



# NOTES & NEWS

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COLORADO STATE MUSIC TEACHERS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

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AND PUT "CSMTA" IN THE SUBJECT LINE.

## Emotionally Healthy Teacher-Student Relationships

### Identifying Teaching Patterns We Inherit in Order to Honor Our Students



By Dianne Betkowski and Dorian Kincaid  
Editors: Ben Raznick and Chee-Hwa Tan

Regardless of our age, the “voice” of our past music teachers remains an influence in our lives, seeping into the relationships we have with our students. It imprints the message of our value as a person apart from our playing skills, coloring how we approach our instrument and our teaching philosophy.

In a quote from one of my favorite books, *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse* by Charlie Mackesy, the horse says to the boy: “Always remember you matter, you’re important and you are loved, and you bring to this world things no one else can.”

What would happen if all students knew

that they matter and that they bring something special to the table - regardless of their skill level, or whether they have practiced that week?

In the following interview-conversation, cellist Dianne Betkowski, and violinist Dorian Kincaid, discuss the topic of equity in the teacher-student relationship, their own experiences as students, and student-centered teaching styles that honor the student as a person. They also courageously address the seldom raised topic of emotionally abusive teacher-student relationships and how to equip our students to avoid such environments.

*By Chee-Hwa Tan, VP for DEI*

# Emotionally Healthy Teacher-Student Relationships CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

## Meet Dianne & Dorian:

**Dianne Betkowski**, as the cellist of World Music ensemble Miguel Espinoza Fusion (MEF), composes, performs, records, and tours around the US, including residencies at a number of universities and colleges. She has performed, toured and recorded with the St. Louis, Utah, Honolulu and Colorado Symphony Orchestras. She is also a composer whose works have been performed by the Rochester Philharmonic, and the National, St. Louis, Houston, Honolulu and Colorado Symphonies, among many other groups. Dianne has also performed with the Boston Composers Quartet and the Lark Quartet. Her book, *How to Get To Carnegie Hall: A Weekly Music Practice Schedule*, is in its second printing. Dianne is the founder and former director of Denver Eclectic Concert.

**Dorian Kincaid** has been a resident of Colorado and a member of the Colorado Symphony since 1995. She holds degrees from Indiana University Jacobs School of Music and the Cleveland Institute of Music, where she was awarded the Jerome C. Gross Prize in Violin. She is honored to have studied with David Cerone, David Updegraff, Bernhard Goldschmidt, Nelli Shkolnikova, and Andrew Dawes. Dorian has appeared at numerous venues and festivals throughout the region, including Boettcher Concert Hall, Denver Eclectic Concerts, Strings Festival, Crested Butte Chamber Music Festival, New Music Symposium, Off-the-Hook Summerfest, and Taos and Aspen Music Festivals. Dorian also has been heard on CPR's Colorado Spotlight.

*N&N:* Since music teachers tend to be passionate about what they do and care deeply about their student's progress, it seems inconceivable that we might unintentionally perpetuate certain negative patterns that we inherited from our own teachers. Is it relevant that we examine the teaching styles that we absorbed from our past teachers?

*Dorian:* Yes, young students are so impressionable, and the teaching they receive when they are young has such an influence in all the ways they will eventually function as musicians.

*Dianne:* I agree, though it takes time to realize what has been healthy for us and what has not. We've had a spectrum of experiences as students ourselves that have taught us what to do as teachers, and sometimes what not to do. The good experiences were wonderful, but the bad ones were devastating and took some time to bounce back from. It takes a toll on one's psyche and ego. Eventually, if we give it some thought and examination, we can see what was positive for us, and what we really need to let go of completely.

*Dorian:* Emotionally abusive teaching can take a toll on our performance and contribution as musicians. In my own experience, it sometimes felt like I've had to unlearn more than I've learned, but the silver lining is that it has led me to think a lot

about the effect we have on our own students. After experiences like these I think we both hope to interrupt negative patterns; to pass on something more constructive to our students. We hope to shape their confidence by helping build a strong, well-rounded foundation, and by honoring their individual musicianship.

