

# Sharing Talent With Others

—Michelle Baylor, December 2009

## *Why should students be encouraged to play for other people?*

Part of the reward for learning a musical instrument is being able to share your talent with others! Performing certainly doesn't come naturally to everyone, but there are things about performing that are good for everyone to experience.

**First**, playing for other people provides encouragement for the student to work hard on a specific piece and polish it well. A recital date or grandma's visit may be just the thing needed to spur extra practice or give another purpose for polishing review songs.

**Second**, playing for other people can be a great opportunity for someone besides the student's practice partner to provide positive feedback. If mom is the one who does daily practice, then playing the song for dad can be a great way for dad to be involved and supportive of the student's hard work. Learning a musical instrument has greater value when multiple people are able to appreciate the child's efforts and encourage him/her to continue learning.

**Third**, playing for other people helps the student learn how to conquer fear, focus in the midst of distraction, gracefully accept compliments, and deal with mistakes as well as successes. These are all important skills in a variety of life situations and it is good for kids to have a chance to practice them in small and large ways.

**Fourth**, playing for other people is a way to share a gift that God has given. I believe that God has given each person a unique set of skills and talents, and those talents can and should be used to enrich the lives of people around us. Sharing musical skills is a chance to give your student the opportunity to serve others and bring them joy.

## *Why is my student reluctant to play for others?*

Obviously there are many reasons, some easy to address and others more complicated, but here are some of the most common:

- Fear of making a mistake
- Dislike of excess attention
- Fear of looking foolish
- Too much pressure from parents or others
- Fear of sticking out or being different
- Defiance of parent's wishes
- Boredom with the songs they know

Do you know which reason is the strongest one for your student? If not, have a conversation and find out!

## *How can I help my student enjoy performing?*

Some kids will always enjoy the spotlight while some will always avoid it, but there are a few things that can make playing for other people a little easier.

- Keep practicing review songs carefully so the child always has something to play that is comfortable and "safe."
- Provide some warning or preparation time before you expect the student to play for others.
- Give your student some input or control. Your child could choose which song to play, when to play it (e.g. before dinner or after dinner), or who they would like to play for (e.g. grandma's visit tomorrow or a friend next week).
- Provide lots of low-key performance opportunities—playing a song for dad each week, making a tape recording to send to an aunt, taking turns playing music with another friend taking lessons, even setting up a stuffed animal audience!
- Perform with them—encourage other people to share their talents too: singing, playing the piano, or even telling a joke.
- Unless you feel your child is being deliberately disobedient or defiant, don't force them to play against their will.

## *How can I prepare my child for a more formal recital?*

- Practice the performance piece several times each day in the week or two leading up to the recital.
- Don't practice too long and hard the day of the recital, or even the day right before. Use those days to calm down!
- Make sure your child gets enough sleep the night before, and try to plan your schedule so that the hours before the recital are not filled with too many other activities, errands, or rushing around trying to avoid being late!
- Talk children through the experience—what they will wear, where the recital will be, who else they might see there, how they will act when they play, and how they will act when others play.
- If I forget, remind me to talk with your child about the recital experience as well!
- Build confidence with the recital game. Have your child focus on playing the recital piece the best they can while you try as many ways as you can to distract them. Drop books, start conversations, and ring the doorbell!