

“I Learned to Play the Piano At 91”

By Alma H. Bond

As a child, I was uninterested in learning to play an instrument as I was preoccupied with becoming an actress. As an adult, I was busy raising three children and working hard at becoming a psychoanalyst. I may have understood psychoanalytic theory but I remained a musical ignoramus.

At the age of five, I couldn't carry a tune. When my mother said, “Shut up and let your brother sing,” I learned I was musically untalented and didn't sing for 30 years. I did take piano lessons as a teenager for a few months where the teacher seemed to know only how to play with his right hand. I soon got rid of him.

Then when my children were babies, I rocked them to sleep singing as I figured they were too little to complain.

When they grew older, I bought a white upright piano decorated with purple polka dots which had a soft lovely tone. The children started piano lessons. Unsurprisingly in an unmusical family, they “didn't take.” I alone sat among the polka dots and banged out my old favorites. I was too embarrassed to play around anyone else.

To my astonishment at age 90, I became obsessed with 1,000 songs racing through my head. How strange that someone who had no talent or deep interest in music was silently singing all day! So I decided to buy a piano.

After looking into perhaps 100 advertised pianos, all of which I rejected because they were too large, expensive, blemished or screeched like cats howling at night, I found an eBay notice that a walnut spinet made by Estey was on sale for \$250 but was worth \$800.

I soon learned that every piano, even when made by the same manufacturer in the same year, has its own personality. I desperately hoped the temperament of this piano would jive with mine as it seemed right for me in every other respect.

Despite my thumping rendition, I got the feeling that once I learned to play it, the tones of the piano would



Alma Bond loves to play Ode to Joy

flow with a bell-like clarity. The piano behaved as if it were made for me. It was small and would fit nicely into my living room beneath a large window, was made of beautiful walnut wood with real ivory keys and was delightful to look at.

I immediately fell in love with it and imagined myself up on a concert stage flawlessly playing Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. I knew I must have that piano.

So I bought it and began to look for a piano teacher who would be willing to take on a 91-year-old beginner.

My teacher, Jen, a lovely young woman, knows enough to encourage my banging away. Jen is delighted to add a woman of 91 to her grammar school clientele. On the first lesson, she taught me fingering which helped me place the notes correctly. Soon I was delighted to play *Are you Sleeping, Brother John* with both hands.

I found out why I need to play the piano. I was playing “I Would Give the World to Hear That (mother's) Song Again” and I burst into tears. My mother died over 50 years ago. I thought I had finished mourning her. It seems music reaches a part of me nothing else does.

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