

We found a sturdy upright Yamaha with a nice sound and feel and brought it home with much fanfare. I dived into the Goldberg Variations and got stuck on the very first page—theme. But it was great to make music again, and I kept going. Of course, naturally, with a piano in the house, the next step was Piano lessons for all!

Happily for us, the Anderson Academy of Music was just down the street, and the people at Farr's directed us to Mrs. Joan Gause, who was "wonderful with small children."

We had no indication that Aly was musically inclined. In fact, she didn't sing until well past two, and when she did sing, it was just tuneless humming. We were quite excited when she finally started singing "Winnie – A – Pooh" at the age of 3. She did play AT the piano, and literally ON the keyboard, which was on the floor and would play as its demo tune a pop/rock version of the Nutcracker Suite—the kids' favorite dance tune.

More than anything, it seemed she was obsessed with ballet dancing as a 3 year old. Every day, without fail, she would don her pink leotard and tattered tutu, and dance joyfully and vigorously to Swan Lake in our living room. As soon as she got home from preschool, she slipped on that leotard. We got the idea that since she loved it so much, she should start dance lessons. That lasted... two weeks. Somehow, to my puzzlement, her enthusiasm for dancing in the living room did not translate to dancing in a group class.

So I really did not expect too much when I signed her up for piano lessons with Mrs. Gause at the Academy of Music. At the very least, it was something that all kids should try, I thought. After all, to quote the babysitter in the movie, *The Incredibles*, "Mozart makes kids smarter." And all her little friends were doing some sort of extra class or activity, so it was time to get busy! She was already five and a half years old!

Well, Aly surprised us. She caught on faster than I thought possible. Pretty soon, she was telling me what key songs were in—"Mommy, that is in F Major" and then playing all manner of tunes by ear. One day, she started playing the melody part of the first variation of the Goldberg Variations. I looked up to see that she had no music in front of her, and asked her how she did it. "I just heard you playing it a lot," was her answer.

Her teacher, Mrs. Gause, worked beautifully with her, and just let her keep going as fast her mind and fingers would allow, and kept it fun. Before long, she had finished all the Alfred books, and was ready to move on to bigger pieces.

Our family has been truly blessed with the gift of music that others have shared with us. Academy Teachers, like Mrs. Gause, and later her flute teacher, Ms. Herold, helped open up new worlds for Aly and get her started on this magical journey of discovery. The first teachers are often the ones that leave the most indelible mark, whether good

or not. They are the invaluable ones who can get you started and encourage you to keep going. So much depends on their kindness, patience, and understanding.

Now, Aly is largely responsible for keeping her own studies going. She still has excellent teachers who inspire and teach her well, but were it not for that first successful step, who knows if her talent would ever have been developed? It could have fizzled out, just like her short-lived dance fever.

Instead, she is playing the music of the great masters, including my personal favorite, Bach. She has far surpassed what I envisioned for her in the beginning, which was a basic proficiency at the piano. And she will probably one day tackle the Goldberg Variations, fully equipped to do so.

So, thank you to all our lovely teachers, but especially the first ones, who will always have a special place in our hearts. And parents, don't hesitate to give your children the gift of music—it will enrich their lives and yours.

Hikaru Soriano ©2014