

Simply in tune!

The white, yellow, and red sign posted in the instructor's front yard states it simply:

Play Piano Ages 7 - 107

Inside the Olde Towne Bellevue home, Arlene Nesbitt, age 76, takes a seat on the piano bench and places her fingers gently on the keyboard. The familiar sound of the 16th Century English folksong *Greensleeves* fills Janita Pavelka's living as she nods her head slowly while glancing over Nesbitt's left shoulder.

Nesbitt has learned to play the piano through a method called Simply Music. Pavelka - one of five Omaha-area accredited Simply Music teachers - says Simply Music differs from traditional piano lessons in that its students learn by playing before reading the music.

Pavelka, a classically trained pianist who has played the piano for more than 30 years, says humans by nature are musical beings. Acts like walking, talking, and clapping out hands are rhythmic exercises people do naturally without thinking. We learn to tie our shoelaces, brush our teeth, and button our shirts by doing these activities without learning theories or referring to notes.

That learning by going approach is the basis of Simply Music, she adds.

"Expecting students to read music before they've learned how to play is like expecting to read and spell before they've learned how to talk," says Neil Moore, the Australian founder of Simply Music.

Pavelka says having students read notes and practice scales for hours before playing music often becomes boring and frustrating. This frustration may take away from the student's desire to play the piano.

"Simply Music students focus on the fun and sheer joy of playing great-sounding music immediately," she says. "We want music to be their lifelong companion."

Pavelka says Simply Music students learn a larger and better quantity of jazz, blues, classical, and contemporary songs quicker and easier than their peers who are taught the piano through traditional methods.

"We temporarily delay the reading process, but the reading of rhythm and notes is introduced after the student has 30 to 40 songs in their repertoire," she adds.

Nesbitt, who returned to her Simply Music lessons after her back surgery in December, is one of Pavelka's five students over age 70.

Learning to play a musical instrument is a great way to lower the risk of dementia and cognitive decline in older men and women, Pavelka says. Research on aging has shown from middle age onward people who enjoy a sense of control and mastery of an activity stay healthier than those who don't that control and mastery.

Pavelka says older adults - many of whom didn't have the time earlier in life - benefit from taking piano lessons though socializing with the instructor and students, and from an increase in self-esteem that comes through learning a new activity, and in some cases, fulfilling a dream.

The Simply Music method is particularly effective for older men and women because it teaches everything in single thought processes, Pavelka says. The students are taught a new song by learning what to do with their right hand, then their left hand, and finally, with both hands.

Many older adults are especially good Simply Music students because they have no pre-conceived notions as to what piano lessons should be like, according to Pavelka.

"I've always wanted to play the piano because I love music," Nesbitt says.

She believes in the Simply Music method because it allows students to play music tight away instead of practicing scales.

Pavelka says Nesbitt, who sings in the Westside Baptist Church choir, is an excellent student because she's committed to practicing the piano and watching the program's videos.

"The more you practice the better you get," Nesbitt says.

Simply Music students begin by taking a free one-hour introductory course. If they want to continue, they pay a monthly fee of \$75 to \$100. That fee provides weekly 25 to 50-minute lesson with an accredited instructor. An accompanying kit, which includes music books, notes, and a video, is \$40.

For more information, log to the web at (www.omahapiano.com)