

Syllabus

Jim Stopher's Piano Studio

updated August 12, 2020

1. Course information

1.1 Outcomes

The student will:

- learn to play increasingly advanced repertoire at a performance-ready level,
- develop solid technical skills so they may play without discomfort or awkwardness, and
- internalize music theory concepts at the keyboard to increase skill in sight-reading, improvisation, composition, and learning new music quickly.

1.2 Teaching philosophy

Playing the piano should be an act of great joy and pleasure! With a proper grounding in technique, theory, and repertoire study, that aim is within reach of everyone.

This studio is for students who love the piano and are committed to improving their playing one step at a time, in a highly structured and supportive environment.

2. Instructor

2.1 Contact information

Dr. Jim Stopher

Email: james.stopher@gmail.com

2.2 Credentials and experience

- degrees from Harvard University (Bachelor of Arts), the University of Arizona (Master of Music), and the Peabody Conservatory of the Johns Hopkins University (Doctor of Musical Arts)
- 9 years and counting of college teaching experience, including at the University of St. Francis (Piano Program Head) and College of Marin (Music Department Chair)
- experience teaching private lessons to elementary-, middle-, and high-school students; college students; working professionals; and retirees
- concerto soloist with the Louisville Orchestra, Arizona Symphony, Mill Valley Philharmonic, and the Lucas Valley Chamber Orchestra
- orchestral pianist/keyboardist with the Tucson Symphony Orchestra, West Suburban Symphony, Mill Valley Philharmonic, Marin Oratorio, and other ensembles
- composer and performer of "Tonal Recall," an album released in 2018
- regular performer at College of Marin as soloist, accompanist, and chamber musician

2.3 Quotes from students (unsolicited)

“I want to write with an unsolicited enthusiastic recommendation regarding Jim's teaching. He is extremely expert in his field, but also well organized, a clear communicator, energetic, creative, enthusiastic. And overall an amazing educator. I have been a student and/or volunteer faculty member at other colleges (Duke, Yale, Stanford, UCSF), and Jim's teaching ability and performance are among the very best that I have ever encountered anywhere. This is not an exaggeration. Being an expert in a field, does not necessarily make one an excellent teacher, but Jim Stopher is a truly excellent and dedicated educator.”
— J.S., Marin County

“Hi Jim - I wanted to thank you for a wonderful experience in your class this semester. I've had many professors / teachers in my life (both in undergraduate and graduate studies... albeit not in music) but I must say you are one of the best, if not the best, I have encountered. I really appreciated the energy and enthusiasm you brought to every class, the adherence to a tight/solid structure, the respect for your students, and of course your incredible mastery of music.”
— C.R., San Francisco

“You are one of the most wonderful teachers I have ever had the gift of working with. Because: You are so passionate and dedicated to your craft. You are committed to music and you have been and continue to practice and grow. You are so organized, attentive, patient, clear, concise, and directed in all of your lessons. You really value your and our time so you prepare to make the most out of every class and rehearsal minute. Above all of this and essential for me and I would say everyone really is your great kindness, faith in our ability as your students to grow, compassion, humility, empathy and open heart. Thank you for who you are as a person, such a kind person. We need more teachers like you in the world!
— M.N., Marin County

3. Materials

3.1 Scores and books

The instructor and student will coordinate ordering scores, books, and other materials appropriate to the student's level, such as the following:

Repertoire

- Suzuki Piano School, International Edition, Volumes 1-7
- [supplementary repertoire to be assigned as needed]

Technique

- Junior Hanon (Alfred Masterwork Edition)
- Hanon: The Virtuoso Pianist in 60 Exercises
- The Complete Book of Scales, Chords, Arpeggios & Cadences (Palmer)
- [supplementary exercises to be assigned as needed]

Music Theory

- Music Fundamentals (my own text, available as a PDF or hard copy)
- Kostka/Payne/Almen: Tonal Harmony, 8th Edition
- Standard Wirebound Manuscript Paper (Hal Leonard)

(See section 5.3 below for reimbursement policy.)

