

Keyboard Reflections

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Summer: A great time to learn and refresh.



*M*y American Music Teacher (AMT) magazine arrived as its June-July, 2026 edition. This summer issue immediately grabbed my attention with the opening page editorial by Brian Shepard, Chief Executive Officer of Music Teachers National Association, when he called for “NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTIONS.”

As members of MTNA, we teachers know that June, July, and August are the months we have to prepare for the “New Year” —after Labor Day when students and families return from vacation.

This summer I’m motivated by my school age kids who continue to work hard by continuing their lessons through June, July, and August. And my “lifelong adult learners” have set summer goals to review, refresh old pieces, and study new ones.

*B*y attending past MTNA national conventions in Chicago, Las Vegas, Anaheim, and San Antonio, I’ve been privileged to attend concerts, master classes, and pedagogy sessions from some of the world’s most respected pianists and master teachers:

(Partial list) Byron Janis, Leon Fleisher, Menahem Pressler, Sara Davis Buechner, Eric Himy, Scott Mc Bride Smith, Christopher Norton, Valentina Lisitsa, Marc-André Hamlin, Andreas Klein, Peter Mack, Jon Nakamatsu, Emanuel Ax, Shelton Berg, Hans Boepple, Inna Faliks, Seymour Bernstein, Jeremy Denk, Jon Kimura Parker, Jerome Rose, Abbey Simon, Seymour Bernstein, and several others.

Master Classes Cover Both Classical and Jazz Repertoire

**We teachers need teachers, too.
Move ahead or fall backwards.
We’re in the same boat.**

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“I’ve been a proud member of MTNA for over 15 years. The best organization ever!”

Jim



Music Teachers National Association (MTNA)
Celebrates its 150th Anniversary in 2026



While the storm clouds gather far across the sea, let us swear allegiance to a land that's free. Let us all be grateful for a land so fair, as we raise our voices in a solemn prayer:

(Verse) God bless America, land that I love; stand beside her and guide her through the night with a light from above. From the mountains, to the prairies, to the oceans white with foam, God bless America, my home sweet home."

THE WHOLE STORY: IRVING BERLIN (1888-1989) WAS BORN IN RUSSIA AS ISRAEL BALINE.

Irving Berlin, the famous American songwriter who wrote "GOD BLESS AMERICA," was born in Russia in 1888 and immigrated to the United States as a child. According to *Steinway & Sons* and *the Kennedy Center*, Irving Berlin was born Israel Baline in the village of Tyumen, Russia. His family fled to escape the region's persecution of the Jewish community and settled in New York City in the mid-1890s.



Berlin's beloved verse to *God Bless America* (shown above) is sung at ball games, patriotic events, and can probably be sung by heart by many flag-waving Americans. However, the full lyrics (in larger type above) are not as well known.



Metronomes



While a student at South Salem High School, I recall vividly how our principal would get on the public address system, first period, and give about a 10 minute talk. He called this “**Roses & Dandelions.**” Roses represented positive events he would cite in our school life. Dandelions, however, stood for negative happenings and often unseemly student conduct.

So, I thought, what better metaphors to cite concerning the use of metronomes?

Let’s begin with the positive: Metronomes can be useful when trying to develop an understanding of rhythm or to determine the appropriate tempo. Both for classical and jazz repertoire, some pieces demand that you “stay in the groove” and not wander all over the place.

On the negative side: Over dependence of metronomes can make your playing sound rigid, without feeling, stilted. The important point here is to listen to your sound production. Recording your pieces can help you hear what others might hear, Critique your work.



Inventor Johann Nepomuk Mälzel patented and marketed the mechanical metronome around 1815, although the underlying mechanism was invented by Dietrich Winkel.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) was one of the first major composers to use the newly invented mechanical metronome, enthusiastically adding metronome markings to his earlier and newer compositions.

Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849) also used a metronome, and kept one close to his piano. According to his student and assistant, Carl Mikuli, he valued a strict, steady underlying pulse even while using expressive timing.



Traditional



Battery

The two most popular metronomes are shown left. The traditional model has a key that you wind up like a clock. The pendulum pops out and swings left to right, making a loud click (“tick-tock”) according to the speed you chose to set tempo. Triangular slider has markings. The modern battery model is regulated by the middle black dial — twisted to the right for faster, left for slower. It, too, makes a loud click for each beat.

Final note, most digital keyboards have built-in metronomes that can be set to preferred tempos



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“Musical phrases imitate the wave forms of nature.

They run on a breath, build to a break, relax, breathe and build again.

And, like nature, they show infinite variety within their generic shape.”

—Robert Dumm

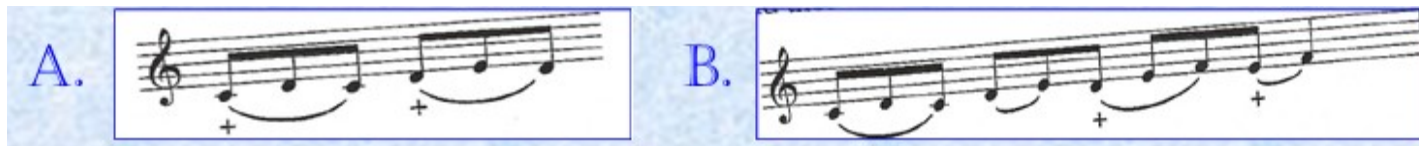
Piano Today Magazine

Dumm’s description of musical phrases reminds me of **The Sound of Music** production when the nuns sang about Maria, their unpredictable postulant. Lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II teamed with composer Richard Rodgers to write “Maria,” the perfect song to teach the meaning of musical phrases.

“How do you keep a wave upon the sand?”

“How do you hold a moonbeam in your hand?”

As with waves on the beach, no two phrases (or reading of a single phrase) ever come out the same. And just as an ocean wave carries countless ripples on its surface, a musical phrase comprises many small phrases or slurred groups, some just two or three notes long.



Example A marks (+) the smaller, ripple phrases that start on the beat. Example B shows those that begin inside or at the end of a beat.

Now make waves of your own and mark (+) for the measures in exercise C, as shown above in examples A and B.

You won’t need to break or alter the long **legato lines**. Articulate those differences by a slight stress on the first note of each new slur, like playful ripples as the wave builds or breaks.

Nature teaches us to subordinate, group, rank, and sort out those stirrings (**slurrings**) to the overall dynamic thrust and ebb of the whole. You can’t keep a wave upon the sand. Just relax your hand, create patterns with hand rotation, and have fun.



Enjoy your pianistic time at the beach!