

An Interview with
Pianist/Composer Edward Weiss

Edward Weiss Talks About his Piano Course

By Kimberly Luker



Published by
Quiescence Music

Edward Weiss Talks about His Piano Course

The following is an interview done by one of my students. She was curious about what I do and asked some interesting questions.

When did you start playing piano?

I started playing piano about 20 years ago at the ripe old age of 29. My wife had an old keyboard and I started playing around with it. I was hooked from there.

Are you self-taught, or did you have lessons - classical or otherwise?



Both actually. I learned how to read music as a young child from taking saxophone lessons of all things. I was also in the school band so I learned how to read the treble clef. Other than that, I'm pretty much self-taught. And that through a long hard search to find materials to help me freely create my own music.

I did have a few piano lessons, but they were, for the most part, unhelpful. Why? Because I can learn technique on my own. What I needed was a mentor - someone to guide me and help me find my own voice on the piano. Unfortunately, that was impossible to find. I had to invent it.

What led you to the new age style?

Good question. I attended San Diego State University for a semester. I went into the student lounge one day and the music from someone named George Winston was playing. I immediately took notice because of how different this music was. Free flowing and somewhat poignant, here was a music that did not have any catchy hooks or lyrics, yet left me spellbound ... almost as if I were in a trance.



I knew after that I wanted to play in that style. But how? That's where it began for me.

Tell us what happens when you sit down at the piano, when you're on your own. In the classical lesson world, it's "practice time." What happens for you?

Most times I have nothing planned. That is, I sit down and just play. Usually this means I reach for a chord that calls ... could be major or minor. The point is, I allow my intuition to guide me. And it took a long time for this to become a part of me. What I always tell my students is that trusting yourself and your intuition is the most important thing you can have when improvising and creating at the piano. If you don't have this, you'll always be second-guessing yourself and it will be difficult

to move forward.



I don't really 'practice' per se, but if I was going to perform a concert, you better believe I'd make sure all technical aspects were taken care of.

I look at playing piano almost like meditation. That is, I listen and allow for the music to come up. One of the most important lessons I've learned was to let go of the need to control the outcome. That one idea in itself was liberating. Enough for me to do what I've always wanted to do and that is just sit down and play without judgment.

What inspires you as a performer and a composer?

That's easy. Nature inspires me. Or more accurately, nature's beauty. There's so much beauty in the world and it's been inspiring artists for centuries. A picture of a quiet lake or a forest transports me to a non-verbal world where 'feeling' is. I then move to the piano and transfer that feeling and create music. Nothing complicated. Especially for the New Age style. A few chords, some simple melody is all that's required.

I know you're a long-time private teacher. What inspired you to create lessons online?

Well, I can only reach so many people here in San Diego. And while it's nice to help students on an individual basis, the Internet makes it easy to take lessons and put them online.



I've been teaching online for about 10 years now - even before video if you can believe that. Video and sites like YouTube revolutionized education for everyone, myself included. Now a teacher can give instruction and students can actually see the teacher teach. An amazing advance and one I've tried to take advantage of. Along with video, students also get step-by-step instruction written out for them.

I approach teaching piano like art teachers teach. You have a title for the lesson, something like "Autumn Sky" for example. I then show you the 'materials' you use to create your own unique piano piece. I've always admired how clear and concise art technique books are and how they break projects down so students can see how it's done step-by-step. That's what I've tried to do with my online lessons.



Tell me a little more about your lessons. Can a complete beginner use them?

Yes. I designed the course so a complete beginner can learn how to improvise right away. Improvisation is at the heart of the lessons because I find this to be the most important skill an aspiring New Age pianist can have. Why? Because students must be able to move forward with the music without stopping and starting. And it comes back to trusting intuition again doesn't it?

Because without that, you'll be constantly second guessing yourself.



Many of the lessons approach and tackle this problem by giving students a set of limits upon which they can improvise. For instance, I might give a lesson where I say 'use these 2 chords and play for 3 minutes.' With this set of limits, students can relax and freely express themselves without worrying if they're getting it right. Once students can freely improvise, composing comes in. And I teach that as well.

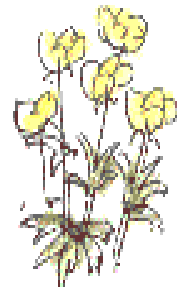
What words of encouragement can you give to someone who thinks it's too late to learn to play piano?

If I can do it, you can too! I started playing piano in my late 20's. The thing that kept me going was love of the music. If you have this, you will achieve your goal. Which is why I always tell students they should focus on what they like and love.

I actually have students in their 70's and they love the course. They aren't concerned with 'playing it right' or getting into Julliard. They want to make music and feel the connection between the music and themselves. This is precious! And the one thing most students really want, but either don't think they're capable of doing or can't find someone to teach them how.

Can you recommend some other pianists and recordings for those that are unfamiliar with the new age style?

Yes. Well, there's the father of New Age piano. And it's not George Winston. It's someone named Steven Halpern. I would say Halpern actually created the 'new age' piano style way back in the early 1970's. He's interested in the healing aspects of music and anything by this guy would give someone an idea of how healing a music this can be.



And then there's George Winston. The man who put New Age piano on the map. His CD 'December' is a multi-platinum album that anyone interested in the New Age style should have.

Other important names for New Age piano are; **David Lanz, Liz Story, Michael Jones, Rick Erlien, Phillip Aaberg, and my favorite John Herberman.**

Herberman records for the Solitudes label and there's something about his piano playing that just gets me. The music is combined with nature sounds and it's just an amazing listening experience. For me anyway.

*by Kimberly Luker
December 22, 2011*