

Certification Profile: Elaine Gallo

by Anne James, NCTM



“Certification is something I’d thought of for a long time but I never thought I’d have the time for it,” says Fairfax teacher Elaine Gallo. “Preparing a portfolio is a great option. I’ve always saved programs—for certification by portfolio saving things is important. I spent three months getting things together and submitted it. I think certification is definitely worth doing and I’m glad I did it. I equate it to the engineer who gets the professional engineering license. And doing a portfolio gives you something concrete to show for your work.”

Elaine Gallo already had forty piano students by the time she graduated with a Music Education degree from Indiana University of Pennsylvania. While pursuing her MA in piano performance at the same institution she continued teaching and held a graduate assistantship which included accompanying and teaching music at the University school on campus. She met her husband, a tubist, when he needed an accompanist, and they moved to Virginia when he joined the Army band.

Almost fifteen years ago Elaine founded Contemporary Keyboard Studios, located in Falls Church. Having previously taught Yamaha group piano at a music store, she was convinced of the value of group study, and in her studio she offers both group lessons and private instruction. A typical group has six members or fewer, and she matches the students carefully as to age and ability. One-week summer camps help her assess new students and match them. “If grouped correctly they’re unstoppable,” she says.

In the one-hour classes Elaine tries for a well-rounded music education with a wide range of activities. In addition to playing from the Hal Leonard or Alfred method books students have ear training, solfege, computerized theory such as Music Ace and Alfred Theory, and ensemble using accompaniments

like the orchestrated MIDI CD’s from Hal Leonard.

In addition to Elaine there are five other teachers at the studio, including Andy Horowitz, the subject of an earlier Certification Profile. Student interns from Joanne Haroutounian’s pedagogy course at George Mason University often contribute to the mix. They observe teaching, lead activities such as ear training, and prepare videotapes of their work.

Elaine believes group instruction works particularly well for the younger students, whose parents sit in and can guide the home practice. She finds group lessons are great for retention of students because they like it. It prepares them well for any other group musical experience such as band. As the students advance they may need private instruction to allow greater emphasis on interpretation.

At Christmas and in June there are five recitals for kids and one adult recital. The students also participate in a composition festival, the Federation spring festival and a festival for the studio itself where each participant gets a certificate, a medal and treats. The June recital features many awards, including trophies for graduating seniors who have earned them.

With the help of advanced high school students Elaine teaches two summer camps. Early in August the one-week camp for 20 three- to six-year-olds features a theme. This year the studio will be decorated for a Castles and Dragons camp and all the activities will relate to the theme. From 9:30 to 11:30 each day an array of activities such as keyboard, computer, instrument making and ear training are offered in twenty-minute blocks to keep the students’ interest. At the end of the week the students present a program for the parents. The Keyboard Camp for Kids two weeks later is for ages five to ten and has similar activities, all age-appropriate.

“My main thing is I want this to be fun for them. I want my students to learn a lot but I want them to like it so much that they’ll have it the rest of their life.” ■

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