*Dianne:* What I've learned is that, to honor myself fully, to forgive my deficits, and to be very much in touch with my strengths, makes me a better teacher and musician, and a better colleague. In re-imagining myself, acknowledging the best of me and the not so best of me, and loving all of that, I can offer to my students a cleaner, more positively supportive approach as well. That positive honesty gives me a much healthier and realistic ego that in turn creates a positive and richly supportive environment for my students.

*N&N:* How can we equip our students to expect healthy boundaries in their relationships with future teachers?

*Dianne:* We can set the best examples we are capable of setting. We teach self-respect to our students by treating them with respect. We also give them a sense of healthy relational boundaries before we send them out into the world. If they encounter (emotionally) abusive teachers - teachers who degrade and insult, who humiliate and hurt them - they can walk away quickly (no, RUN!) and find another teacher that honors a healthy teacher-student relationship and who gives of themselves with little to no negative ego involvement. Also, I hope that our former students will trust us enough to let us help them process negative experiences later on.

*Dorian:* We can provide them with the foundation that their musicianship is theirs to own before they graduate from our teaching studios and take whatever direction they choose. That means to me that, though they come to a private teacher with an open mind and an open heart, ready to absorb and learn and apply what is taught, they are of unique value as musicians and must be respected. Whether our students will go on to become music-lovers or music professionals, I find it useful to remember that as teachers we are contributing to a sort of great feedback loop, enriching our art as a whole.

*N&N:* What is an issue you worry about as your students progress to college-level teaching?

*Dorian:* In sending students off to college, I've noticed that some universities and conservatories have policies of hiring high-profile performers, maybe without thoroughly vetting their teaching style. In some cases (though certainly not all) these star performers may have been focusing their energy on their concert careers and not much on teaching; they may have little patience for students with deficits requiring a methodical or insightful approach, which can lead to abusive behavior towards students. It's so important for college-bound students to make sure the teacher they are basing their college choice on is the right fit for them. The draw of big star performers at conservatories and universities needs careful examination.

## Emotionally Healthy Teacher-Student Relationships CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

It's entirely possible that some of the world's greatest performers are wonderful teachers, but that's not necessarily true. Many of them were child prodigies who cannot possibly understand the challenges of us mere mortal aspiring musicians! As teachers of high-school students we can educate them that, while it may seem glamorous to go away to study with a famous performer, ultimately it might not benefit the student. Ideally, by the time they leave us, we will have created a supportive relationship where they can contact us with any significant difficulties they might encounter with a teacher down the road.

**Dianne:** There needs to be a shift in hiring committees. Choosing a 'star' candidate for a teaching position who may not have the attributes of a great teacher, or who is ingrained with those old-fashioned sensibilities of pedagogical "discipline," may serve a school in the short term, but in the long run, the reputation of a school depends on the word of mouth that students share with each other about their experiences. Maybe redefining the role of the "performer-artist" who lacks inclination for teaching (as opposed to musician-educators who prioritize what is best for the student) could also work well. Perhaps this type of faculty can primarily concertize and occasionally teach public master classes, limiting their one-on-one time with private students.

**N&N:** Traditional teaching tends to focus on performance-based results with a master-apprentice type relationship between teacher and student. While this obviously has its benefits, we also have the alternative of more student-centered teaching approaches. What does this look like and why is it important?

**Dorian:** Today's musical possibilities are more expansive than ever before. Though a student may learn their musical skills through traditional Western classical methods, it's important to keep in mind that students have individual ambitions, needs, talents, interests, and opportunities. If a student has the potential for a solo career, or an orchestral or chamber music career, then the traditional teaching environment may work quite well. Expectations are well-known, and the path well-worn. If this is not a student's vision of their musical future, then I do believe it is a teacher's responsibility to support that

student's interests and help achieve them. It's important because the music world looks very different now.

**Dianne:** Yes, I was an example of exactly that kind of student! I took the traditional path to learning to play the cello, and to a great extent I am grateful because I acquired the technique and foundation I needed, but I was not given the freedom, or the respect, to pursue musical avenues and opportunities that actually showcase my greatest strengths as a cellist. Eventually I was able to do that for myself, but only later in life.

**N&N:** What about if a student goes on to college studies? Is a student-centered approach to teaching and learning still relevant here?

