

KeyNotes Piano Studio

Studio Handbook and Policies

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KeyNotes

piano studio

www.keynotespianostudio.com

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Welcome Letter

Dear Parents and Students,

Welcome to my thriving studio! I am so excited that you have chosen KeyNotes Piano Studio to begin or continue an exciting journey through music and piano or guitar. Since 1996, I have offered the finest piano and guitar lessons in the comfort of your own home in Tallahassee, and my beautiful studio, located in my home, or worldwide via the Internet. Because I deeply believe in the intrinsic value of a musical education, I take the responsibility and trust that you have placed on me very seriously and assure you that you and your loved ones will receive nothing but the most exceptional possible music instruction.

I carefully designed this handbook to assist you in making the most out of your musical journey. A significant amount of effort, and over two decades of teaching experience, have gone into its creation. Please read it thoroughly and consider implementing the ideas contained within it. As usual, I'm always available to answer any additional questions or concerns that you may have.

Thank You,

Jaime García-Bolao, NCTM, FRSM

Successfully learning an instrument depends on the three parties involved.

The Three Parties

Although I assume the ultimate responsibility for lessons, learning will rarely be successful without the effort of all three parties involved: **Student, Parents, and Instructor.**

The Student

Carefully prepares for each lesson with thorough and thoughtful daily practice. Once a student has been accepted for study, and after the initial interview, I expect that practice will take place regularly. Remember: you should practice five, or preferably six days a week. Please rest on one day of your choice, but not on the lesson day. It is best to practice shortly following a lesson, as a considerable portion of knowledge acquired during our session together may be lost otherwise.

You are also responsible for keeping track of the practice time. This information will assist me in the evaluation of your progress, commitment, and understanding of the material.

The Parent(s)

The success of a young music student is usually directly proportional to parental involvement in the learning process. Regardless of musical background, every parent can work with me and the student to make music lessons a positive, rewarding experience. Here are some suggestions:

- * Encourage the student with an active interest in practice sessions. Parents may need to supervise practice. It is crucial for students age six and younger, and vital with 3-5-year-olds.
- * Be responsible for providing the student with an environment conducive to learning. That means providing the student with a well-lit, quiet, pleasant atmosphere, and an adequately maintained instrument.
- * Express enthusiasm for accomplishments. It will provide a strong incentive for the student to continue making progress. Reviewing the lesson with the child and playing the role of the audience at least once a month also shows your continued interest in the child's improvement and underscores the importance of consistent practice.

- * Most important: establishing a definite schedule for practice is essential to developing a commitment to lessons. Unless you give time a high priority, it will probably not take place. Locate the instrument in an area free from distractions.

The Instructor

One of the hallmarks of a professional is the drive to keep abreast of the field.

I am a member of MTNA (The Music Teachers National Association), FSMTA (Florida State Music Teachers Association), the Tallahassee Music Teachers Association, and the American College of Musicians, where I also serve as an adjudicator. I attend at least three conferences every year, to hone my skills, and to keep them up to date.

I hold the title NCTM (Nationally Certified Teacher of Music) in Piano since 2015. The title is awarded by the Music National Teachers Association (MTNA).

The MTNA Professional Certification program exists for teachers who teach music to students of any age level in private or group settings. The program is based upon a set of five standards defining what a competent music teacher should know and be able to do. Upon fulfillment of these standards, applicants are granted the MTNA Professional Certification credential with the designation, Nationally Certified Teacher of Music (NCTM).

To maintain the MTNA Professional Certification credential and designation, NCTM must continue fulfilling the program's standards through the yearly renewal process.

New Student Interview Session and Admission

Before starting lessons, I interview each prospective student with no obligation. The interview gives me a chance to get acquainted with the student, determine their degree and source of motivation, existing abilities, etc. It also allows the parents to become familiar with the expectations, policies, and resources that I make available to each student.

I admit the majority of students. Only those who seem dead set against lessons, suffer from any significant behavioral or emotional problems, or have learning disabilities that I may feel inadequately trained to handle, are denied admission. In this latter case, I will send an e-mail to parents explaining the reasons and possible remedies, together with a referral list of other local instructors who may provide a better fit.

Do not let the existence of a learning or disability; however, dissuade you from contacting you. I have vast experience and advanced training teaching children with a wide variety of challenges, and those in the autism spectrum.

