



GOING THE DISTANCE

Lee Ann Leung

Tempo. Cadence. Speed. Terms we've said many times as music teachers. They're also the crux to my training sessions as a runner.

Most mornings before long hours of teaching, I clear my mind with the staccato tap, tap, tap of my feet on the trail. The path winds up and down like a single-track roller coaster, except this one is lined with trees, cacti, and wildflowers. It's beautiful, and my fellow trail runners and I stop to take in the views. (It's really a fermata to catch our breaths.)

I'm a life-long pianist, but fairly recent runner: I went from piano bench to half marathon five years ago. Since then, the same spark that drives me to be a better teacher is the same inspiration I get from pushing myself further in running. I'm curious to see how far I can go, and how fast and for how long. It's an art: start too fast and possibly fatigue too soon; over-train and potentially get injured; don't train enough and miss performing at your full potential. Preparing for marathon distances and beyond has given me discipline, patience, and the mentality of never settling. These are the values that I stand by as a teacher.

Running promotes accountability and finding solutions. Your knee hurts? Figure out how to make it better. Just don't quit running. Likewise, if I present a new concept to class and see confused faces, I don't think, *Oh they're dumb. They don't get this.* Instead, I get

excited to explore, and ask, *How can I be more effective?*

Going out for a 15-mile training run is uncomfortable, but the threshold for tolerance is raised when barriers are broken. I've broken my own barriers by teaching students with autism and learning challenges. I don't give up when teaching requires a new path away from what's comfortable. There are many times in life where we must persevere, and I encourage you to teach authentically and not let personal inconveniences get in the way.

Some days I do my tempo runs—a steady, prolonged effort at a slightly uncomfortable pace—taking the ideal cadence of 180 steps per minute using a metronome. My students laugh when I tell them. Then, out of curiosity, they use the metronome to (finally!) even out the pace of their scales.

I remind my students that we are in this for the long run. Some think that running more than 10 miles is torture. *Okay, so piano playing is better!* they realize in relief, returning to the notes of the Beethoven Sonata, or being particular about the phrasing in their assigned piece. They huff when I hold them accountable for accuracy or clarity. I tell them, *Keep going: that climb to the top is worth it!* And indeed, it sounds amazing to them when they arrive, even if it's weeks or months later.

Running is fun, hard work. That oxymoron is the same for teaching and taking piano lessons. I've found

it important to take risks and avoid going through the motions. With my students, I've replaced staid lectures with conversations, working harder to relate content to their lives. If you show you care, and allow students creative freedom, what will emerge is a musician experiencing their own musical marathon. ■

Lee Ann Leung is a pianist, teacher, and distance runner. As adjunct faculty at Citrus College and a conservatory teacher at the Orange County School of the Arts, she engages diverse students—from opera singers to contemporary commercial musicians—teaching them fundamentals of piano. Holding an MFA in Piano Performance from UC Irvine, Lee Ann fused her classical training with performances of video game music in Taiwan, Spain, and Canada, and also became a self-taught DJ. That same desire to explore creatively translated into running: Lee Ann has run in a 50-mile race, 50K, and a handful of marathons. She is a current RADrabbt athlete and former Global Energy Race ambassador. The remaining balance of her week is dedicated to her private students throughout Orange County, and serving on the board of directors for the MTAC South Coast Branch.