

Instrumental Music Program of Holy Cross Academy

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Welcome to the Instrumental Music Program of Holy Cross Academy! The band and strings program is for students in grades 4 through 8. The Beginning Piano Skills class is open to students in grades 3 and 4.

Beginning Piano Skills - grades 3 & 4

Students who sign up for Beginning Piano Skills should have no prior piano experience. This class is not for those who have previously taken private piano lessons, however, students who have studied other instruments but have not studied piano are invited. Students must have a piano or keyboard at home before signing up for the beginning piano class. You do not have to bring your keyboard to school since the music room is equipped with several keyboards and an acoustic piano. Students should bring their books to class every week (Monday), and then take the books home again to practice every day.

Band and Strings - grades 4 through 8

The instruments of the band and orchestra include flute, clarinet, saxophone, trumpet, trombone, baritone horn, percussion, violin, viola, and cello. All students must have their own instrument, even percussionists. It doesn't matter if you rent your instrument or if you own a new or used one. Students should bring their instrument and books to school on class day, and then take them home again for practice during the week.

Some students already take private lessons on an instrument outside of school. In these cases, the student may want the experience of participating in an ensemble with other players. These students may sign up for the group ensemble practices only, and participate in the Christmas and Spring Concerts.

Enrolling in multiple programs

Students in grade 4 can enroll in the beginning piano class or the band & strings program. They cannot enroll in both programs at the same time. If you are having a hard time deciding which instrument to learn, the beginning piano class is recommended. Piano will provide an excellent foundation to learning another instrument later. In addition, some students who would choose a band instrument might benefit from another year of physical maturity before learning to play. Please talk to me for suggestions if you are unsure!

See the section on scheduling, below, to see how the schedules of the different programs work.

Scheduling - Beginning Piano Skills

The Beginning Piano class will meet once a week (Wednesday) for about 30 minutes. The class format will be group lessons with 5-10 students per group. The number of students in each group will be dependent on enrollment. Students will be excused from an academic class to come to piano. I try my best to coordinate with the teachers so that an important test or class is not being missed.

Scheduling - Band & Strings

Every student will receive an individual or group lesson on either Monday or Wednesday. Most students will have time with the teacher one-on-one, but some students may meet with the teacher in pairs. Occasionally, there will be small group lessons. Lessons will be 25 to 30 minutes long. Students should come to their lesson 5 minutes early to get set up so that the lesson can start on time. Students will be excused from an academic class to participate in their instrumental lesson. Students will be assigned to a rotating schedule so that they do not miss the same academic class week after week.

Students are responsible for making up any work that was missed while attending their instrumental music lesson.

The Band and Strings students should expect extra rehearsals to be scheduled after school when there is an early dismissal. Please do your best to attend - the rehearsal will not be very effective when there are a lot of students missing.

Occasionally, there may be an after school practice on a regular dismissal day. Please plan ahead for transportation after school and let me know if the student will not be able to attend.

Some students already take private lessons on an instrument outside of school. In these cases, the student may want the experience of participating in an ensemble with other players. These students may sign up for the group ensemble practices only, and participate in the Christmas and Spring Concerts.

Makeup Lessons

I cannot make up any class that was missed for any reason.

Missing Class

You should try not to miss any classes throughout the year. Since the instrumental music lessons and classes only meet once a week, missing just one class can put you far behind. If you forget to bring your books or even your instrument, you should still come to class and learn the new material. If you have a test scheduled during your lesson time, I *may* be able to rearrange the schedule IF you contact me no later than the night before your scheduled lesson day. I only have access to the music room on certain days, since I share the room with Mrs. LaPietra. I also have no control over the weather, and am not responsible for a student's lack of preparation. For these reasons, there are no makeup classes! If you have missed a class for any reason, PLEASE contact me (or one of your classmates) so that you can find out what we did in class that day.

Program Extras

Your tuition pays only for your weekly scheduled instrumental lessons and/or classes. In addition to these lessons and classes, I will schedule occasional extra rehearsals, group lessons and concerts. You will not be charged anything for these extras.

When your weekly lesson or class is missed because of illness, scheduling conflicts, weather, forgetfulness, etc., the extra time that I offer through the "extras" should more than cover any lost lesson time, even if you've missed more than one lesson.

How to get Instruments

There are several local music stores from which you can rent any instrument for the band or orchestra. Unfortunately, I don't know of any stores that rent portable keyboards, although piano stores will rent acoustic pianos. Please see the supply lists for complete information on how and where to get your instruments.

Tuition

Band & Strings and Beginning Piano

34 weeks

\$396.00 per year *-or-*

\$44.00 per month

The tuition for the 2007-2008 academic year is payable in nine *equal* monthly installments. The tuition amount does not change, regardless of how many lessons or classes you receive each month.

Each student will receive a lesson or class once a week, as long as school is being held. You are NOT guaranteed a minimum number of lessons or classes each month. There will be no music classes when school is out. Your tuition is payment for your regularly scheduled lessons or classes. Your tuition does not cover after school rehearsals, extra practices or concerts, and there will not be any extra charges related to those activities.

