

Tolley Creative 2025-2026

Bethany Tolley – Teaching Qualifications

Years playing the piano: **38**

Years accompanying: **34**

Years giving lessons: **8**

Years singing and performing: **42**

Years composing music: **3**

I grew up singing alongside my family. My mother was intent on us learning to sing together. An ear for singing harmony quickly developed while I was still in elementary school. My older sisters took some sporadic piano lessons when I was young, and I read their piano books and figured out the notes and basic theory easily on my own. When it was my turn for lessons, I took them from an informal teacher for about 7 months. In that time, I went from Level 1 (beginner) to Level 4 (early intermediate). Piano came easy to me. It was so easy in fact, that I did not see the point in continuing lessons. I just wanted to play the music I wanted to play.

However, it never occurred to me to play for more than enjoyment, at the time, and my family didn't have the resources (even had I wished) to have me taught more technically, or professionally. A natural sight-reader, I quit lessons and taught myself how to play pop music from the 90s, church hymns, and contemporary religious music. At age fifteen I started playing piano to accompany my youth group.

Participation and excellence in both chamber choir and concert band honed my performance abilities. I sat first chair clarinet all four years of high school. I played solos and ensembles and scored 1-ratings at state contests, but declined a scholarship to play the clarinet in college, as I was not interested in the clarinet beyond high school. I also played the baritone saxophone my senior year of high school, learning it on the fly, when the Jazz Band fell short a player who had been injured in a car accident.

I accepted a choir scholarship to sing at a local community college, but left after a year to get married. While singing in that college choir I had the chance to accompany the choir some, as a pianist, in practices. It was a small college and there wasn't always a pianist hired for the regular scheduled class and the choir director preferred to focus on directing.

After getting married young, I began to see that my poor technique limited my capacity to play more complex pieces. I began to challenge myself and began playing more classical music and more difficult hymns. Over the years I have accompanied church ensembles, choirs, and continued to study technique on my own as well as theory, chords, music-writing, and improvisation.

I am a natural teacher, and always have been. I also have years of volunteer and professional teaching experience (corporate trainer) to individuals and groups of all ages. **I have high expectations, but an easy-going demeanor.** I'm low stress (as long as my students make efforts to practice) and "chill" about mistakes and differences in learning abilities and styles. While there may be some exceptions, I will not teach students under the age of 8. This is due to the lack of attention span and maturity for the stress and pressure of performing and upholding a rigorous practice schedule.

Piano Lessons

Cost for Lessons

Age	Cost per 30- or 60-minute lesson
8-12	\$12 per 30-minute lesson (paid monthly)
13+	\$15 per 30-minute lesson (paid monthly)
8+	\$26 per 60-minute/1 hour lesson (paid monthly)

What's Required

- 20 minutes daily practice
- Punctual lesson attendance
- Keeping a piano practice log
- Completing Music Theory work outside of lessons
- Lessons paid monthly*, parents pay for and provide lesson books and materials
- Student ability to focus and concentrate

What's Included

- 30-minute weekly lesson***
- Piano binder with practice log and more
- Mandatory Recitals (quarterly or bi-annually)

Lesson Focus

- Piano basics (rhythm, technique, notes, theory, chords and scales)
- Sight-reading emphasis over memorization
- Improvisation and accompanying singers
- Playing for enjoyment, stress relief, and spiritual connection

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FAQ: All the Details

20 minutes daily practice strongly encouraged. If students do not adopt a reasonable practice schedule then the chance that they will become dissatisfied with piano increases (contrary to what they may think). This is because without practice they will quickly forget anything covered in lessons. The result is that they get discouraged because lesson time is spent in review instead of exciting progress and growth.

We all need to feel we are making progress and can meet our goals. I reserve the right to drop students who do not adopt a reasonable practice schedule within two (2) months of beginning lessons. I do this because it is a waste of money to continue paying for lessons if the student is not practicing.

Punctuality is required. If a student is late, the cost of the lesson is the same, and the end time is the same. Students cannot be successful if they do not arrive on time, and paying for a full lesson and only receiving 15-20 minutes is insufficient time for me to provide the value needed for students to make progress, find joy in playing, and have success. For this reason, I suggest that students plan to arrive 5 minutes early so that they can come and sit down, and then jump in as soon as the student in front of them is finished.

Students will keep a piano practice log. The purpose of a piano practice log is two-fold. First, I will write down their piano assignment for practice at the end of lessons. I will also include reminders and instructions to parents/guardians, as necessary. That way the students have the information and will not forget, and parents can easily check up on what the student is supposed to be doing. Secondly, parents will be required to sign off on the practice log and students will bring the signed log back and present it at the beginning of their next lesson.

Students who keep a faithful piano practice log will be given incentives and bonuses over time for their consistent effort. This may include: stickers, pencils, erasers, or other larger piano themed items as students reach piano log milestones. Students who complete learning milestones will also be rewarded.

Students will complete Music Theory work. Music theory is the backbone of learning any music instrument, as well as singing. Students need to learn how to read the notes, understand the rhythms, understand finger distances, and other music notation. Music theory is not hard and the concepts grow with the piano level. Music theory must be completed outside of regular piano lessons and is not included in the daily 20-minute piano practice time. It is separate. This is important because some music theory requires the student to play a worksheet after having completed it. This is part of Music Theory, not the daily piano practice.

Lessons are paid monthly. Over the years, it has been my experience that paying per lesson, weekly, is a hassle for me as the teacher, and a disservice for parents and students. Checks and cash are easily forgotten when it is an every-week thing. As well, I have found that when the day gets full and busy, students (and parents too) tend to bow out and miss several lessons in a row (because there is no money on the line). This is time that I could be using for another student, and therefore unfair to me as the teacher, and it is also unfair to the enrolled student who keeps canceling because he/she is not making any progress. Therefore, to avoid the financial hassle, and to meet the purpose of successful instruction, lessons are paid for at the beginning of each month. There are no refunds for absences or misses within a given month after the monthly payment has been made*+**.

