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Rebecca Penneys International Piano Festival at USF

by Lee Elstun



One can sense the flow of impulses surging through her brain, working their way down the nervous system and into her fingertips in a matter of milliseconds.

There's no tension in her fingers nor her eyes, which occasionally glance at the ceiling either out of some silent acknowledgement of God or a sign that shows that there is no stress lying dormant in her veins.

That is the mind and hands of Rebecca Penneys at work. It is an advanced technique that she developed over the years called "Motion and Emotion." According to Penneys, it is "a natural keyboard technique that allows pianists to achieve performance goals and handle stress without physical strain or injury." Ignoring the cultural and anachronistic inconsistencies for a brief moment, you can imagine that Dr. Penneys would be exalted as one of the definitive artists

in an era of classical music that spawned the likes of Beethoven, Mozart and Bach during the time of the harpsichord and fortepiano, the predecessors of the modern piano.

Imagine the romantic Golden Age of Piano, the joy of the debut of modern piano in the days of Chopin, Liszt, Brahms and Schumann, with salon-style, three-hour long concerts.

Instead she lives in a time of great musical diversity. The audience for classical music has become much more elite in modern times, but unlike the United States, people in South America, Asia and Eastern Europe still cram into theatres and concert halls to hear piano concerts. Dr. Penneys performs worldwide and teaches and prepares younger generations to combine historical information, style and sounds of the great pianists of the golden age and more modern times with current piano techniques and holistic learning.

Dr. Penneys is founder/director and host of a piano festival less than

an hour away from here. The 4th annual Rebecca Penneys' Piano Festival (RPPF) is held this summer from July 12-30, in Barness Hall on the Tampa campus of the University of South Florida.

For three weeks, three dozen top, aspiring, concert piano students not only get to play and study piano, but they get to meet their peers, other dedicated young pianists with whom some maintain relationships for decades. They also get to attend live performances and hear master classes from Penneys and thirteen other distinguished piano professors from top schools worldwide.

Those students will learn to hone their craft and expand upon their skillsets using Steinway pianos. That's a big deal. Why? Steinway is a brand that's known for high quality and considered the finest instrument in the world. Imagine learning how to drive in an Aston Martin with Formula One winner James Hunt as your teacher, and you will know how these



REBECCA PENNEYS, PROFESSOR OF PIANO,
EASTMAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC
ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE AT ST. PETERSBURG COLLEGE
STEINWAY-ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE AT USF

students feel once their fingers hit those piano keys for the first time, all the while in Penneys' careful oversight. These are all future piano stars in the world of music.

They will enjoy world-class mentorship and tutelage for no charge – it is tuition-free. The Rebecca Penneys Piano Festival is supported entirely by donations. The Rebecca Penneys Friends of Piano Inc., a not-for-profit 501c3 organization welcomes your support, since there are operating expenses, like USF facility fees, room and board, food, transportation, piano tuning, and faculty salaries. The public is invited and encouraged to attend the festivities. RPPF offers attendance at all concerts and classes to the public at no cost.

Over fifty years ago, Dr. Penneys was invited by Steinway to become a Steinway Artist, which is quite an honor. In addition to this title, she is Professor of Piano at the Eastman School of Music, *Artist-in-Residence* at St. Petersburg College, and *Steinway-Artist-in-Residence* at the University of South Florida. Dr. Penneys has

accumulated many awards. She even won an award, at age 17, that was created "in her honor" the Special Critics' Prize at the 7th International Chopin Competition in Warsaw. After that she piled up award after award in competitions across the world, while being recognized for her prowess at the piano.

It's no wonder then that publications all over the world rave about that prowess. Take the Budapest Sun for example. In a review they said, "Penneys' recording embodies the true essence of the Chopin Etudes, studies in sound, nuance, sensitivity, touch & emotion. It is through her transcendent pianistic ability and complete understanding of the physiology of the body that these more humanistic qualities are released."

If you investigate the rest of the reviews, you will find that Dr. Penneys is not compared to anyone. Her skill is not compared to other players, and her techniques are not compared to those in the past. With talent, imagination, years of practice and determination, she has established her own precedent.

Two new DVD's filmed locally and recently at St. Petersburg College should will soon make their debut.

As word of the success of the first few festivals spread through the international concert piano student community, interest has increased. Rebecca and her handpicked faculty had over 100 fully qualified applications for the festival's 36 openings. Since much of the learning comes from practicing performing in front of a group of strangers, piano music lovers are invited as audience during much of the festival. Outreach concerts are also performed closer to the beaches, at Westminster Shores, Allegro and closest of all, at St. Pete College Music Center, 5th Avenue and 66th Street. These performances are provided free of admission, although donations of any amount are greatly appreciated.

If you want to find out more about Professor Penneys, feel free to visit www.rebeccapenneys.com. For more about the festival and it's concert-watching opportunities, or to help support the festival, visit www.rebeccapenneyspianofestival.org