The tuition is due by the first class or lesson of each month. If tuition is not received by the 15th of the month, a \$10.00 late fee will be added to the tuition for that month. If tuition is not received by the last class for that month, the student will not be allowed to participate in the program until all debts are paid in full. You may bring the tuition to school to give to Mrs. Shirk in person, or you may mail it to:

**7931 Block House Road
Spotsylvania, VA 22551**

You should make checks payable to: **Amy Shirk**

** Please DO NOT hand in the tuition to the school office, principal, or secretary. Also, do not send it back to school in the family envelope - it will not get to me on time!*

*Your only choices are to give the tuition to me, in person,
or to mail it to my home studio address!!*

*If you do not follow the above instructions
and your tuition does not get to me on time because of it,
you are still fully responsible for any late charges!*

I cannot refund any money for classes that were not taken. If you miss a class, please contact me right away to find out what you missed. (See above about missing lessons and makeups.)

Account statements will be handed out every month. You should look for these statements in your child's take-home monday folder. You are responsible for handing in the tuition on time whether you receive a statement or not!

Books & Materials

Each student will buy his own books. To assure that every student purchases the correct books, I will provide all books needed for class. I usually purchase books at a discounted rate. When I do, the savings will be passed on to you. Payment for books should be included in the following month's tuition. You should expect to spend about \$10.00 - \$15.00 on books for the year.

Other materials that may be purchased but are not required for class:

- metronome - although not required, owning a metronome is *highly recommended*. If you are interested, please talk to Mrs. Shirk to discuss the MANY different models and options.
- tuner - also recommended, especially for stringed instruments and trombones.
- cleaning or care kit - you can buy a complete care kit for your instrument, or individual care items can be bought separately.
- other music - students should be encouraged to play for fun! Play music that is not part of the class assignment. Popular, classical, sacred, jazz, and TV and movie themes are just a few suggestions.

Concerts

Band and Strings students should plan on performing twice during the year - once in December and once again in May. Concert dress will be **black on bottom, white on top**. Students should wear a white shirt, black pants and black shoes. Girls have the option of wearing a LONG (below the knees) black skirt. No tie or jacket is necessary for boys. If you have any questions or concerns about the concert dress, please call Amy Shirk at 540-582-6003.

Keyboard students *may* perform at one or both concerts, depending on the amount of progress that is made during the semester.

Concert attendance is mandatory. Every student is equally important in the full ensemble. Your classmates are depending on you to be at the concert, just as you were at rehearsal. If you must miss a concert, your parents must notify me **in writing no later than 2 weeks before the performance**.

Practicing

Students are expected to practice their assignment *every single day*. Practicing is the "homework" for this class. I will give assignments that need to be worked on every day in order to achieve proficiency. Since each new lesson is built off of material that was mastered in the previous lesson, practicing to mastery is essential to keep up with your classmates in your lessons. It is impossible to "cram" the night before your class. You are learning a skill that requires training and conditioning of the muscles to do new things. Some days you may feel like practicing for 30 minutes, and other days you may be able to find only 5-10 minutes to devote to your instrument. The amount of time is not as important as the frequency of practicing. If you are not willing to

commit some of your time every day to your instrument, you should think twice before joining the program.

Practice charts may be given to students to fill out and return to me. PLEASE! Be honest when filling out your practice chart! I'm not interested in scolding students who don't have "enough minutes" on their chart. Knowing a student's practice routine is very helpful to me when I hear a student play. I can better understand why a student performs the way he does if I can compare what I hear to how the student has prepared.

Preparation, Attendance, Attitude

Students are expected to come to class prepared. This means you have practiced your assignment and you remembered to bring your instrument, all books and materials, and a pencil. If you do forget to bring your instrument or a book to school on class day, you should still come to class. You can take notes, share a book with another student, etc.

Perfect attendance is an important goal for every student because we only meet once a week. If you are in school on class day, you should come to your lesson. There aren't many reasons to skip your lesson - even if you have forgotten your books or instrument. If you don't want to miss your academic class for some reason, call me so that I can try to rearrange the schedule.

I expect students in my class to be cooperative, respectful (to the teacher and to other students), and open-minded. I will not tolerate disrespect, chronic unpreparedness, or an overall poor attitude. You will find that I am a very easy person to get along with. Even though I like to have fun in my class, I take what I do for a living very seriously. I will not accept less than 100% effort from my students.

When a student is constantly unprepared, misses class frequently, shows disrespect, has a defiant attitude, or misses a concert unexcused, I will immediately call the parents for a discussion on whether or not that student should continue in the program.

Communication

Because I only meet with students once a week, it is necessary for us to have ways to keep in touch with each other throughout the remainder of the week. If there is ever a need to get in touch with me, you can call, e-mail, or snail-mail me any time. Please do not think that you are bothering me at home - you are not. If you have any concerns, do not hesitate to ask questions. If you can't remember which page in your book to practice, I would much rather you call and ask me than to practice the wrong page all week. If you miss class, you should call me right away to find out what we learned while you were out. You can reach me at:

540-582-6003 -or- ashirk14@aol.com

FAQ's

• *I know I'm supposed to practice every day, but this week's assignment is too easy! It's boring to have to practice the stuff that I already know so well. Can I skip a few days of practice this week?*

NO!! To gain proficiency on your instrument, you should play every day. Don't skip practicing just because you think you've mastered the material in a day or two. If your assignment is really that easy, take another look at it. Are you sure you are doing everything correctly? If yes, then there are lots of other things that you could play to make your practice time more interesting. You could try looking ahead in the book. If you need something more challenging for that week, call me for suggestions, or just get out your favorite music to play. Learn a new piece on your own, or call up a friend and play duets.

