

FROM THE TRENCHES | BY MYRNA SISLEN

# My Recital Secrets

I am standing at the front door of my store Middle C Music holding a tin of homemade cookies. It's June 14, and we have just completed the last of our end-of-the-year recitals. They've been running every Friday, Saturday and Sunday since the end of April. That's 18 recitals involving almost 600 students and 20 teachers. Why am I standing at the door with cookies? That's my exit strategy. Each performer gets a cookie as they leave the store, emphasis on leave.



**There are a few things you can do to make your music recitals extra special**

If you have lessons in your store (and if you don't, start immediately), recitals are essential. The size of your store doesn't matter: Middle C Music is only 2,750 square feet, and most of that is studio space. We clear everything out of the middle of the store, set up chairs and we're ready. Every student should have the opportunity to perform at least twice a year.

Holding successful recitals that please students, parents, grandparents and friends doesn't have to be hard. Here are a few tips and tricks I use at Middle C Music:

**1. FOR OUR RECITALS, THE ROUTINE IS THE SAME.**

First, the teachers must turn in their program by the prior day so that we have time to format and print it. We have a template with the Middle C logo that we decorate appropriately. Parents love programs. On recital day, we start to set up about 30 minutes before the performance begins. Recitals begin immediately after the store closes. There are never enough chairs for everyone, so the house rule is that adults get the chairs and kids get to sit on our spectacular floor. I make an announcement to that effect, and it always gets a laugh.

**2. GO OVER PERFORMANCE ETIQUETTE.**

Remind all performers to announce their names and what they are playing, and most important to

be sure they bow and acknowledge the audience when they are finished. Then I turn everything over to the teachers. Normally each student plays one or two pieces, often with the teacher

accompanying, so that even the youngest students can play. If a student has difficulty, the teacher is there to help. Sometimes a young student will cry and not want to perform at all. (This rarely happens with adults.) I never force children to perform. There's always next time.

**3. AS FOR ADULTS, REMEMBER THEY'LL BE NERVOUS.**

It really helps to explain before they play that they are in a very safe and relaxed environment. I give out little dark chocolate bottles filled with liquor for each player. It makes them laugh and relaxes them.

**4. RECORD THE RECITAL.**

At Middle C, every recital is recorded and every family gets a free DVD of the performance. (Be sure to include your store logo on your DVDs.) The real reason for the recitals is to involve entire families and friends, and, most importantly, to give back to the parents. I can't tell you how important it is to give away something for free. Giving the DVDs does cost money, but you can't imagine the amount of good you will get in return.

The final tip? As important as the recitals are, when they're over, I am ready for everyone to leave. The cookies work every time. **MI**

Myrna Sislen owns and operates Middle C Music in Washington, D.C.