



little bird music

# QUARTER NOTES

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Photo by Lucas Alexander.

## ‘Band to me means community’ — how to navigate band as a pianist

Tahoe is home to some of the more notable school band programs in the region. With a vibrant community of band teachers— Jesse Steele (Truckee High School), Todd Holway (Incline High School), Natalia Tomasello (Alder Creek Middle School), Lena Meyer (North Tahoe School), and Dean Nordby (North Tahoe High School)—musical opportunities abound for students.

Tahoe’s school music programs continue to produce a standout roster of students, including Truckee locals Jordy Guldman and Vincenzo Pellegrino, who have gone on to pursue university training in music. “Band was a very valuable experience for me,” said Guldman, a

### Staying Motivated

For most people, maintaining the discipline to carry out any laborious task—whether it’s schoolwork, exercise, or practicing the piano—ebbs and flows in sometimes unpredictable ways. This is normal! In effort to help students make meaningful progress in lessons, it’s important to understand what motivates them (or ourselves) and how these forces work.

Social psychologists outline two forms of motivation. Extrinsic motivation encourages us to work hard based on external outcomes,

sophomore studying trumpet performance at Oberlin Conservatory of Music. “Especially now with COVID, I am realizing how special it was to play with a group of people every single day.” For Pellegrino, in his second year as a jazz studies major at the University of Nevada, Reno, “band to me means community. Some of my closest friends today are those I met through the power of sharing and playing music together, which is something I will never trade away or take for granted.” Both Guldman and Pellegrino play piano, as well as other band instruments.

Even for students who might not plan to study music as seriously as Guldman and Pellegrino, the act of learning to navigate the collaborative dynamics of ensemble work has lasting benefits. “The collective experience of making music with peers helps students develop leadership skills, work ethic, and a unique creative voice,” said Alice Cotter of Little Bird Music. “I encourage all piano students, whether or not they play a specific band instrument, to join their school’s music ensembles.”

Todd Holway, band director at Incline High School, said, “I think a lot of young musicians who have worked so hard at piano are apprehensive to dive into a new instrument. But what I tell most young musicians is to try a bunch of different things and see what you like. Middle school band gives you the time to learn. Many of their skills that they have gotten through studying piano will translate, especially their ability to read music, and it will be easier for them than their other bandmates.” Holway, himself a pianist, regrets not having learned a wind or brass instrument when he had the chance in middle school. “I personally chose to be a percussionist because my piano skills could translate to the xylophone and marimba, but most of the time I was not challenging myself. I wish I had pursued another instrument. Trumpet was one I always said I wanted to play! (I play it now.)”

whether a gold star, a good score on an exam, or approval from peers. Intrinsic motivation compels us to engage in our work based on a deep interest in the subject and a genuine feeling of satisfaction while doing it. We often privilege intrinsic motivation because it can lead to deeper learning and enjoyment of a subject, all with a feeling of effortlessness. If only we could be intrinsically motivated all the time!

The reality is that both forms of motivation are often at work. For instance, students may need a gentle reminder to practice with a reward in mind, but then in the act of playing they become lost in the moment and realize how much they enjoy making music. Joy is the ultimate goal and sets the stage for intrinsic motivation to get us to practice in more meaningful ways.

Another important factor is the situation. When students feel controlled or forced to do something, they’ll likely avoid the task altogether. But when they’re given some agency in their learning, such as options for how and when to practice, they’re allowed to feel competent and supported at the same time. Specific praise (i.e. “your hard work shows!”) also goes a long way in fostering intrinsic motivation.

So instead of favoring one form of motivation over the other, think about how to use both. Extrinsic rewards can be a great kickstart. But the intrinsic rewards bring the most meaning to our lives.

Natalia Tomasello, music teacher at Alder Creek Middle School, likewise encourages students to seize the opportunity to try a new instrument. “Although piano is not a primary instrument in my band classes,” Tomasello said, “I usually like to encourage piano players to play percussion (mallets, drums, auxiliary) or they may pick up a new instrument of their choosing. This is a time for any musician to explore and become multi-talented (that's how I like to view it).”