• *Oops, I forgot to bring my instrument to school today. Do I still have to come to class?*

YES!! You may not be able to play today, but you can still learn. You can take notes, help your classmates, ask questions, and find out how to play next week's assignment. Skipping class will only put you farther behind.

• *I had to take my instrument to the shop for repairs, and they didn't have a loaner instrument for me. Do I still come to class?*

YES!! (See the answer to the above question.)

• *My family was away all week and I didn't get to practice at all. Should I still come to class tomorrow?*

YES!! Things like this happen occasionally. You should still bring your instrument to school, come to class and do your best. Skipping class because you haven't practiced will only put you even farther behind.

• *My class was yesterday, and I can't remember how Mrs. Shirk said to practice this page. What should I do?*

If you're really stuck, you should call or e-mail me right away. Don't wait until the end of the week, or you may find out you have been practicing incorrectly for a few days (which won't be easy to correct.) Don't worry, you won't be bothering me at home.

• *Can I add my band tuition to my school tuition and hand in just one check to the school office?*

NO!! The tuition accounts for school and for the instrumental music program are completely separate from each other. You need to give the instrumental music tuition to Mrs. Shirk directly, or mail it to her.

• *My instrumental class is tomorrow and I just found out today that I will be missing a really big test to come to band. Can I miss band tomorrow so I can take the test?*

If something important comes up in your academic class that you would rather not miss, you need to let me know as soon as possible. Call me and I will try to schedule you into another group for that day. I may not be able to do this 100% of the time, but I will do my best to see that you can take the test AND come to your instrumental class that day.

• *I've decided to drop out of the strings class. I returned my rental instrument to the music store, but I still have a metronome, a tuner, and my practically new books. Is there any way to get my money back on these things?*

YES. If you have materials that another student could use, I will buy them from you (as long as they are in good condition) to sell to another student. Used items normally buy and sell back for 50-75% of their original price.

• *I stayed home sick today and missed my band class. I tried to read ahead in my book, but I don't understand the new material. What should I practice this week?*

You could always practice something that you already know how to play. The first thing you should do, though, is try to get in touch with me so that I can fill you in on what you missed. You could also learn what you missed by meeting with someone else from your class and practicing together.

• *I took pretty good notes in class and thought I knew how to practice my assignment, but when I got home and tried to play, I didn't understand how to do it. How can I get some help?*

If you're really stuck, you could ask one of your classmates for help. You could even get together and practice with each other. If you'd rather just call me, then go ahead! I will be more than happy to help you out. If you don't want to call, you can e-mail me with your questions.

• *I missed my class today. When can I make it up?*

Sorry, but you can't. See the section above titled "Makeup Lessons."

- *I missed my class today. Can I get either a refund or a credit towards next month?*

Sorry, but again, no refunds or makeups can be given for missed classes.

To clarify: Mrs. LaPietra uses the music room on the days that I do not. I have no control over the weather, student illnesses, family crises, or unpreparedness of students. I can't just refund money every time someone had a test, forgot a book, didn't practice, got sick, etc.

- *What is a tuner and where do I get one?*

A tuner helps you to play your instrument in tune. For stringed instruments and trombone, it is also an invaluable tool to help you learn the correct notes. You do NOT have to buy any "special" tuner, like a violin tuner or a cello tuner, in fact, those kind of tuners are more expensive and do less. Students should get a Chromatic Tuner instead, which is more economical and can be used with any instrument.

My favorite chromatic tuner runs about \$17.00 and can be purchased from me.

- *What is a metronome and where do I get one?*

A metronome is, in its simplest form, a fancy clock. A metronome keeps the beat for you (steady tempo), encourages you to keep going (continuity), helps you to learn new rhythms and sets the speed. When you turn it on, it clicks a certain number of beats per minute. A regular clock clicks 60 times per minute. A metronome can click anywhere from 40 (sometimes less) to 240 (sometimes more) times per minute. You set the speed yourself. Some of the more elaborate metronomes have other options, like volume controls, flashing lights, earphones, built-in tuners, reference pitches, and other beat options.

Metronomes range in price anywhere from \$15.00 for the most simple models to \$200.00 or more for the most elaborate models. My favorite kind of metronome that I usually recommend to students runs about \$35.00.

String and trombone students should get a metronome that has a chromatic pitch pipe built in (plays reference pitches).

I use a metronome in all of my lessons and classes, right from day one. Students who own their own metronome have an advantage over the students that don't because they can practice with it at home in the same way we play along with it at school. If you are interested in a metronome, I will help you find a model in your price range. You can also go to any of the local music stores and try out the metronomes that are in stock.