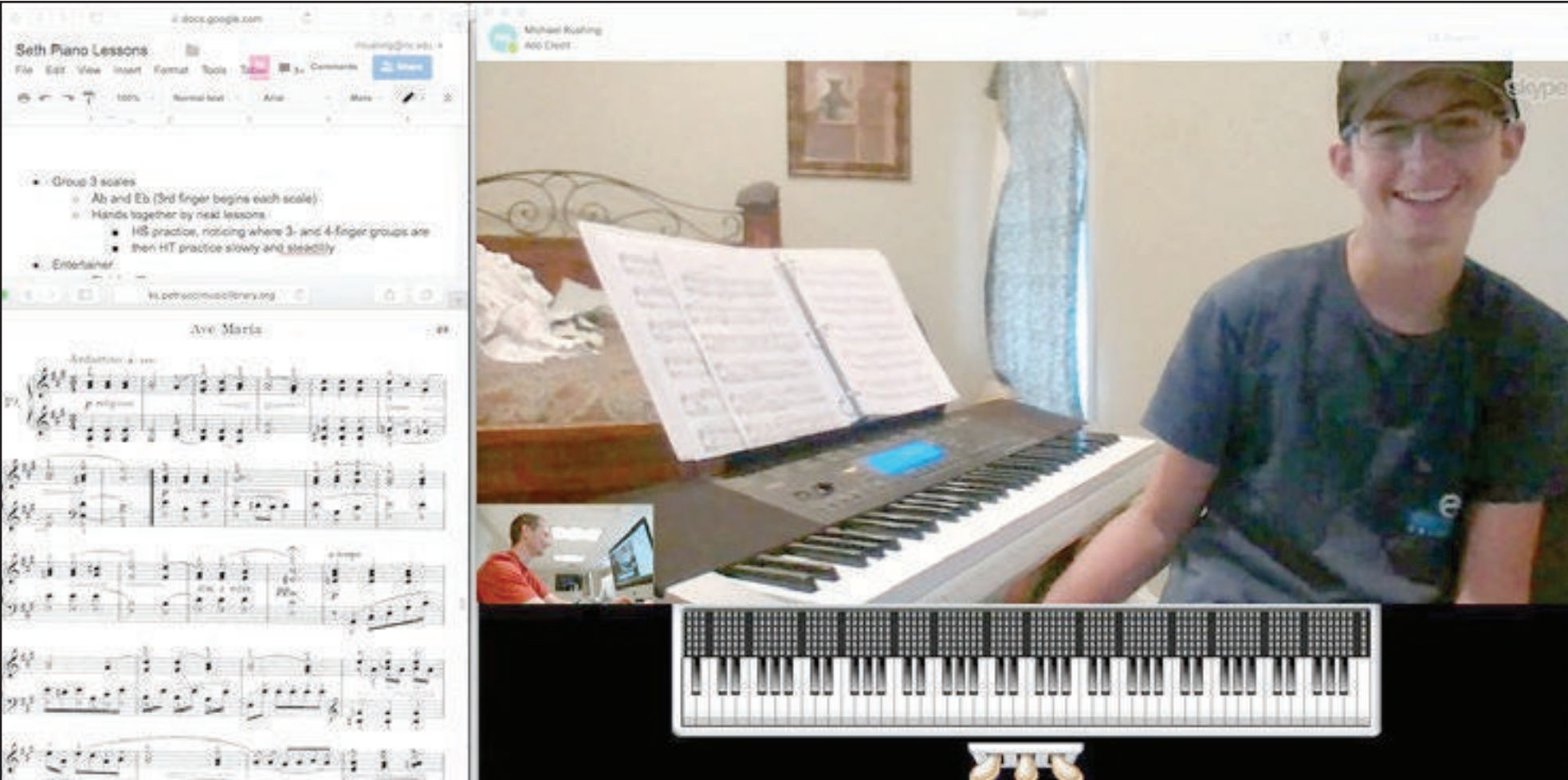


Music lessons change, but stand the test of time



A Taylor School piano student enjoys a virtual piano lesson via Skype.

Special to The Clinton Courier

By Guest Columnist Dr. Michael Rushing

Some of my fondest childhood memories are of times spent with my first piano teacher, Edith Kitchens. Her beautiful home in Crystal Springs is surrounded by a pecan tree orchard and was within walking distance of my house. I looked forward to seeing her each week for my lesson, and still vividly remember the way her cozy teaching studio created a comfortable learning environment for all of her students.

One of my proudest moments as a musician was being asked to perform at her retirement celebration, at age 99! She is currently 104 years old and, until very recently, still loved holding court with visitors at her home. Mrs. Kitchens made an impact on countless students and is the primary reason I chose to be a profes-

sional piano teacher as an adult.

My teaching day often includes lessons that look very much like those that I took from Mrs. Kitchens. Students meet with me individually in what I hope is a hospitable learning environment. We play through scales, chords and pieces to perform at the piano. At the end of the lesson, new material is assigned, along with practice suggestions for the next week of at-home practice.

Other parts of the day look very, very different! Small groups of 4-year-olds might be found in my studio singing and dancing to encourage a love of music, establish an internal sense of rhythm, and develop muscle coordination. Groups of elementary-aged children might meet in a music lab full of digital pianos and iMacs. Teenagers might meet in partner lessons with friends to play piano togeth-

er. Making music is far more interesting when making it with friends!

Technology has also changed the way people study piano. Each week, some of my time is spent teaching students that live over an hour away or have inconsistent work schedules. Without the assistance of technology, these students might not have the opportunity to study piano at all. We might have virtual piano lessons one-on-one or in small groups via Skype or Google Hangouts. This requires everyone to be present at the same time, but not in the same place.

For those with flexible schedules, online lessons might look like a mix of Skype lessons and videos posted to video sharing apps. This allows students to video their performance using their cell phone and receive personalized feedback. No more waiting an entire week to

see the teacher! Other apps are able to tell the student immediately whether or not they pressed the correct key at the correct time during a performance.

Piano lessons might not look like they did in years past, but they can continue to bring joy to students who learn to express themselves through music. Seeing a student “get it” and grow into an independent young musician is one of the great pleasures of teaching, regardless of whether it happens in my studio or with the aid of technology. My hope is that each student has as meaningful an experience, through whatever medium is necessary, as I did with Mrs. Kitchens.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Michael Rushing is Associate Professor of Music at Mississippi College, where he directs the Taylor School community music program.



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