While piano is a part of the jazz band and extra-curricular jazz combos, there's usually only one piano spot, so it's more competitive. “I would recommend having students think about finding a band instrument they have interest in playing,” said Jesse Steele, band director at Truckee High School. “There are opportunities to play piano at the middle school/high school level, but not exclusively. I have had several pianists join band and learn a secondary instrument with success.” Steele recommends percussion instruments for pianists, but he also says, “this may not appeal to all piano students, so I also think learning a wind instrument is just as good an option, especially coming in at the middle school level. Instruments students may consider include flute, clarinet, saxophone, bass clarinet, trumpet, French horn, oboe, bassoon, trombone, tuba, baritone or euphonium, or string bass.”

Due to the pandemic, group performance opportunities have been limited or even canceled. Lena Meyer, band director at North Tahoe School, maintains a positive outlook. “This actually would be a good time to welcome new students into our program, especially those with a piano background. We are not currently using our band instruments at school due to COVID; we are doing percussion. Students who want to join at this time would have a role as a percussionist, either on the xylophone, drums, or another small percussion instrument. When we get back to normal, the students could continue as percussionists...we need more in our Concert Band anyway!”

Exposure to other instruments can offer additional perspectives on musical creativity. “Playing different instruments helps me understand the inner workings of a piece,” said high school senior and Little Bird Music piano student Samantha Osborne (she's also an accomplished violinist and the principal oboist in the Reno Youth Symphony Orchestra). “If I'm composing music, it helps me understand the abilities of the instruments I'm writing for and when instrumentalists need to breathe. Each instrument is fun and hard in new ways.”

All of the above-mentioned band teachers would be delighted to answer questions for parents or students. If interested, please get in touch with Alice for their contact information.



## *These little birds told me...*

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“What I love about piano is doing flash cards! But I especially love playing Beethoven. I really like Moonlight Sonata and the fast changing chords that shift all of a sudden. They’re just really beautiful. I feel happy I can actually play this piece. Classical music makes me feel excited. The tune is super cool and it’s just really good music.”

—Andrew Buchanan, age 10

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“My favorite part of playing piano is getting to play Beethoven because I’ve always loved listening to his music. I like how Für Elise is really soothing and calm and then gets crazy and bouncy in the middle. And I like how he didn’t have it as easy as other composers because of his hearing loss and yet his pieces are so beautiful.”

—Avery Buchanan, age 10

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“I love the piano because you can make your own songs. My favorite hand position is neighbor thumbs because two of my top favorite songs have that position. Playing the piano makes me feel calm.”

—Zoe MacFadyen, age 6



Andrew Buchanan



Avery Buchanan



Zoe MacFadyen





Brody Frumkin

“I really like the hand movements and how they shift around. When the hands and fingers change they make a song. When I feel sad or mad I come to the piano and play my favorite songs. Afterward I feel calm and focused.”

—Brody Frumkin, age 6

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“Piano is one of those instruments that people think is really serious, but it’s actually something to enjoy. Piano for me is a very beautiful instrument that I can use not just to express music but also to express my feelings. You don’t just play with your fingers, but you play with your heart.”

—Nicole Rekhtman, age 10

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Nicole Rekhtman

“Sometimes music is the only medicine the heart and soul need.”

—Unknown



## Upcoming Events

Mark your calendars! Below are just a few of the many cultural events held virtually this season:

**Nightly:** New York’s [Metropolitan Opera Live in HD Streaming Operas](#). Take advantage of this wonderful (and free!) resource. Performances are engaging with educational materials available.

**November 8 and December 5:** [Reno Philharmonic Orchestra's](#) thoughtful virtual concerts.

**November 27:** [An Evening with Yo-Yo Ma](#) via Cal Performances. Enjoy Yo-Yo’s fun musical spirit.

**November 27-December 31:** [The Nutcracker](#) by the San Francisco Ballet streamed in HD.