

THE LESSON ROOM | BY PETE GAMBER

Need Teachers? Look In-House

I've lost teachers for a number of reasons. This year alone, teachers started and finished school, met someone on the Internet, got divorced, joined a touring rock group, became ministers, became ill, or died—all of which ceased their employment at Alta Loma Music, and without much advanced warning. On top of that, I had no new teacher apps on file.

In a moment of desperation, I took my own advice. In "Help! I Need More Music Teachers" (May 2004), I suggested training advanced students. So, I started a Teacher Training Program. It could be the saving grace for anyone having "that discussion" with a multitude of instructors.

THE ADVANTAGES

Advanced students will look at this opportunity as an honor; they can become part of something they've looked up to for years. We trust people this age to drive cars and fight in the military, why not train them how to teach music?

More importantly, they are familiar with your lesson program. You can bet on quicker indoctrination and a higher retention rate than with "off-the-street" teachers.

HOW TO GET STARTED

Focus a training program on how to teach beginning students. With beginners, new teachers will be in a safer environment while they develop skills. Besides, more beginners sign up for lessons than any other group.

Train willing participants in the summer—plan on at least two months for a series of classes—and then start them with a limited teaching regimen in the fall. The new teachers will gain experience, and you will have time to evaluate them before January and the holiday crunch.

WHAT TO TEACH

It's best not to train new instructors in all the neurological-historical-neoclassical-metaphysical approaches to teaching an instrument. Pick the two most-used methods at your store and discuss how they can effectively use those method books. Ask your experienced teachers about any supplemental material like sheets or scale and chord handbooks that they use, and pass that on as well.

Write it all down in an easy-to-follow format, and package it with a few of those top methods. You've just created a teachers manual. It's nice to leave the new teachers some freedom to decide how and what they want to teach,

but this gives them a grounding in what's common, especially at your store.

Other helpful program topics for a teacher-in-training could include: record keeping; organizing a 30-minute lesson; interfacing with parents; developing professional skills, including general people skills and attire; making lessons fun yet constructive; motivating bored students; and knowing when a student should be moved up.

TEACH THE TEACHERS

Even after they've been hired as teachers and prepared for the job, make sure they remain students in your program. It's imperative that they continue to grow as musicians. They will also have someone to help them when "stump the chump" happens during one of their lessons.

As their playing and teaching skills improve, the number and skill-level of students these new teachers will be able to handle will also improve. They will be effective, student-drawing teachers, and your roster of instructors will look much healthier. **MI**



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