

NVMTA News

June 25, 2014

Executive Board Meeting June 4, 2014 Highlights

Sonata Festival:

- Students selected for the second round will receive ribbons

Professional Development Awards:

- Deadline for application moved to November 1, 2014
- Committee will have flexibility in determining distribution of budgeted funds for the awards

Event Fee Increases:

- Achievement Awards to \$32 (from \$27)
- Piano Concerto Festival to \$26 (from \$22)

Judged Recitals:

- Video recording permitted at Judged Recitals

Piano Achievement Awards Competition:

- Piano Achievement Awards Competition will consist of five levels, matching the levels of the Robert Spencer Concerto Competition for Piano (grades 2-4, grades 5-6, grades 7-8, grades 9-10, grades 11-12)

Cash-Awards

Competitions Policy:

- Any student who arrives after his or her scheduled time may play for comments only, and only if the chair is able to fit them in without further disrupting the schedule

Adult Workshops:

- Event developed by Andrew Horowitz, details on nvmta.org by the end of the summer

Highlights from the Annual Meeting May 28, 2014

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NVMTA Laureates named:
Nancy Breth and Julie Slingerland

Installation of Officers 2014-2015

Most Valuable Member May 2014: **Juliana Kuo**



Eve Ginnett, Most Valuable Member of the Year 2013-2014

Congratulations to Nancy Breth, NVMTA Laureate!

Below is a peek into Nancy's impressive life, in her own words.

What is your musical background?

I was born in Virginia Beach, but by the time I was four my family had moved west to Spokane, Washington. My grandmother's 1898 Chickering was shipped to our house. When I started picking out tunes on the piano my mother, who could read music but was more comfortable playing by ear, said, "No child of mine is going to be an ear-player!" For her, it was like a second-class citizenship, not to be encouraged but to be nipped in the bud. The problem was how to pay for lessons.

Mother was an inveterate reader of classified ads, and one day she found one that said "Will teach any number of family members in exchange for two hours of practice time on your piano, per day." She was thrilled, not only at the prospect of free lessons, but also at the thought of hearing her piano played every day. So Mr. Jacques, who was blind and lived alone in a piano-less apartment, began visiting us daily, teaching four members of my family. The other three fell away one by one, but I continued.

It's interesting about first teachers: 30 years later, after a concert I played in New York, someone came up to me and said, "I can tell you had a great first teacher!" I said, "You can?!" That seemed a little crazy to me, but now I think you really can tell in many cases. So I'm grateful to Mr. Jacques.

I had another teacher, Mrs. Luke, in elementary school. She was very nice: candy after every lesson! Mrs. Luke taught me a lot of Bartok and other contemporary composers, so she was ahead of her time. In my 8th grade year, though, I started throwing my music around and having tantrums about practicing. My mother said, "You can quit tomorrow if you want to, but I'm not paying for those lessons if you're not going to practice!" I did want to quit; but I was a good girl and also didn't have the nerve to quit, so I kept at it, grudgingly.

Years later my mother told me that she had known for some time that I needed a different teacher; but everyone loved Mrs. Luke and didn't want to hurt her feelings. But eventually she took me to meet Margaret Sanders Ott, who was already a celebrated teacher in Spokane. Mrs. Ott and one other teacher had the highest rates in town: \$10 an hour. She accepted me as a student, but my mother said, "I could never pay that much for lessons," which must have been very hard for her to say. So Mrs. Ott taught me for \$5 an hour. I was in high school by then, and the whole

world opened up through her. Once I was an adult, I realized Mrs. Ott was not that much older than me—about 20 years—so she became and remained a close friend until the end of her life a few years ago.

As a high school student, I attended what was then called the Spokane Music Festival -- a great event that still occurs every spring. It goes on for an entire week; children even get out of school to attend. Interestingly, it is run by business people not teachers: my father, for example, who was an architect and completely tone-deaf, once led the organization. The Festival brought in adjudicators from all over the country. Bela B Nagy, from Indiana University, came several years in a row. You played not just once, but in as many classes as you entered (Bach, Sonata, Concerto, etc.). There were written adjudication sheets, but at the end of each hour, there was also a mini master class, so you got to know the teacher a little bit. I fell in love with Dr. Nagy; I said, "I have to go to Indiana!" -- and I did.

After my freshman year, though, Nagy took a sabbatical, which turned into a job offer elsewhere; so he didn't come back to IU. My mother was furious! I told her it was probably not personal. [laughs] Various things ensued; I did study with one very famous person (no longer at IU) who was a tyrant: it was a horrendous experience. I dropped out of school for a while, and lived in Washington with an elderly aunt who needed company. I worked as a secretary and went back to school after 6 months. I finished at Indiana with Gyorgy Sebok, which was an incredible gift.

