7. Myers, David Eugene. "An Investigation of the Relationship Between Age and Music Learning in Adults." PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1986.

In his dissertation, David Eugene Myers examines age-related differences in music learning by adults across three age groups. The learning rate and outcomes by participants of the study were assessed but Myers found no evidence that chronological age results in declining achievement. The study's findings support the feasibility of efforts to grow RMM programs for adult piano students and can be cited in refuting the stereotypical notion that adults are less deserving of quality music learning programs and dedication by piano teachers.

### **Scholarly Journal Articles**

8. Dillon, Brenda. "Observations Regarding Recreational Music Making." *The American Music Teacher*, 59 no. 2 (Oct/Nov 2009): 20-21.

In this article, Dillon offers a comparison between her experiences with RMM piano classes and traditional piano lessons. She reflects on the differences and suggests that although RMM places an emphasis on enjoyment of the process, no matter the outcome, RMM students are actually quite motivated to fulfill their dreams and therefore the assumption that RMM students do not practice or learn effectively is debunked, in her experience.

9. Hays, Terrence Neville and Victor Minichiello. "The Meaning of Music in the Lives of Older People: A Qualitative Study." *Psychology of Music*, 33 no. 4 (2005): 437-451.

Drs. Terrence Neville Hays and Victor Minichiello present findings of their qualitative study on the meaning of music to fifty-two people over the age of sixty, from an Australian community. Hays and Minichiello, like Peter Jutras below, find that the benefits to students are very personal, though this study presents more evidence to support the notion that music participation serves to connect oneself to others and is a form of interpersonal communication, while Jutras' finds that participants in his study placed less importance on the social aspect of music-making. Hays and Minichiello are both highly published researchers and authors.

10. Jutras, Peter J. "The Benefits of Adult Piano Study as Self-reported by Selected Adult Piano Students." *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 54 no. 2 (2006): 97-110.

Jutras presents findings from his own study and cites numerous other research works that can be referenced as evidence for why adult piano students may be motivated to take lessons, what benefits they are looking for in leisure activities, and what benefits are less important. Jutras, an authority figure in piano pedagogy is a professor of piano and the piano pedagogy and group piano specialist at the Hugh Hodgson School of Music at the University of Georgia in Athens, GA. He is also the Editor-in-Chief of *Clavier Companion* magazine. Jutras' uses three broad categories to assess the extent to which adult piano students receive benefits from their participation in piano study: personal benefits, social/cultural benefits, and skill-based benefits. Jutras' findings can be used to better understand what benefits adult piano students are looking for from their lessons in order to inform the teacher's curriculum design. The evidence presented suggests that social/cultural benefits are least important compared to the other two categories which may serve to refute the hypothesis that the group piano class format is ideal for adult students when compared to private lessons.

11. Palisca, Claude V. "The Quality of Life and the Education of the Musical Amateur." *College Music Symposium*, 16 (1976): 42-49.

This thought-provoking article by Yale University professor Claude V. Palisca argues for the importance of highly trained amateur musicians to the social and economic fabric of society. Though the article is a reflection of the music and educational ecosystem as it existed in the 1970's, the author's main arguments are easily applied to today's society, fifty years later: highly trained amateur musicians should be a priority in today's colleges and universities for a multitude of reasons. The arguments within this article clearly support the position that amateur musicianship should not be considered inferior to professional-level musicianship, but rather critical to the sustainability of the overarching field of music as well as fundamental to a dynamic, rewarding, and deeply fulfilled society.

12. Pitts, Stephanie E. and Katharine Robinson. "Dropping In and Dropping Out: Experiences of Sustaining and Ceasing Amateur Participation in Classical Music." *British Journal of Music Education*, 33 no. 3 (Nov 2016): 327-346.

This article by Stephanie E. Pitts and Katharine Robinson presents research on the barriers to continued music-making in adulthood and offers several narratives that support the growth potential for RMM. This article should be referenced when attempting to address the challenges that threaten the overall participation and engagement of amateur pianists in today's society and also when guiding independent piano studio teachers of amateur students in their responsiveness to these students with unique goals, motivations and challenges. Both Pitts and Robinson are Department of Music faculty members at University of Sheffield in the UK.