



## How to Find the Right Music Teacher for Your Child

by Rufina Gorin, MA, NCMT, Musical Director, The Gorin School of Music

Children are fascinated by the sounds of musical instruments and many would like to learn to play one. Some parents, especially those who never played an instrument, do not know how to begin finding a teacher. There are too many music studios, schools, and private instructors who teach from their home or even come to student's homes.

I have been in music education for over 40 years. It was my great pleasure to work with piano students, many of whom studied with me from a young age till the time they graduated. But recently, I found myself on the other side, as a grandmother trying to find the right teacher for my grandchildren.

My grand kids live three hours away from me and from the music school I started in 1991 (The Gorin School of Music), so I had to find a teacher outside of our music school in their area. I would like to share my thoughts and my experience in this regard, in the hope that it may be helpful in your search for the right music teacher.

First of all, it is important to assess your child's capability (of course, to the best of your knowledge): to observe his/her attention span, to determine his/her musical interest, and determine the teaching method (for example, a slow pace or more intense study) which would most likely be compatible with your child's personality. All these factors will influence how your child develops a deeper appreciation for music, and especially, skill in instrumental learning.

It is also very important to clear a misconception that any teacher (be they professional or just a person who just plays the instrument) can teach a beginning student, and a more qualified teacher is only needed later if the student becomes serious about the music study. In fact, the beginning study is extremely important. I like to compare the beginning music study to building the foundation of the building. In both cases if you don't lay proper foundation, there is a high price to pay in rebuilding or retraining.

What do parents need to know about the teacher and his or her teaching methods? In answering this question, I would like to use an example of my three and a half year old granddaughter. She began attending music lessons (Kindermusic, group lessons) when she was 18 months old. When she reached three and a half, she asked for individual piano lessons. I called the local Music Teachers' Association and got the phone numbers of a few local piano teachers. In my calls to the teachers I asked how much experience they had teaching this age group and what the content and structure of the lessons was. My selection of the teacher was based on a few points that I knew were important from my own teaching experience: that teacher paid close attention to the student's posture and hand position and that the teacher's personality was warm and nurturing to assure that the piano lessons would have a positive effect on my granddaughter.

Periodically I attended my granddaughter's lessons and was pleased to see that the lessons were having a positive effect on her attitude toward music. However I did not see sufficient focus on playing the instrument in these lessons: In the first year of her study with this teacher, my granddaughter did not learn a single song to perform. In contrast, students at The Gorin School of Music (regardless of their age) perform after three months of study. Even though these may be very simple pieces, the children play them from memory and with musicality.

This experience was not only disappointing for me, but it was also hazardous for the child's musical future: she was clearly bored and losing interest. My next step was to research again through the Music Teachers' Association, making calls once more to teacher candidates. This time my questions were focused on the

importance of posture, hand position, and how much playing is a part of the lesson. I also asked about how they would building technique and repertoire in a motivational and nurturing way.

As you can see, at this point, it was necessary for me to change the teacher. Although at THE GORIN SCHOOL OF MUSIC, we take all these points in consideration as a matter of course, in the private sector, parents need to take the initiative to make sure that their child's teacher has proper qualifications, appropriately structures the lessons, and is consistent and well-organized in their teaching. Evaluations and recitals are a way of providing accountability for the student and the teacher. Therefore, these evaluations and recitals, which can be done in a lighthearted and friendly way to limit performance anxiety, have to be a part of the learning process. If they are absent from a teacher's curriculum, then the child is missing a critical element of the learning process.

What I learned from this personal experience is that the careful selection of an appropriate teacher and method of study that is consonant with your child's personality will positively influence the child's development. That method should include training in the skills of performing and the joy of sharing music with others. It is a good practice to use referrals from friends, but it is still important to do your own research as well. I wish you all the best in your quest to find the best possible program for your child.

#### **About the Author**

Mrs. Rufina Gorin, Musical Director, The Gorin School of Music is Nationally Certified Music Teacher (NCMT). In addition, she holds a M.A. in Piano Performance and Pedagogy, Nezin Gogol Music Teachers' Training Institute, Ukraine and a B.A. in Piano Performance and Pedagogy, Music College, Kiev, Ukraine. Currently, Gorin is a faculty member at National Guild Performance Auditions, an adjudicator of CM and National Guild Performance Auditions, Sound of Music Festival, U.S. Open Piano Competition, and others. She has been an active member of the Music Teachers' Association of California (MTAC) since 1981, serving on the Board of Palo Alto Branch since 1988 and as branch president 1993-1995. In 1996, Gorin was elected to the State Board of MTAC and served for four years, completing her tenure there as a Vice President. Previously, she was piano faculty chair and piano teacher at Special Children's Music School, Kiev, Ukraine; Accompanist for Children's Ballet Group, Kiev Ballet Company, Ukraine; and a piano teacher at Junior Music Academy and Conejo Valley Conservatory, Thousand Oaks, CA.

#### **The Gorin School of Music**

As the only local school of music accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), Gorin School of Music located in Mountain View, California, also makes learning music and individual music lessons fun for the student. We offer lessons in **all musical instruments** including **piano, violin, viola, cello, guitar, flute, clarinet, saxophone**, and **voice**. Our goal is to foster a love for music while training the music student comprehensively on the skills required for their chosen musical instrument with each music lesson. A warm and nurturing environment for learning music coupled with a personalized approach and individual pace of music study allows all Gorin School of Music students to reach their full potential.

We recognize that every student is different, so depending on the music student's age, personality, musical ability and availability, The Gorin School of Music offers a choice of enrolling students in Music Program Track A or Music Program Track B. The rigorous and comprehensive curriculum coupled with qualified, supportive and experienced teachers make the music education learning experience meaningful and exciting for Gorin School of Music students of all ages.

To learn more about The Gorin School of music, visit [www.gsm-music.com](http://www.gsm-music.com), call (650)-961-4910, or email us at [mmgorin@aol.com](mailto:mmgorin@aol.com).