Student etiquette

Instructor's Arrival at your Home

I make every effort to start lessons on time, whether at my studio, the Internet, or your home. I will contact you if the lesson might be delayed for over fifteen minutes. If nobody is home upon my arrival at your home, I will typically wait fifteen minutes. If a student must leave the house before the lesson time without prior notice, please leave a note on the door, or call or text me directly at (850) 322-8746

If I am teaching in your home, please have your student's materials (books, etc.) and a chair ready for me, as this can save some time.

Parents' Observation of Lessons

I encourage parents to observe as many lessons as possible, since it will not only keep them informed of the student's progress, but also it will arm them with some tools to help the student during weekly practice sessions. Observation of lessons is crucial for young students. Please do not interject during the lesson, and make sure that you, and other siblings that may be present, are quiet at all times.

During the Lesson

For the benefit of instructor and student, a parent or sibling, age 18 or older, must remain in the home during the lesson. *At no time during the lesson should a minor child be left with me being the only adult in the home or the studio.* This is to protect both student and instructor from any allegations or suspicions of misbehavior. If an emergency should arise that would require the adults to leave the lesson, I will be happy to schedule a makeup lesson.

Rewards System

Many music studios reward their students for consistent practice, completion of levels, attendance, and performance in recitals and masterclasses. Students earn points from each of the areas and are presented an award at the spring recital.

Although consistent practice and performance are vital to the development of any musician, music should be taught in a bubble, where students are just making and enjoying music for themselves and their families.

That is the reason why I reward my students for sharing music with others and being involved in the world of music.

Students who play their instrument in retirement homes, school functions, share their knowledge of music with a friend, sibling or parent, or who attend music performance in their community, receive awards, and are recognized at the Spring Recital

Students can earn points, as follows:

- * 50 points – Awarded for playing at a retirement home.
- * 25 points – Awarded for performance in a school music-related function (talent show, for instance).
- * 20 points – awarded for attending a musical performance in their community (A copy of the concert or recital program is required for credit).
- * awarded for attending a musical performance in their community (A copy of the concert or recital program is required for credit).
- * 25 points – Awarded for participation in a Neighborhood Master Class.
- * 50 points – Awarded for participation in the Holiday, Spring, or Summer Recitals.

Music Awards

➤ **(Student must perform in the Spring Recital to receive award).**

- * 100 points – Ribbon
- * 150 – Music Pin
- * 200 – Medal
- * 250 – Small Trophy
- * 300 – Large Trophy
- * 400 – Plaque

Practicing Guidelines

As a music student, you or your student will bring home a weekly assignment with several elements. There are new pieces to be learned, pieces to be memorized, challenging sections, etc. Also, from time to time, there are technical exercises, pieces to be composed and written, and work specifically designed to reinforce the various musical concepts that we may be working on at the time. Completing all of the assigned work from week to week is essential to the satisfactory progress of the student.

- * Students will determine their weekly practice commitment within the following *suggested* framework:
 - Levels 1-3: 20+ minutes, six (6) times per week, minimum.
 - Levels 4 and above: 40+ minutes five (5) times per week, minimum.

Some students may find it necessary to practice a little bit more, while others may require less practice time. The most crucial factor is that the student has some contact with the instrument daily with as few interruptions as possible.

Contact with the Instructor:

It is of the utmost importance to me that my students and their families can contact me whenever they need assistance or guidance.

Phone

The Studio's phone number is: (850) 322-8746

Since I spend much of my time teaching, I usually do not answer phone calls when you place them. However, I always check my cell phone after the conclusion of every lesson, so that I receive and respond to any messages that students leave right away. Messages left during regular studio business hours (T-SU 12:00-08:00 P.M.) are typically returned on the same day.

Texts and emails

You can also text me at any time at (850) 322-8746. This is the preferred method for most communication.

The studio's e-mail address is: info@keynotespianostudio.com.

Facebook

Although I often befriend many of my students' parents, and adult students on Facebook, it is not a very effective way to contact me regarding studio business, as I do not receive those messages right away.

Studio's Website

The studio website can be found at: www.keynotespianostudio.com, and it is filled with useful information, resources, and announcements, such as directions for recitals, group lessons, calendar of events, etc.

