

Sarah Tanner creates art, plays classical piano and instills a love of music in new generation

Prattville native teaches piano at Baldwin Arts and Academics Magnet in Montgomery; she is a pianist for hire, and also creates art pieces

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People need artistic outlets, especially during stressful months of isolation and worry like we've been experiencing.

Montgomery resident Sarah Tanner is doing something to help. Along with being an artist and a classical pianist, the Prattville native passes along a love of the arts in Montgomery through her role as a Montgomery Public Schools piano teacher at Baldwin Arts and Academics Magnet.

"I think right now during this time, the arts are even more vital," Tanner said.

Tanner, the daughter of Gale and Teresa Cheatham of Prattville, has known she wanted to be in some form of the arts all her life.

"Since I was 8 years old, I've been involved with piano," she said. "When I got to junior high, I started taking visual art classes."

Her father described Tanner as an overachiever. "She was always into something. She was in dance when she was young," said Cheatham, who has an artistic background of his own in leatherwork.

When Tanner first started taking piano lessons in Prattville, her father said she wasn't challenged enough. "The teacher would give her an assignment for the next week, and she would bring it home and play it within a matter of just a few hours," Cheatham said. "And then she wouldn't have anything else to play until next week. She had already learned that piece."

When she wasn't drawing or playing piano, Tanner spent her time climbing trees as a child, observing nature.

Tanner went to Huntingdon College for her undergrad classes, where she double majored and earned a bachelor's degree in piano and in visual art in 2004. She went on to earn her masters in liberal arts from Auburn University at Montgomery in 2015.

Tanner has continued in her music as a classical pianist. She is available for hire, and often performs for events like Christmas parties and weddings.

"Any music you put in front of me, I'll play. My favorite composer is Rachmaninoff," she said. "I'm not a jazz pianist. I can't improv, or anything like that."

Teaching

Tanner has been a piano teacher at Baldwin since 2007. She's also the school's arts department chair.

She and her students have had to make adjustments for instruction this year during COVID-19 conditions.

"Piano is such a solitary instrument," she said. "I teach a lesson to the whole class, whether it's a lesson in person or over Zoom, such as music history or theory. But then I will go around and everybody will be practicing at their keyboards and they'll have their cameras set up from their computers so I can see them practicing. I just go one by one, and I listen to each kid individually."

Her students normally have performance opportunities through the year. Along with being an instrument of learning that gives them self discipline and time management, playing piano is a stress releaser.

"My class is strict and it's structured," Tanner said. "They know that I expect things out of them. But they're still able to do something else than just having to stare at a computer screen right now."

She is the former president for the Alabama Music Teachers Association, and has been a judge for several music festivals across Alabama.



Sarah Tanner with her artwork at the Vintage Pop Up at Vintage Cafe in Montgomery on Nov. 14. CONTRIBUTED



Sarah Tanner, who is also a classical pianist, created a series of painted floating piano keys in shadow boxes. CONTRIBUTED



A raised collage of flowers created by Sarah Tanner, who often includes nature in her works. CONTRIBUTED

Creating

While she doesn't climb trees anymore, the outdoors still inspire her. When Tanner isn't playing piano or teaching, she's still creating works of art.

She likes to paint in watercolors, a medium that's hard to control, and also creates resin sculptures depicting nature, mostly leaves and bubbles.

"I'm a huge plant person. A lot of my art is either inspired of plants or related to music," said Tanner.

She also loves using vivid color in her pieces. To achieve that, she started using alcohol inks two years ago.

Tanner's parents own Fountain City Health Foods in Prattville, and proudly exhibit her work.

"That's where I keep all of my art," she said. "So it's like a little art gallery."

"It makes an attractive display here at the front of our store," Cheatham said.

She's a member of the Montgomery Art Guild, SAC's and the Prattuga Art Guild, and has entered her pieces in several local events. She recently won first place in the mixed media category and honorable mention during the Prattville fall show. She also had a piece in the SAC's waterfront show.

On Nov. 14, Tanner was part of the pop up show from Vintage Cafe, 416 Cloverdale Road in Montgomery. They'll have another show on Dec. 12 from 11 a.m.-3 p.m., with a wine tasting from 1-3 p.m.

Tanner was to be a part of a Prattville Christmas Market in December, but Prattville officials say that show has been canceled due to COVID-19 concerns.

"That doesn't surprise me," said Cheatham. "That virus is messing up a lot of things."

So do Tanner's musical and artistic sides influence one another? A little bit.

"I like the abstract alcohol ink paintings, because it reminds me of listening to a musical piece," Tanner said.

Among her favorite creations is a 3 dimensional collage series of floating piano keys she's painted and mounted in shadowboxes.

"I took alcohol ink abstract paintings and then I deconstructed them. I cut them up into piano keys and then I made them float," she said.

To see more of Tanner's works, and to hire her as a classical pianist, visit sarahtannerart.com.

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