

Piano Teachers Forum helps piano teachers keep each other in tune

By [Alexandra Yearly](#)



After the Nov. 5, 2010 meeting, PTF members Ruth Mortensen, Betty Stoloff, Bobbie Lee, Kristen Topham, Rita Asch, Jean Parsons, Donna Petrillo, Jane Buttars and Emmajane Olsen gather around program presenter Forrest Kinney. (Photo by Alexandra Yearly.)

Composer Forrest Kinney stood beside the piano at the front of the room in Jacobs Music in Lawrenceville. At the Piano Teachers Forum Nov. 5 meeting, the Nationally Certified Teacher of Music discussed and demonstrated how the use of improvisation in piano lessons gives students the opportunity to develop a love for piano, without focusing solely on the technical aspects of music.

Kinney invited Princeton resident Jean Parsons to sit at the piano and play the role of 'Joe,' a young boy just starting to learn to play piano. Parsons hit a few random notes, then soon realized they sounded in harmony with the chords Kinney was playing next to her.

For 30 years, the PTF has held meetings like this. Each meeting provides a way for piano teachers with varying levels of experience to trade ideas and learn new teaching techniques from different musical experts and presenters.

"One of the main things is the community of teachers," said Parsons, the publicity chair of the group. "It's a lonely business because I have a private studio in my house, so I don't have any cohorts. So it gives a place for like-minded people to discuss things you're doing with people who are doing the same thing."

The group meets on the first Friday of each month, where members can enjoy refreshments and a nationally accredited guest speaker. The exception is the October meeting, when members play selected pieces from a themed syllabus. The theme for 2011 is Colorful Impressions. Hopewell resident Ruth Mortensen said she could identify with Kinney's presentation.

"I have had a boy who plays by ear, and I like to improvise, so I particularly enjoyed this workshop," Mortensen said.

Other upcoming presenters are scheduled to address topics such as teaching the works of Chopin, and the use of posture its effect on sound. Aside from monthly meetings, the group also provides different opportunities for both the teachers and their students, including performance groups throughout the month and a yearly performance festival for students.

"We have a performance group, where teachers perform for each other," Princeton resident Jane Buttars said. "So it's not just that we're teaching but we're learning to play better as well."

Every year in March, the PTF organizes a festival where students have the opportunity to play piano in front of music professors or someone who has a degree in music beyond pedagogy. The students are assessed and receive a professional opinion on their performance.

The basis of the group is about learning just as much as teaching, and providing a network of professionals to exchange thoughts and ideas.

“If you are going to teach, you have to continue to learn all the time, keep current with all the things changing,” Parsons said. “Early on, we had to learn about digital keyboards and things like that.”

While meetings are based in Lawrence, the group’s interest has extended outside of Mercer County. Some group members travel from Yardley, Pa. and northern Jersey to attend the monthly meetings and activities.

Meetings are held on the first Friday of each month at 9 a.m. at Jacobs Music at 2540 Brunswick Pike in Lawrenceville. Guests may attend meetings for a \$10 fee. For more information, go online to www.pianoteachersforum.org.

This article appeared in the Dec 2010 issues of the Community News Service local papers, such as the Princeton Echo. It also appeared online in the version above on the Mercerspace.com website.