After graduation I won an assistantship to do my Master's at IU, and went to DC to work for the summer. One day the Dean's assistant called and said they were cutting all piano assistantships in half in order to finance more singers. I couldn't provide the other half, so I didn't go. I'm sure I would be a much better pianist if I had had several more years with Mr. Sebok. However, as a result of staying in Washington, I met my husband, so I can't say I regret that decision.

Steven and I moved to Madison, Wisconsin, where I enrolled in the masters program. At that time, the University of Wisconsin/Madison music school faculty boasted a number of retired principal players from major orchestras, people who had tired of life in the big city and wanted to live in a small town with a great university. They always needed accompanists. And I also took chamber music classes from the revered Viennese violinist Rudolf Kolisch. So I fell in love with chamber music, and this changed my life. At Indiana, I had worked in János Starker's studio, and taken the chamber class taught by Joseph Gingold, János Starker, and my teacher, Mr. Sebok, and that had been an amazing experience. But I still thought of myself as a soloist until my years at Madison, when I realized that chamber music was what I wanted to do forever.

How did you begin teaching?

I started teaching when I was 16, under Mrs. Ott's direction. At IU I taught music majors preparing for piano proficiency exams and at Wisconsin I taught both private and class piano.

In 1969, we moved to the Philippines. My husband had a job with an international, tax-exempt organization, and Philippine law prevented spouses of such employees from working for pay. I taught a couple of children in our community for free. They probably got what they paid for!

So for 5 years in the Philippines I couldn't truly work; then when we moved to Mexico all I did was perform; and the next 5 years in New York I still almost exclusively performed. I thought of myself as a pianist who taught on the side until much later. But now it's the other way around.

Can you describe your role in the NVMTA?

I joined NVMTA in 1982, so I've worked on almost all of our events and committees. I decided about five years ago to retire from volunteer work, but then Elizabeth came along. Her vision and her energy changed my mind, so I'm still here but with a very small job: At-Large Board Member.

You've published some materials on practicing, and you are a coveted speaker. Can you talk a little about that?

I started writing about practicing because I was sick of hearing myself say the same things over and over in lessons. I decided there must be a less "talky" and maybe more interesting way to get students to practice well. I started by asking my students for tips on practicing. I put their ideas, my ideas, and ideas from colleagues into written form.

In those days when you'd print out a document, the pages were all connected, like a paper snake; eventually I ended up with about 40 feet of ideas. I couldn't imagine that anyone would want to read that much about practicing! So I spent a few more years making it as concise as possible; this became the *Guide to Effective Practicing*. The funny thing is that a few years after Hal Leonard published the Guide, they asked me to expand it into a book! At first that seemed crazy to me, but in the end there did seem to be more to say, not to speak of the advantage of having more space for musical examples; the result was the book *Practicing the Piano*.

Speaking engagements came from the publications and from my efforts to interact with fellow teachers. My own pedagogy "degree" came from my colleagues in NVMTA, at the Levine School, and around the country. I owe them a lot. Now that I've been teaching for over 50 years, I have a few good tricks up my sleeve and it's fun to pass them on. Meanwhile, I'm still trying to learn to be a better teacher myself.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

I like to play tennis, ride my bicycle, read, take ballet class, and spend time with friends.

What would people be surprised to know about you?

Maybe that I lived in the Philippines and Mexico, spoke Tagalog and Spanish, and once expected to spend my life overseas? I was 26 years old when we moved to a small town in the Philippines. We had one baby, soon after a second, and two live-in maids. It was a totally different existence.

Do you have a highlight or favorite professional moment?

Playing the *Brahms-Handel Variations* on a Bösendorfer in my Master's recital; concerts with my chamber group, Camerata de Mexico. Mexican audiences fell in love with chamber music, and the Camerata was pretty much the only group doing it. The players were extraordinary. Those three years, though frantic and demanding, would certainly count as a highlight.

Do you have a philosophy of life you'd like to share?

Care for one another.

Congratulations to **Julie Slingerland**, NVMTA Laureate!



Julie joined the NVMTA in the late 1970's. She has chaired multiple events and served as Treasurer for many years. She served as President of NVMTA from 2007-2009.

Marilynne Jost, NVMTA Most Valuable Member April 2014

By Ann Lee

Marilynne Jost and I chatted over a long breakfast at Amphora Restaurant in Vienna. It's difficult to concisely summarize a life so full and rich, but some highlights are below. I'm still smiling at her *joie de vivre*.

What is your musical background?

I came home from Sunday School at 4 years old -- we always went to my grandmother's for Sunday dinner, and she had a piano in the living room. The adults were at the table. I left the table and sat down at the piano without asking (which was a big no-no at that point in history) and started playing what I'd heard in Sunday School. When my parents saw that I was playing all by myself, they decided they should get a piano at our house and get me started in lessons.