**Dorian:** Absolutely! As a student becomes more proficient, more experienced and capable, and more able to realize their

ambitions, it is at least equally important to be given the latitude and support to fulfill those musical ambitions. In the way that we have defined a student-centered approach, a continuation of that approach seems logical and consistent, doesn't it?

You (Dianne) use some wonderful creative approaches in your teaching of classical cello that involves composition and

improvisation skills. I think these student-centered methods can help lead students (and their teachers!) down their own unique paths, where they take ownership of what they do. We may not be able to change the teachers that are out there at every level, but we can help our own students develop a sense of validity and ownership of their musical journey.

**N&N:** How do you think the competitive environment of the music world affects one's teaching?

**Dorian:** At the university level, there are music schools where administrators turn a blind eye to the abusive behaviors of their faculty, perhaps with the notion of preparing their students for the rigors of a competitive professional environment.

**Dianne:** I understand that it is hard to avoid the trap of feeling validated as a teacher by our students' successes, and I see that this situation can adversely affect the process of teaching, of even which students one accepts into our studios in the first place. I know the world functions in a competitive way, but I think we suck the joy out of music when we go too far with competitions. I'd rather have showcases for musicians than cutthroat competi-



Dorian Kincaid and Dianne Betkowski

## STUDENT PROGRAMS



## Colorado State MTNA Competitions

MTNA sponsors a national competition in performance and composition that is open to members and non-members. Each state association is responsible for holding and staffing the first round of competitions. This year CSMTA will hold its MTNA Competition in conjunction with the state conference in

October.

Info & forms: [www.comusicteachers.net/mtnacompetition](http://www.comusicteachers.net/mtnacompetition)

2024 Application deadline: TBA

2024 Composition scores due: TBA

2024 Event date: October 19, 2024

2024 Event location: Colorado State University Pueblo

Event chair: Abigail Silverberg [abigailsilverberg@gmail.com](mailto:abigailsilverberg@gmail.com)



## 2024 CSMTA Master Class Activity

The 2024 Master Class Activity will take place at the next state conference, October 19 at the Colorado State University Pueblo.

Info & forms: [www.comusicteachers.net/masterclass](http://www.comusicteachers.net/masterclass)

Application Deadline: September 8, 2024

Event date: October 19, 2024

Event location: Colorado State University Pueblo

Event chair: Jill Ice, NCTM [jill@icepianostudio.com](mailto:jill@icepianostudio.com)

## TEACHER ENRICHMENT CORNER

BEN RAZNICK, VP FOR TEACHER ENRICHMENT, EDITOR

## Teachers' Toolkit (Resources for Music Teachers)

How can we as teachers support our college and university students? Here is a short list of MTNA opportunities we can inform these young professionals about:

### Starting an MTNA Collegiate Chapter

One way to engage students actively enrolled in a college or university is by encouraging them to connect to MTNA by establishing a collegiate chapter. In fact, it's not that difficult! Each prospective collegiate chapter must submit an online Collegiate Chapter Application. Upon approval by the state association and national office, the collegiate chapter will receive notification and a certificate from MTNA. Each chapter must have at least three student members, as well as a sponsor or advisor who is an active member of the state and national associations.

### MTNA Collegiate Chapters Symposium

This annual conference is sponsored by MTNA, and it combines the quality of the lectures of the national conferences but in a much smaller and intimate environment. Lectures are given by both collegiate faculty and graduate students. Although focused on MTNA Collegiate Chapters and collegiate members, the weekend is open to anyone and everyone. We anticipate

a wonderful weekend, and we hope to see you there!

### Making The Most Of Young Professional MTNA Membership

In addition to the various conferences, workshops, networking that MTNA provides, young professionals are offered exclusive benefits: Grants and Awards (for example, financial assistance to attend a national event, or funding of projects offering educational and professional development), Complimentary Conference Registration (for members who volunteer for six or more hours during the MTNA National Conference), 50% Off Active Member Dues Following Graduation, and 50% Off MTNA Certification Application Fees to become a Nationally Certified Teacher of Music.

Learn more at [MTNA.org](http://MTNA.org) in the *Young Professionals* area.