3.2 Technology

For the foreseeable future, lessons will be conducted remotely. Thus, there are technology requirements:

- a (free) Zoom account and the Zoom app
- a (free) Google account, for using Google Docs
- a reliable and fast internet connection
- a computer or other internet-connected device with a camera and decent audio quality

Recommended setup for lessons:

- computer with webcam showing student, the keyboard, and their hands
- wireless headphones
- a USB microphone connected to the computer
- Zoom settings:
 - wireless headphones set as speaker (Audio settings > select from drop-down)
 - USB microphone set as microphone (Audio settings > select from drop-down)
 - Original Sound on (Audio settings > Advanced > check “Show in-meeting option...”). Then, in meeting, click “Turn on original sound.”)
 - Automatically adjust microphone volume enabled (Audio settings > make sure box is checked)
 - Suppress Persistent Background Noise disabled (Audio settings > Advanced)
 - Suppress Intermittent Background Noise disabled (Audio settings > Advanced)

3.3 Practice setup

Regular practice time is crucial for success, and a well-organized practice space encourages greater quantity and quality of practice. Students should have:

- a piano (upright or grand) or, at minimum, an 88-key keyboard with weighted keys (like a Yamaha Clavinova)
- a quiet area free of distractions during practice time
- a metronome or metronome app
- a pencil with eraser
- all relevant scores, books, and other materials

4. Course structure

4.1 Lessons

Weekly lessons are 45 minutes each and are conducted via Zoom. Lessons are currently offered on Mondays and Wednesdays, during the afternoon and early evening hours.

A normal lesson proceeds as follows:

- 5-10 minutes of warm-ups and technical drills
- 20-25 minutes of repertoire work (learning and perfecting increasingly difficult pieces)
- 10 minutes of music theory instruction
- 5 minutes of summary and tailored guidance (specific feedback and practice strategies, including goals and assignments for the next lesson — enumerated in a Google Doc shared among student, instructor, and parent/guardian if applicable)

Of course, lessons may occasionally deviate from this structure depending on the student's needs (if they're preparing repertoire for a competition) or skills (if they already have advanced training in music theory).

4.2 Assessments and performances

As students gain skills, they may be required to participate in:

- studio recitals
- competitions (if eligible) such as Marin Music Chest, Certificate of Merit, and MTNA

5. Studio policies

5.1 Lessons

In lessons, the student is expected to:

- be on time
- be prepared
- pay attention
- make a good faith effort at doing everything suggested — even when it's challenging
- not play while the instructor is talking

5.2 Practice

Without regular practice, there can be no substantive improvement. Students are expected to practice **at minimum** 5 days per week for 30 minutes at each session. Students will document their practice time in the Google Doc shared with the instructor.

5.3 Payment

The current fee is \$80 for each lesson. At the end of each month, an invoice for the month's lessons will be sent using PayPal's easy-to-use payment system (all major credit cards accepted). Full payment is expected no later than the 5th of the following month. The invoice will also include reimbursement notices for any scores, books, or materials purchased by the instructor for the student.

5.4 Absences

Notice must be communicated by email to james.stopher@gmail.com; **no other form of notice is acceptable**. Absences are dealt with according to the following table:

Absence Notice	Action
Student/parent/guardian provides 24 hours' notice	A reasonable attempt will be made to reschedule
Student/parent/guardian provides less than 24 hours' notice due to emergency or sickness	A reasonable attempt will be made to reschedule
Student/parent/guardian provides less than 24 hours' notice (not due to emergency or sickness)	No attempt will be made to reschedule; student is charged for the lesson
Student/parent/guardian provides late notice or no notice	No attempt will be made to reschedule; student is charged for the lesson

5.5 Holidays

In general, lessons will not be offered on federal holidays or during the holidays in December and early January — though occasional exceptions may be possible if the student is interested.

The instructor will communicate well in advance if there is to be any other deviation from the regular schedule (due to vacations, concert obligations, etc.).

5.6 Policy enforcement

If infringements of the policies above begin to accumulate (regularly missing lessons, two late payments, insufficient practice, etc.), the student will be dropped from the studio.

5.7 Communication

Email (to james.stopher@gmail.com) is the preferred contact method. Generally speaking, you can expect a response within 24-48 hours on weekdays; urgent messages receive priority.