It was during the Second World War; everything that was useful, all the metal and everything, was going to make guns and tanks; so we couldn't find a piano. (They didn't make many). I had to wait about 2 years, but finally, my parents found someone who was selling theirs. As soon as we got the piano in the house, I started lessons. I took to it like a duck to water -- it just felt so good that I wanted to play all the time! I had a teacher who was apparently very excited to have a student who really wanted to learn and caught on quickly, because within four or five months, I was out playing in the community for women's clubs and things. By the time I was nine years old, I was playing radio recitals on (KFUO-FM) in St. Louis. It was set up with the Federation; they had a 15-minute slot, and they would feature different students. So about every month, I'd be on one of the days, do my 15 minutes, then leave and go back to school. That's how my performing career started. I stayed with my first teacher until I was ten, until the point where she said that I needed a teacher who could take more advanced students. (I think I played my first Beethoven Sonata when I was about 8 years old.)

I moved to another teacher, and after about six months, I wanted to quit. I told my mother, but she decided that at that stage, I wasn't quitting. So we changed teachers again, and I got with someone who was a very good technician. I stayed with her until I finished high school. During high school, I was pianist for the orchestra class first,* then moved to the choral department. When the teacher realized I how good I was at sight-reading, she had me read the parts in rehearsal and eventually made me her official accompanist for all performances including the operettas we gave each spring. In the choral room, there was a sign on the wall that there was going to be a music contest, and the winner would receive a concert grand piano. My mother didn't want me to participate at first, but I convinced her and I went: 825 kids showed up, vocalists and all kinds of instrumentalists. During this time (I was about 14) there was a lot going on with Civil Rights. So you were separated from the judges; you didn't see the judges, and the judges didn't see you; they didn't want any discrimination so they based selection entirely on what they heard. They took groups of 25, then took the top 5 of those, and pitted them against each other.

We went through the whole year, and by the finals, there were four pianists and an accordionist; I was the youngest one. In the end, I won the piano! That really changed my approach to my studies. At that time, a grand piano cost about a couple years' salary, so it was all over the newspaper, radio, everyone knew about it. I continued to play recitals for all kinds of functions – locally and state-wide, and lots of competitions – I love competitions. When I was 15, I got a letter in the mail that the St. Louis Philharmonic was having auditions for soloists in two days. Well, I didn't have a concerto ready, but I was playing a solo recital a couple weeks later, and they allowed me to use that. I won the audition, and I debuted with the St. Louis Philharmonic shortly after I turned 16. That was right when I was getting ready to graduate high school. I got a full-tuition scholarship to Washington University in St. Louis; I studied with the Artist in Residence there, William Schatzkamer. He had studied with Alexander Siloti, who had studied with Liszt, who had studied with Czerny, who had studied with Beethoven. The training from all those backgrounds was just wonderful. My mother didn't like Mr. Schatzkamer because he made me play contemporary music! I adored him, and grew so much with him; he died just two years ago.

However, my Bachelor's work was in music education, because I had been preached to so much: "You'll never make it as a performer! You'll never make enough money to live off of! You need a degree in something where you can get a job!" I did teach; I started teaching music at Fairview High School when I was 19. (I graduated from high school early, and worked hard in college). My advisor told me, "You can't do that! You're the same age as they are!" and I said, "Watch me!" ...which is kind of where I am. When people tell me, "You can't do something!" and I think I can, I say, "Watch me!" But when I went back for graduate school, I did piano literature and performance. That, to me, was much more fun.

How did you begin teaching piano lessons?

I started teaching piano in the evenings when I was teaching high school. I continued during graduate school. After marrying, I moved to Virginia. Shortly after, I was in an automobile accident and smashed my left hand. I had been intending to audition for the Phillips Collection series, but with the two successive pregnancies and then the accident, it seemed the word was that I wasn't supposed to do Phillips Gallery recitals. Soon after that, my husband left, and here I was with two little girls; I had been teaching a few students. I had to bring in more money as they grew, and so I expanded my teaching. It was nice, because I could do it at home. We did babysitters in the afternoon, and it worked out really well. I married a second time, and my husband died after two years. Eventually, I married again, and we were married 20 years. We lived in Oakton, and it was the boonies then! We had another daughter together. She is grown and lives locally now, and I watch her two boys everyday for her. Through the court system I became a mom again, after that husband died: I've been active in the National Guild of Piano Teachers for 100 years. (I'm not that old, but it seems I've done it that long!) I grew up in the Guild and got started here, was Chair when I lived in Arlington, then started the Oakton and Vienna center. I have been an examiner for them (this is my 45th year). I was in Maryland judging one year, and learned of a young lady named Ting Ting, whose parents intended to return to China without her. My late husband Bill and I had housed 12 exchange students from different countries, and because of this background, a teacher asked if I

would consider taking Ting Ting. I said I'd have to meet her; I did, and she was marvelous. Her parents signed over their parental rights and left; I was her guardian from that point on.

