

Music Learning Center: Sharing the Love of Music

By Pamela Brown

It's all about learning, playing, and sharing the love of music at the Music Learning Center (MLC). If you're seeking exceptional music education in classical, pop, rock, blues, jazz, hip-hop, and everything in-between, MLC is the place to go. "Music is an important part of a child's life. Our total focus is on education. Seeing other students come in weekly can inspire their fellow students and encourage them to make a commitment to learning and practicing," said Director Jeff McGill. "I've always felt music's importance in my life. Studies have increasingly shown music can have a positive benefit and definitive value on a child's development."

Theresa Weir, of New Fairfield, appreciates MLC's extensive programming, and her daughter Alli-

son, 7, loves attending her weekly piano lessons under the direction of Margaret McKerrow. "Allison really enjoys the recitals. Margaret is the greatest teacher because she's so friendly and like a grandma," said Theresa. "She's tough, but also very caring. It's the best of both worlds." After only 3 years, Allison can now play Mozart. "She's an adventurer and has a natural ability. As she's performing you see that sense of accomplishment. It's inspiring and entertaining. Jeff is really trying to support the arts. The work he does at MLC is really great," said Theresa.

Jeff enjoys seeing how music touches so many lives. "It's tremendously exciting to see the students growing and developing. It's very rewarding for me to see

smiles on the students' and parents' faces," said Jeff. Recitals are held in June and November. "Recitals allow students to become more comfortable performing in front of an audience and boosts their confidence level. Knowing



MLC offers both private and group lessons for guitar and piano.

the recital is coming gives them valuable experience in working toward goals and seeing incremental progress."

On February 26th, MLC's students will perform at its annual

Student Showcase featuring solos, duets, trios, and ensembles in a variety of music genres. Held at the Danbury Music Center at 256 Main Street in Danbury, the event is free and open to the public.

MLC offers lessons for children and adults, from beginner to advanced, whether the student wants to play for fun, enter competitions, or pursue a music career. In addition to private voice lessons, MLC offers instruction in popular instruments, including piano, keyboards, guitar, drums, violin, viola, cello, flute, clarinet, saxophone, percussion, trumpet, trombone, bass, and more.

Affordable instrument rental is available.

The Studio

The professionally-designed facility features state-of-the-art

recording equipment, sound proof studios to increase concentration, two band rooms, and comfortable waiting area. "It's a wonderful facility," said Jeff. A special feature is the group-digital piano classroom with state-of-the-art digital pianos, headsets, and specially-designed teacher's control console. "This electronic component allows students to hear themselves, interact with the teacher directly, and also allows the teacher to work with the entire class and have students collaborate," said Jeff. Students also have the opportunity to digitally record their lessons.

Teachers

MLC maintains high standards for its staff of 25 professional teachers. "We have a wonderful, passionate, skilled group of

Continued on Back Page

MLC: Sharing the Love of Music

Continued from Front Page

teachers," said Jeff. All are University or conservatory trained, having advanced degrees in music performance and music education from notable colleges, including The Juilliard School, Eastman School of Music, and Westconn. Additionally, most actively perform and have appeared in national and local symphony orchestras, jazz festivals, concert halls, and local jazz and rock clubs. Some have traveled throughout the US and Europe, performing and/or winning competitions and prestigious national and local awards. All have a minimum of four years and an average of 20 years of teaching experience.

The teachers professionally and enthusiastically guide every student with hands-on instruction. "They tailor their approach to each student's skills. We work with parents on placement that will facilitate the student's



MLC Director Jeff McGill.

growth, development, and enjoyment. All our teachers have a high degree of awareness that students have a lot of things going on in their lives. To make music part of that, they adapt their program so they can maintain the student's interest. There are fundamentals every student needs to learn, and our teachers strike a balance between

those and incorporating music and material that will excite the student," said Jeff.

History

MLC is located at 425 Main Street in Danbury. In 1993, Jeff co-founded it with New Fairfield resident, Barbara Vogel, a professional pianist and organist. Today, along with being director,



Christian Hewitt and his piano instructor Natalia Kolenciak. She is one of 25 music instructors, 14 of whom teach piano. Ms. Kolenciak has been with the center since 2004.

Jeff also teaches jazz piano, ensembles, and works with students and instructors in using technology in music education. What began as a small teaching studio has grown to become the largest music school in the area. "I'm extremely proud. We wanted to bring value to the community by offering a school that combined the talents of different teachers and share our love of music," said Jeff who has more than 30 years of experience in music, working as a pianist, composer, arranger and music educator.

Jeff feels fortunate to have grown up in a musical family. "Music was always playing in our household," said Jeff, a Newton resident whose father was a

bandleader with his own swing orchestra and his mother was a singer. "My grandfather gave me my first piano lesson when I was ten years old. When I was 18, my brother gave me Dave Brubeck's Take 5. It was my first introduction to jazz and I became passionate about learning and playing." Jeff graduated from St. Lawrence University and studied jazz at the Crane School of Music and Berklee College of Music with legendary jazz pianists and educators Charlie Banacas and Andy Laverne. He was a 6-year faculty member at the Gunnery in Washington, becoming chairman of the Arts Department and developing the music curriculum. Since 1985, Jeff has fronted The Jeff McGill Group, a jazz group that has performed at festivals, concerts, and jazz clubs throughout the region.

MLC's Goal

MLC's goal is to expose students to the large world of music by inviting professional musicians



Many adult students attend weekly lessons or classes at the Music Learning Center which features a state of the art digital piano lab.

to perform and as a supplement to weekly lessons, students can perform together in duets, trios, ensembles, and bands. "Teachers recognize it can be inspiring and exciting not only to work on music on their own but collaborate with other students," said Jeff. The

groups are made up of students at the same age and skill level. Jeff feels group performances offer many benefits. "Students develop their rhythmic and listening skills to a greater degree when given an opportunity to play with others. They learn from both the instructor and fellow students. The lessons of cooperation and teamwork



Drum instructor Jim Walker demonstrates a technique during a percussion workshop.

can be a wonderful musical experience, as well as a valuable life experience." Band members have the opportunity to make a CD of their performances.

The Music Learning Center is a valuable place for music lovers. "Over the years, we've seen a steady increase in the number of advanced students. Students who play string and band instruments come to us for further instruction and can audition for the Western Regional Band," said Jeff, noting one student, Hannah Kim, received a perfect score for clarinet playing and gained entry into the Western Regional Band. "One of the most gratifying things is seeing students leave their weekly lesson looking forward to the next step and getting excited on a regular basis," he said. "We want

students to enjoy the process of learning, feel inspired, and in the long run realize where they can take their music if they become career musicians or just want to keep it in their life as an avocation."

The Music Learning Center is located at 425 Main Street, Danbury. For more information on classes and lesson fees, call (203)748-1444, visit their website at www.musiclearningcenter.org, or email them at office@musiclearningcenter.org. Register now for winter music lessons.

The Jeff McGill Group will be appearing on January 22nd from 6-8p.m. at Pizzeria Lauretano at 291 Greenwood Avenue in Bethel as part of their Sunday Jazz Series jazz group that has performed at festivals, concerts, and jazz clubs throughout the region.



Hannah Kim performs on clarinet during the Music Learning Center's fall recital weekend. Hannah achieved a perfect score on her CT Western Regional's Band audition. She takes weekly private lessons with woodwind instructor Claudia Mickelson.