## INDEPENDENT MUSIC TEACHER FORUM

LEILA VISS, IMTF CHAIR AND 2024 MTNA FOUNDATION FELLOW

THE MAIN OBJECTIVE OF THE CHAIR IS TO DISSEMINATE INFORMATION ON TIMELY TOPICS FOR INDEPENDENT MUSIC TEACHERS SUCH AS BENEFITS, INSURANCES, LEGALITIES AND BUSINESS. LET ME KNOW YOUR SUGGESTIONS OR QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE TOPICS AND I'LL DO MY BEST TO ADDRESS THEM.

## The Power of a Teacher



In partnership with Lamont School of Music Piano Preparatory Program, Denver Area Music Teachers Association held a Student Musicale Celebrating Black History Month. Most students played pieces from Dr. Leah Claiborne's newly published Hal Leonard series, *Music of Black Composers, Volumes 1 and 2*. The

organizers were able to invite Dr. Claiborne to attend the celebration because they received funding from the MTNA Community Engagement Grant and the CSMTA Local Association Grant.



Dr. Leah Claiborne

Twenty-six students from over a dozen teachers performed music from Dr. Claiborne's books or by other black composers. Dr. Claiborne brushed aside tears as she praised the students and their teachers. She also explained how lonely her experience was as a black woman working towards a doctorate in classical piano. She never considered playing compositions written by black composers until a professor during her graduate studies nudged her to consider it. After years of studying repertoire from the classical canon, Dr. Claiborne stated, "I finally found my voice" playing spirituals. She then gave an emotional performance of a spiritual titled "I'm Troubled in Mind," arranged by Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson. Her passion for spirituals led her to seek out more music by black composers, which developed into a doctoral thesis. Dr. Claiborne's work resulted in two volumes of teaching pieces. After the performances, students were invited to ask Dr. Claiborne questions. One asked how she got her books

published. Dr. Claiborne said she repeatedly contacted sheet music publishers to consider publishing the two volumes. Most did not reply to her request, or they said 'no.' That is, until the death of George Floyd. Soon after, publishers changed their 'no' to 'yes,' and Dr. Claiborne had the luxury of choosing her publisher. Ben Raznick and Dr. Emily Book McGree presented Dr. Claiborne with the Trailblazer Award in recognition of her significant expansion to the world of piano music. Denver Area Music Teachers Association created this honor to recognize community members doing inspirational and courageous work. In response, Dr. Claiborne made a profound statement: "Teachers have power. Teachers have the power to program fresh repertoire at recitals and make a change!" There were numerous parents at the musicale to cheer on their performers. I'm guessing that it never occurred to them and the diverse crowd how teachers hold the power to steer students toward repertoire beyond the default "classics." The weight of her statement was tangible.

There are two main reasons why I feel compelled to share my thoughts about this musicale:

1. Kudos to CSMTA President-Elect Dr. Emily Book McGree and DAMTA President Ben Raznick, who organized a truly significant event alongside a fine committee. Both are outstanding leaders. Colorado music teachers are fortunate to be led by notable visionaries.
2. One of the reasons why Dr. Claiborne is a pianist and piano teacher today is because of the love and safety she felt from her first piano teacher. Music teachers not only hold power in expanding the diversity of repertoire for generations to come but also impact the souls and vocations of their students. A reminder to make every lesson count.



Ben Raznick, Emily Book McGree, Leah Claiborne, Greta Praznowski

CSMTA MEMBERS AT THE 2024 MTNA NATIONAL CONFERENCE



CSMTA members at MTNA receive the 2024 MTNA State Affiliate of the Year Award

CU-Boulder graduate piano student of Dr. Jennifer Hayghe receives the MTNA Composition Young Artist winner prize from MTNA President, Dr. Peter Mack



CSMTA President, Andrew Cooperstock and Past-President and West Central Division Director, Mary Beth Shaffer



CSMTA MEMBERS AT THE 2024 MTNA NATIONAL CONFERENCE



Left: CU-Boulder Collegiate Chapter members and their mentors after their presentation.

Leila Viss, NCTM received the 2024 MTNA Foundation Fellow award



CSMTA Members at the West Central Division dinner



CU-Boulder undergraduate piano student of Dr. Andrew Cooperstock receives the MTNA Young Artist Piano winner prize from Asia Passmore