Teaching has been my saving grace. When God blessed me with musical ability, he knew I'd have a lot of boulders in the road to get over. I'm glad that I have this skill; it has helped me in many, many ways. I currently teach 35 kids and 6 adults weekly.

Can you describe your role in NVMTA?

I've been in the group since the early 1960s. At that time, you had to audition and have three favorable references in addition to working on some event. My role in NVMTA? I guess it depends who you ask. Some might say, "She's a hard worker, she contributes a lot," and others, "She's trouble!" I'm vocal. I've been dubbed, "Marilynne the Mouth." [laughs]. I have done I think every job here – well that's not exactly true. I haven't been treasurer or recording secretary. I've been corresponding secretary, president, chair of many events; I started the Bach Baroque Festival. We had done a Bach Festival when I was president in the District, and it was one of the biggest functions we had; so when I became president of NVMTA, I suggested it. We had a male teacher dress up like Bach and talk to the kids, and another dance teacher teach them the gavotte and minuet dances – it was fun! A festival should be fun!

What do you like to do in your spare time?

Sleep! [laughs] I like to do a lot of different things. I was a tap dancer until I was 15. When Ting Ting went away to William and Mary, I saw a newspaper that we were using to wrap her things – it said "Free Tap Dancing Lessons". I said, "Unroll that paper!" I dragged out my tap dancing shoes and took lessons, and I continued until I broke my hip -- I actually did a little after that. Sheila Epstein got in too, and we went together for awhile. I like to garden; I had a vegetable garden at my former residence every year. I like to cook; when I got married, all I knew how to make was tuna casserole and fried chicken, but we couldn't eat that for our entire lives. I started reading cookbooks, and I got hooked! Quite accidentally, related to my work in an orthodontist office, I ended up in catering at one point.

What would people be surprised to know about you?

When I was a kid, tap-dancing, I used to tap dance on the steamer on the Mississippi River every summer. It went out of St. Louis every morning, and return in the evening. It always had a 2 o'clock show.

Do you have a highlight or favorite professional moment?

I have a lot of things I think that were just wonderful... I think one thing is that when I broke my hand, I was told I'd probably be able to do things like tie shoes, but I'd never play piano. Again, I said, "Watch me!" I got my cast off, soaked my hand, did my exercises, and started with the Clementi Op. 36 No. 1 Sonatina – only one note in the left hand at first, and only 10 minutes. But I was on No. 6 by the end of the week, so I was making progress. I went to Willis Bennett for coaching. He encouraged me that I could develop skill again. I studied with him until August of 2010 (he died 2 months later). I was preparing an

all-Chopin recital that fall. I also played regularly on the Barker Hall Recital Series in D.C. It was all such a morale booster! But how can I pick one moment? Getting up in the morning is a highlight!

I was chosen to be part of a delegation of the National Guild of Piano Teachers to go to Poland, Romania and the Soviet Union to investigate the teaching methods in their conservatories and exchange ideas about teaching materials. I had met Kabalevsky over coffee when he was at the Kennedy Center and I was president of the DC Federation. I saw him again when I went there, and we talked about kids, how we taught, how things were different and the same. He talked about his composition process, and it's fun to be able to talk to my students about the way he changed things. It was fascinating, and I was glad to go!

What pieces do you like to play or listen to?

Oh my goodness, they're all favorites! Everything has its own charm. I particularly like Mozart, but I'm squawky about it; I think Mozart is pristine, and often over-pedaled ("Play the rests!") I love Mendelssohn; I love Rachmaninoff; I love Bach.

Do you have a philosophy of life you'd like to share?

When you live a long time, you experience a lot of things. I've been very fortunate in what I've experienced, not just in music, but in every way. Life is a real blessing. A friend and I were saying how many people don't live to be as old as we are. Every day is a blessing – try to live every day as if it could be your last. I could be here for another ten years annoying everyone! [laughs] But if this is my last one, I want to make the best of it. Try not to make waves. I think it's important to appreciate what we have in this country too. Be thankful to be among the breathing people! When people ask me how I am, I say, "I'm vertical!" The other option is horizontal, and I'm not there yet...[laughs] Life, like music, is a gift, so appreciate it! Don't let yourself get aggravated, enjoy it!



Marilynne Jost has four daughters, five grandsons and one granddaughter, with another grandchild due in October. Her oldest daughter, Suzanne Smith, is an active member of NVMTA, serving as Recording Secretary and Chair of Bach-Baroque Festival and Competition.