

by Jean Fox

Have you ever wondered exactly what your tuition dollar buys? Sending out bills is my least favorite job, and I know you would be as delighted as I if sending and paying bills was not part of music instruction. Since it is, I would like to mention some things included in the tuition. I am well aware of the fact that music instruction is expensive. When preparing a presentation many years ago, my husband and I found figures showing that my parents spent more on pre-college music training than was spent on all of my husband's college education, including his Ph.D. As an example of what music instruction at that time cost, while in high school, I had as many as 4 music lessons weekly. The lowest tuition, based on an hourly rate, equaled \$30.06 when adjusted for inflation by the consumer index, and the most expensive was equal to \$64.49.\*

Your music tuition pays for the teacher's expertise. However, your lesson fees include much more than the teacher's expertise. Our journals tell us that 33%-50% of the money coming in goes out for expenses. Because of the added opportunities I offer, my expenses run at the high end of that. Examples of these costs are: recital expenses, repairs and maintenance of equipment, professional membership fees and journals, teacher expenses incurred in competitions and festivals (postage, printing for applications, travel), continued teacher training of new techniques, interpretations, equipment, and materials. These expenses, of course, are in addition to the normal operating expenses any small business proprietor incurs. (In addition, a self-employed business person must do without many things that you probably enjoy if you are not self-employed - sick leave, paid vacations, medical insurance, disability insurance, retirement pension.) [Also, we must pay not only the employee's, but the employer's part of Social Security Taxes - 15% total - on top of our income taxes. TL]

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A significant part of your music dollar pays for the teacher's time, of course. But were you aware that it includes much more time than that spent at the lesson? Not only is time spent preparing lessons, evaluating new music, and studying the most current interpretations (Musicologists' research indicates, for example that Bach is performed differently than was thought to be correct even 15 years ago), but time is spent in organizational tasks such as planning and physically preparing for recitals, festivals, competitions, and scheduling for lessons, repertoire classes, and rehearsals. Did you know that we must type at least one application per student, and usually judge's sheets and other papers, for each event a student enters? Did you know that we are required to volunteer many hours to each organization providing student activities? You make tuition payments that are prorated for an entire year's worth of activities, not only for individual lessons. Statistics from professional music teacher journals reveal that, for every half-hour enrolled in piano lessons, you are actually investing in at least two hours of the teacher's time.

Music lessons may be expensive, but they are a lifetime investment. Students who study through high school often consider the purchase of a piano to be a first priority after graduation from college. Whether for pleasure or profit, they keep the piano and music as a lifetime investment. This is possibly one of the most rewarding facets of a piano teacher's career. I hope that your child will be added to this list of lifetime musicians.

\*These rates for a town in the Midwest in 1991. In many areas, and as years pass, these figures are higher.

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