



OVERCOMING ADVERSITIES

2020 has been an unprecedented year and it looks like 2021 will have its challenges as well. This year, our theme is "Overcoming Adversities." Learning to play an instrument is hard. It requires a commitment to get your bum to the bench, even when you don't feel like it. It means not giving up, especially when the music gets difficult. We all face personal struggles from time to time and the COVID-19 pandemic has thrown so many new issues our way. We are all trying to adapt and make the best of a bad situation.

This year, musicians around the world are celebrating the life and music of Ludwig van Beethoven who was born 250 years ago on December 16, 1770. Beethoven was no stranger to adversity. He grew up in the home of a domineering alcoholic father. As a child he was dragged from his bed and forced to practice at all hours of the night. When he was sixteen, he moved to Vienna in order to study with Mozart, but his mother took ill a few weeks later and he had to return home to care for his younger brothers after she died. Beethoven lived during a time when success depended on connections with the wealthy upper class so he made up the prefix "van" to hide his humble roots. In his early 30s, he had to abandon his hope of becoming a concert pianist due to hearing loss. He was totally deaf his mid-40s. He suffered from stomach aches and profound loneliness as he lived much of his life in isolation, cut off from the world of sound and with very few close friends. But despite all this, Beethoven became one of the greatest composers who ever lived.

In order to assist people in overcoming adversities and to encourage regular practice habits at home, I am issuing a practice challenge which will carry through the entire 2020-21 term. Each day of practice will potentially earn \$1.00; one week of practice every single day earns a \$5.00 bonus. At the end of every month, I will make a donation on behalf of the Joan Blench Piano Studio to the charity chosen by the student who has achieved the most practice days. If there is a two-way tie, I will honour both choices; if there are three or more students with the same total, I will make a random draw. Each new month is a new start and a new opportunity to help others.

- The number of minutes spent at the piano each day is not counted. If a student can achieve his or her practice goals for the day in 15 minutes of focused practice, that's far better than a half hour or more of mindless repetition. Students are required to check off their practice days on the assignment sheet which must be initialed by a parent.
- If a student does not have an instrument to practice on that day, for example, if you are out of town visiting relatives for the weekend, then he may "attend" a concert by listening to a good quality recording or watching a video of a piano performance on You Tube. Alternatively, he can do several pages in the UMT theory workbook or research something about the piano or a composer and share that information with me at the lesson.
- Students are asked to write down the name of their goal charity to serve as extrinsic motivation. It can stay the same all year or change from month to month. Maybe they want to help artists whose livelihood is on hold due to COVID issues; perhaps they've been inspired by the Terry Fox Run; or they may have an interest in rescuing baby sea turtles. As long as it is a legitimate organization, the hours spent practicing can potentially translate into a cash donation. And our collective piano skills will improve at the same time! It's a win-win all around.

*We don't grow when things are easy.
We grow when we face challenges.*