When a Lesson is Missed

Student Illness

Because I teach many children and adults throughout the area, I ask that you call and reschedule your lesson in the event of a contagious illness. It is unfair to the student, to me and all other students to carry on in such circumstances. If a student is sick, we simply schedule a makeup lesson.

Inclement Weather

In the event of a weather watch or warning has been issued in our area or, if after evaluation, I consider driving conditions to be hazardous for any reason, I may decide to cancel the lesson. You will receive as much advance notice as possible, usually via text, depending upon my location and situation. We will schedule a makeup lesson.

Makeup Lessons and Cancellations

I will make every effort to attend all scheduled lessons. If I must miss a lesson, I will offer a makeup lesson at a later date.

Please give as much notice of missed lessons as possible. If the student misses a lesson, without notice, **no refund or credit will be issued**. A makeup lesson must be scheduled instead.

To cancel a lesson with less than 24-hours notice, please call or text me at (850) 322-8746. If you can provide more advanced notice, you may e-mail your cancellation or rescheduling request to: info@keynotespianostudio.com

Likewise, should I be unable to attend a lesson, a makeup lesson will be provided at a mutually convenient time.

No makeup lessons are provided if no notice is given.

Studio Swap Lists

Understanding that students sometimes have conflicts, and at the same time, realizing the importance of attending lessons faithfully, I make a studio Swap List available to all students. Students who choose to be on the swap list will receive a copy, listing the names, lesson times, and phone numbers of all students requesting to be on that list. Students can then rearrange (swap) lessons for unavoidable conflicts. Please notify me in advance of any swapped lesson times. The Swap List is only available for students taking lessons at the studio.

Recitals and Other Studio Performance Opportunities

Every student at KeyNotes Piano Studio, whether child or adult, beginner or advanced, has multiple performance opportunities each year. The backbone of these are the two studio-wide recitals, which take place in late December and early June of each year, in the world-class performance facilities of the Florida State University College of Music.

Each is an excellent opportunity for students and parents to meet and get to know each other. It is also a fantastic chance to see the students "in action." Students not only get to show off their skills and accomplishments, but they also gain motivation from seeing other students of

different levels play--and a sense of perspective by watching those just starting as well as those far in advance of themselves.

Before each of the two recitals, each student must perform a dress rehearsal in front of their peers. Additionally, once a semester, a masterclass is offered for students to showcase pieces currently in progress. For more ambitious students, festivals and competitions are available throughout the city, state, and country.

Additionally, one benefit for adult students at KeyNotes Piano Studio, is our monthly meetings, Adult Piano Performance Forums, in which just the adults gather, and play for each other. While this meeting is voluntary, many students find that playing for each other, both encourages and inspires them. Adult students also have their own, formal recitals, in early December and late May.

For more information about our next meeting, please consult our [calendar](#).

Though the recitals are *not* mandatory, students are all strongly encouraged to participate. Scholarship recipients are required to perform. All parents should encourage their children to attend. Remember that, in most cases, we learn music to share it with others and, therefore, performing is a vital part of the music training experience. Students do not pay a separate fee for performing in the recital. However, given the investment of both extra time and financial resources that come into play to organize these events, performance and preparation leading up to recitals, including the dress rehearsal, are counted as *two lessons*. Therefore, there are no lessons in the two weeks immediately following recitals.

A reception with food and beverages usually follows recitals and masterclasses. I present every student with a certificate of participation.

Each graduating senior who has been my student for nine years or longer, is entitled to a senior recital at the Florida State College of Music. The Studio pays all costs associated with senior recitals.

Dress Rehearsals

Students participating in Studio recitals are required to perform a dress rehearsal in front of their peers before the recital.

Recital Etiquette

Student recitals can be tremendously fun and valuable experiences for young pianists. Unfortunately, they can also be a source of some stress and anxiety if preparations aren't complete, and specific practices aren't followed. There are guidelines and rules of behavior all performers and audience members should follow during all recitals or concerts.

Audience members must remember the purpose of their visit to the recital hall - to listen quietly, actively, and appreciatively to the music performed by the performers.