*If a student becomes exceptionally ill and must miss several lessons, I will deal with these situations individually as they present themselves. Additionally, if there is a real emergency (sudden severe injury or sudden family death), I will deal with these situations on an individual basis. Otherwise, my policy, in general, stands.

**If you have travel arranged, and let me know as far in advance as you can (hopefully at least a full week before the coming month), I can adjust your monthly fees prior to payment. Thank you!

Lesson books and other materials must be purchased by parents/student. I do not provide lesson books or materials. This is because lesson books and materials are personalized by student and teacher markings starting with the very first lesson. Those markings are unique to each student. I encourage parents to get “new” copies of books. However, if you opt for used books (which is totally fine), you are responsible for going through them and erasing all previous markings. In some cases, this may include the need for white out. Books must be clean before I can use them in lessons.

Teacher Vacations/Sickness/Emergency. If I need to cancel a lesson, I will notify students as far in advance as I can, and the fees for those months will be adjusted accordingly. I will either charge less that month, apply paid fees to the coming month, or refund money as needed. If the absence is mine, not the

students, I will not charge. If applicable, I will also provide projects and work to be completed in my absence. These will be presented and performed at the student's next lesson.

Students must be able to focus and concentrate for the duration of the lesson. If the student struggles with attention and focus, these issues should be addressed *before* signing up for lessons in a manner that allows them to handle 30 minutes of lesson. I have children that struggle with attention and focus, and so I understand the difficulty it puts on them. I do my best to keep lessons engaging, but the goal of the lesson is not entertainment. Therefore, it is imperative that students are prepared to pay attention and focus.

What I focus on in my piano lessons is piano playing capacity (taking them as far in learning as they want and are willing to go), **enjoyment, and spiritual fulfillment.** I highly stress that students must want to play and find joy in playing. If they do not enjoy learning and playing after a reasonable amount of time (despite some occasional learning discouragement as difficulty increases) I usually recommend them pursuing a different musical path.

As lessons are paid monthly, if a student desires to quit, I strongly encourage them to endure until at least the end of the month. This is not about the money, as much as it is for the student to hang in there and give piano a try. A lot of piano discouragement is overcome within a week or two if a student will press forward with determination and practicing. Practicing is a key component in feeling good about how it is going and finding enjoyment. It is usually a musical concept or increase in difficulty that leads to frustration and discouragement. Determination pays off.

When do piano slots open up so I can enroll a student? My goal is to get my kids playing at least at a high-intermediate level. That includes being able to play hymns and some complex rock/pop/classical pieces, and accompanying easier songs for singers. However, not everyone wants to play at that level, and as expected, students often tap out. Thus, potentially, at the end of each month, I will have slots open as kids quit or take a break**. If you would like to be on a sign-up for open slots, I can put you on a waiting list.

**If your child decides they just want a "break" from piano (3-6 months max), I will place them at the top of the waiting list so that they can get back in if after a short break they want to keep going. However, I cannot guarantee how soon (or when) an open slot will become available. I can only agree to put them at the top of the list, since they were previously a student. If a student takes more than 6 months off from lessons, their name will be entered at the bottom of the list and move up in a regular order.

30-minute lessons are encouraged. For students 8 and older, a 30-minute lesson is the minimum time possible for a lesson. Less than 30 minutes does not give the student enough time to learn and try before conquering new material for practice. ***60-minute lessons are prescribed only when I have the time slots open and specifically for those that want more guided practice help, more advanced instruction, or who feel they take longer to listen and process before being sent off on their own to practice and apply what has been taught.

Here's what a 30-minute and 60-minute lesson look like.

Time	30-minute lesson	Time	60-minute lesson
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First 10 minutes	Play songs from previous lesson Present practice log for validation and prizes Practice sight-reading and theory	First 20 minutes	Play songs from previous lesson Present practice log for validation and prizes. Practice sight-reading. <i>Discuss concerns from previous week's work</i>
Second 10 minutes	Learn new songs and theory	Second 20 minutes	Learn new songs and theory
Third 10 minutes	Practice new songs and theory with teacher in preparation for week of practice and application Teacher writes assignments in piano practice log	Third 20 minutes	Practice new songs and theory with teacher in preparation for week of practice and application <i>Extra practice time with teacher support</i> Teacher writes assignments in piano practice log

Mandatory Recitals will be a part of lessons as they provide opportunities for students to learn to perform and accompany. For most people, this is the bread-and-butter of playing the piano in life—to be able to play for one's own creativity and enjoyment, *and* to accompany others or play in musical ensembles and receive recognition and praise. Learning to play “in front of people” is a musical skill, and recitals help to develop that. There are lots of tricks and tips to deal with nerves. But there is no substitute for experience. I strongly encourage that parents plan for them in their busy schedules so that students can attend and parents (and invited friends and family) can support their pianist. Recitals provide a feeling of conquering and victory and success that cannot be duplicated in weekly lessons. Therefore, if students miss recitals they are more likely to lose motivation because they won't have these memorial events to mark their progress. Certificates of achievement and awards will also be given at recitals. Therefore, it is really important that students prepare for them, attend, and perform.

Recitals will most likely be held 2-3 times per year. Potential times include: February, May, September, October. I will not hold recitals during the months of November – December.

Recitals include opportunities for students to showcase what they've learned in the following four (4) areas:

- Sight-reading
- Accompanying
- Song-writing
- Performance