

About Cynthia VanLandingham

Tallahassee is home to many growing small businesses that are using technology to provide new services and reach new markets. Cynthia VanLandingham, who operates TallyPiano & Keyboard Studios, is an example of this. Cynthia began offering piano lessons 20 years ago out of her home with a handful of students. “I love teaching piano, and offering lessons out of my house allowed me to work at home and be available for my children”, Cynthia said, who graduated from FSU with a teaching degree. As her children grew up, she expanded the number of students she taught, and five years ago she moved her studio out of her home to a location on Kerry Forrest Parkway. Her studio now teaches about 50 students with a mixture of individual and small group lessons for children and adults.

Cynthia also began developing new teaching techniques and services. “I teach a lot of very young children, and I wanted to create a fun way to help them understand the learning process. So, I wrote a series of illustrated books to help explain piano lessons to children.” These books use “Piano Adventure Bears” characters (imagine a society of teddy bears) to answer questions children have about piano lessons, help them develop good practice habits, and overcome their performance anxieties. One of these books, *Little Bear’s Musical Garden*, is available to read free at her website at www.tallypiano.com. Copies of this book and others can be purchased at Amazon.com and Beethoven’s (another successful local small creative business).

She also developed a series of learning resources that parents can use to support their children’s lessons, which are also available at her website. Children ages 5 to 11 who enroll at her studio automatically become members of the Piano Adventure Bears Club, which utilizes these learning resources to encourage young students. She is continuing to develop new materials,

including a board game that uses the Piano Adventure Bears characters to teach piano concepts.

Cynthia also began exploring ways of incorporating technology into her studio with a technology club her students can join. She developed a system where students record the songs they are playing, and these songs are then published to a Podcast on iTunes, *My TallyPiano Adventure Club Music*. “This is a great learning tool. After students record their songs, we can play them back and review how well they played the piece and captured the spirit in the song.” The recordings also help students quickly identify how they can improve their playing and makes instructions like “make sure to keep the tempo and count the rhythm through this difficult section” come to life. “It provides a powerful incentive for students to do their best and to use their creativity to express their music in an artistic way. They can hear each recording and decide whether to try it again to play it better. This encourages students to persevere and master difficult pieces, and gives them something to look forward to – a refined product and a little bit of fame. Often, students come to the studio saying “I’ve learned my new song and I’m ready to record it!”

Once students complete their recordings, Cynthia posts them to a personal webpage created for each student on her website (www.TallyPiano.com/students.htm). Plus, she publishes them to the studio podcast on iTunes, *My TallyPiano Adventure Club Music*. This allows students to download their songs and share them with their families and friends. “Podcasting is particularly great for grandparents and other relatives who live far away from the students and who generally only get a chance to hear them play during visits or recitals. Students and their families, enjoy downloading their songs to their home computers and mp3 players and playing them on their I-pods and car stereos.

Below are some testimonials about these programs from parents:

"Cindy - Yes, please include Olivia on the Kids Piano Page and we'll pass the audio link along to her grandparents! This is a great idea and we look forward to hearing her performance(s). Thanks for the newsletter and all your hard work!"Andrew Brady

"Cindy - I was visiting Hannah's spot on the student music page of your website and was really happy to see SO MANY of her songs available online! Family and friends of ours are in for a real treat! What a great service to your students and their families to have such a special listening and sharing page available! And your memory book download idea in the newsletter was really nice and very appreciated. Thanks so much."...Sandra Fink

Cynthia says, "Anyone can subscribe to our studio podcast and download our beautiful piano solos and duets free, and subscribe to our newsletter, *Piano Matters*, to get more free resources, including a Piano Article Archives filled with wonderful tips and articles for parents, students, and piano teachers."

Parents who are interested in this unique program can contact Cynthia for more information at 850-386-2425 or email her at cindy@tallypiano.com.