PERFORMERS

- * Performers should wear appropriate attire. Girls in knee-length or longer dresses or slacks, boys in dress pants and buttoned dress shirts with ties preferred. Suits, of course, are also an excellent choice. No spaghetti straps, no platform shoes, flip-flops, or athletic footwear. Please do not wear dangling, jingling jewelry.
- * Of course, no one should feel obligated to spend money on new clothes. The overriding principle should be to simply do the best you can with what you already have on hand and remember that proper attire shows respect to your audience, as well as to yourself, and what you have accomplished as a student.
- * Remember to practice in your outfit, shoes included, before the event.
- * Once it is your turn, rise quickly and walk up to the stage. Adjust the bench, pause and collect your thoughts, and start playing when you are ready. Do not let the presence of the audience intimidate you into playing prematurely.
- * Performers must bow at the beginning and the end of the performance. Instructor and Student will practice bowing properly.
- * Arrive at the requested time to learn where you are to sit and receive instructions for the performance.
- * Once the recital begins, please listen and be quiet.
- * Respect the other performers. Unnecessary noise from whispering, talking, candy wrappers, etc. during a program is not acceptable. Reading, studying, playing video games, and writing letters or grocery lists during a program are also inappropriate.

AUDIENCE

- * Recitals are a special occasion, and so it is customary to dress nicely.
- * Please arrive a little early in order to find a comfortable place to sit.
- * Make sure all your guests understand the importance of arriving on time. If they arrive late, it makes it difficult and distracting for those performing.
- * Please invite as many friends and family members as you'd like. Our recital hall has lots of room and can likely accommodate as many guests as you'd like to invite. And if not, then a standing room only crowd would be a fantastic crowd to have, and a wonderful problem to deal with!
- * Turn off all cell phones and any electrical devices that may produce sound.

- * Once the recital begins, please listen and be quiet.
- * I adore babies. However, a recital hall is not a place for babies. Please do not bring them. Their crying is too unpredictable, and this can have a very negative impact on a performance.
- * If you arrive late, please wait to enter between pieces when you hear applause.
- * Do not enter the recital hall or switch seats while someone is performing.
- * The soloist will bow, and your response should be to applaud politely.
- * No whistling, yelling, or other loud methods of congratulations, especially before the performance, please. If a performer is focused and ready to play but becomes distracted with the "cat-calling" and "whooping," it can throw off the performance. While boisterous congratulations are meant to show support for the performer, they may cause unintended problems instead. The best way to show appreciation for the performance is with thunderous applause, and an occasional "bravo/a" at the end of an, especially excellent performance.
- * Compositions that have multiple movements are, in general, performed without applause in the middle. So are suites.
- * Respect the performers. Unnecessary noise from whispering, talking, candy wrappers, etc. during a program is not acceptable. Reading, studying, and writing letters during a program are also inappropriate.
- * *Please stay until the performance or event is over. Attending a recital so that other families will serve as an audience to your student, and then leaving before the other performers have finished is rude, inconsiderate and unacceptable. If you have other obligations or matters to attend to before the recital is over, please do not attend.*
- * Flash photography is not appropriate during a performance. You may videotape and/or take flash photography as the performer is approaching or leaving the stage.
- * Enjoy! Your presence is the most significant affirmation!

Attendance at Non-Studio Recitals and Concerts

Students are encouraged to attend as many live music performances as possible. Listening to a recital or concert can be a highly motivational experience. To this end, a link to the schedule of recitals at the Florida State University College of Music, as well as other local performance venues, are included on the studio's website. The College of Music offers well over 500 recitals and concerts every year as well as three full-length opera productions. The vast majority of these recitals are free of charge. From time to time, I offer recitals in the Tallahassee area. Information and complimentary tickets are mailed to students and their families in advance.

Performances resources other than the College of Music at FSU are listed under the tabs "resources" and "music in Tallahassee" on the studio's website: keynotespianostudio.com

Competitions and Festivals

Some students develop the confidence and motivation to perform in competitions and festivals. In addition to performing in several recitals each year, these students are encouraged to enter auditions and competitions at the local, state, or national levels.

Entering auditions and competitions promotes a higher level of finished artistry in students. It helps develop a high degree of confidence in public situations in which stress and anxiety have to be effectively controlled. Entering auditions helps prepare students to withstand the pressures of competitive sports, public speaking, and other similar activities.

Additionally, significant public and press recognition, as well as cash awards, can be earned by the highly motivated. For these students, as part of their training, I arrange many opportunities to play in public at various venues in Florida, the rest of the United States, and abroad.

Academics

Evaluations

An evaluation form will be provided to the student and parents two times per year: in November and May. This form contains an in-depth review of the materials and topics covered during that time, recommendations for the student and parent(s), an evaluation of the student's performance and progress, and an overview of goals for the upcoming lessons.

Evaluation of the Instructor

Parents, in conjunction with students, also have a chance to evaluate my performance as their instructor twice a year, in December and June. This is done anonymously through an online questionnaire.

Conferences

Parents, students, and instructor will hold a conference to discuss progress and any other pertinent issues when the student evaluation is ready. Conferences are 15 minutes long and take place during a regularly scheduled lesson.

Parents and instructor may also choose to hold an additional conference from time to time. Please contact me at least two weeks in advance to make any necessary arrangements.

Tuition

Lessons are paid by the month only, in advance. No payments for individual lessons are accepted. Each coming month's tuition is due on the first lesson of each month. I welcome payment in the form of checks, Venmo, Zelle, credit card (with a 3% fee), or cash. Please make checks payable to: KeyNotes Piano Studio.

If there is ever a situation preventing a family from paying on time, simply call me and arrange late payment. No fee will be charged if arrangements are made in advance.

Please contact me directly about current tuition rates.

Fifth Lessons

When any given month has five lesson days (i.e., a student has lessons on Mondays, and there are five Mondays in a given month), the fifth lesson will not increase the tuition bill. These extra lessons are counted toward Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Spring Break. This means that, for instance, in December only two lessons will be scheduled, but your tuition bill will be the same as had we met four times, since we had some extra lessons earlier in the year. The monthly tuition remains the same for the months of November, December, and March.

Summer Lessons

Due to the intensive and demanding nature of music lessons, students are expected to take eight or more lessons during the summer term on those weeks when they are available, and in town. Online lessons during this time are also an option if the student has a piano or keyboard available. Scheduling is flexible. Suspending lessons for the entire summer break, amounts to not receiving instruction for *one-fourth* of the whole year.

Taking into consideration Christmas, Thanksgiving, Spring, and weeks-after-recital breaks, students already get several weeks off per year.

Students not enrolling in the summer term, forfeit their spot in the studio.

Music Purchases

As an additional convenience, music and other materials are purchased for you and billed to your account. Additional music may be obtained from Beethoven & Company. They can be reached by phone at 850-894-8700, and fax at 850-894-8707. It is always a good idea to call ahead and make sure that the required materials are in stock. Otherwise, they can be ordered by phone or through their website.

Two ways to Save \$\$!

Referrals

As the owner of a small business, I heavily rely on referrals from my current customers to find new ones. That is why, as a token of my appreciation for continued support, it is my policy to credit accounts \$50 toward tuition for each referral that leads to an enrollment.

To receive the \$50 credit, the following conditions must be met:

- * The referred student must enroll.
- * A referral to a family with more than one student counts as only one referral.

Note that there is no limit on the number of referrals that you can give and, therefore, to the number of tuition credits that you earn as long as there are time slots available for new students.

Accounts will be credited the month following the enrollment of the referred student.

Scholarships

A limited number of scholarships are available each year for deserving students. A student becomes initially eligible after six months of study. The following scholarships are currently available:

- * **The Whole Note Scholarship:** The student is awarded full tuition for three months.
- * **The Half Note Scholarship:** the student is awarded 50% of tuition for three months.
- * **The Quarter Note Scholarship:** The student is awarded 25% percent of tuition for three months.

All Scholarships also include a diploma (suitable for framing) honoring the student for receipt of the scholarship. Scholarships do not cover lesson materials (books, etc.).

Also, while holding a scholarship, the student must:

- * Uphold the same standards of conduct and excellence that (s)he displayed before the award
- * Perform in both of the two-yearly recitals.

The Scholarship Evaluation Process

As part of determining scholarship qualifications, each prospective recipient is given a comprehensive examination during a regularly scheduled lesson. The examination tests the knowledge of all material covered during the preceding twelve months. A committee of five parents of former scholarship recipients, a former scholarship recipient, age 14 or older, and the instructor will review each applicant. The panel members volunteer their time to make the process as objective and unbiased as possible.

Scholarship consideration is by invitation only. Students and parents are contacted regarding the application process at the beginning of November. The application process is free of charge. Any parent wishing to volunteer for the committee should contact me. Parents whose students are currently being considered for a scholarship may not volunteer for the committee. Scholarship winners are announced each year during the awards ceremony at the June Recital.

Disciplinary Process

Termination of Lessons

Parents and students must be aware that teaching piano and guitar is my passion and also my livelihood. Although I do not make families sign lengthy contracts, I require *Two months' advance notice* for termination of lessons. This notice can be verbal, or via e-mail.

Warning, Probation and Dismissal

When a student displays inappropriate behavior, lack of satisfactory progress, inconsistent practice habits, or habitual lesson cancellations, the student and parents will receive a letter of warning via e-mail. This letter outlines the source(s) of friction or dissatisfaction, proposes possible solutions, and offers the possibility of scheduling a parent-student-instructor conference.

A probation letter is e-mailed to the parent(s) when the student has received a warning, and the situation has not improved after a reasonable amount of time (usually four to six weeks). At this stage, the scheduling of a parent-student-instructor conference with the intent of finding solutions is mandatory to continue instruction.

If, after a student has been placed on probation for a period of at least one but no more than two months, the situation has not been resolved or improved, the parent(s) will receive a dismissal letter. Lessons will then be discontinued, and all unused tuition for that month will be refunded.

The Instrument

Piano Maintenance

The piano is the essential tool for a piano student. Although that statement may seem very obvious, most pianos are not kept in proper working condition.

To keep your instrument performing its best over the longest possible amount of time requires regular maintenance: tunings, regulations, voicing, etc. The backbone of any maintenance program is regular tuning. They should occur as needed to compensate for changes in humidity and temperature, as well as movement of the strings from use. A rule of thumb is that tunings should be performed often enough to hold the pitch between A439 and A441. Depending on the weather conditions and temperature and humidity conditions in your home, and the condition of your instrument, this will probably mean two-yearly tunings. Be aware that while tuning your piano is not cheap, the damage done by avoiding proper maintenance is likely to be far more expensive. If you would like some tips on how to keep your instrument in tune for more extended periods, please feel free to ask me or contact your piano technician.

Buying a Piano

Buying a piano is one of the most important investments you will make toward becoming a proficient pianist. Unlike other household goods, pianos are designed to last 75 or more years, so long as you provide them with proper and consistent care.

Parents are sometimes tempted to purchase a very inexpensive and poor-quality piano or keyboard initially, to gauge whether the student will continue with lessons for the long term. Although that approach is somewhat understandable, it has two pitfalls:

- * Buying a low-quality piano may impede the progress of the student, so that they become uninterested and discontinue lessons.
- * A well cared for piano, will depreciate relatively little over the years so that, if the student ceases to be interested in the instrument, or simply needs to upgrade to an even better instrument, the used piano may be traded or sold for close to the amount of the original investment.

For these two reasons, I highly recommend buying a good quality, reliable instrument, even if it is preowned. Most families will be well served by the two major Japanese manufacturers: Kawai and Yamaha (find the links to those manufacturers below).

[Jim's Pianos](#) has served Tallahassee for several decades. Jim's carries a wide variety of pianos for every budget.

For those who are willing to travel to purchase a piano, I recommend [Piano Works](#), located in Duluth, Georgia. They provide many pianos to the College of Music at Florida State.

Piano Manufacturers

There are many piano brands to choose from when buying a new or used instrument. Likewise, the price of a piano can range from thousands to hundreds of thousands of dollars. Below, you will find links to the websites of some of the major current piano manufacturers. The ones with an asterisk (***) are brands that I highly recommend, and like the cost code, these go down to a single asterisk. The links are further categorized by their cost from \$ to \$\$\$.

[Boston](#) \$\$\$

[Blüthner](#) \$\$\$ (***)

[Essex](#) \$\$\$

[Fazioli](#) \$\$\$ (***)

[Kawai](#) \$\$ (***)

[Pearl River](#) \$ (of inferior quality)

[Steinway](#) \$\$\$

[Yamaha](#) \$\$ (***)

[Young Chang](#) \$\$

For more information about piano prices and quality, and more detailed information on how to choose a good piano, please visit [Blue Book of Pianos](#) or purchase [The Piano Book](#).