Keys of Distinction
et al.: Keys of Distinction

Sr. Carole Riley, David Allen Wehr and Kenneth Burky (seated)
Like the piano’s 88 keys, which work in harmony to make music, the members of the Piano Department combine their talents, creating a synergy that helps students develop into skilled professionals.

A broad spectrum of educational backgrounds, professional approaches and interests enables the piano faculty to identify and nurture the artistic identity of every student.

“We are lucky to have professors who are not only tremendous performers, but have diverse talent and are wonderful teachers,” said Kenneth Burky, piano department chair and director of undergraduate studies.

“While Sister Carole [Riley] teaches the relevance of professional conduct that the piano program is not only unique for its breadth, but it also attracts international attention for its depth.

For Burky, the range and expertise of the faculty really pay off because they collaborate so well. “We have a unique environment where we all work together and respect each other’s talent,” said Burky.

Through dialogue and cooperation, the faculty decides the academic direction of the department—a type of collegiality that Sister Riley, professor and director of graduate studies, believes is special about the Music School. “We show by our example that when we support each other, we all win,” Riley explained.

Approximately 10 years ago, members of the piano faculty traveled and brings the service-learning component, David Allen Wehr does a phenomenal job with performance majors,” Burky explained.

Two highly talented adjunct professors, Anoush Tchakarian and Natasha Snitkovsky, both trained at European conservatories, expose piano students to international perspectives and technique. The department’s strengths extend beyond classical piano through other adjunct faculty: Rebecca Rollet attracts students concentrating in harpsichord, Tony DiVittorio works with piano majors interested in contemporary music and Ron Bickel teaches jazz piano.

“Our faculty represents a variety of approaches, performing and pedagogical,” said David Allen Wehr, professor and Jack W. Geltz Distinguished Piano Chair. He added with Dean Edward Kocher to New York City to select Steinway pianos for the department—a purchase that marked a significant advancement for the school and the Piano Department.

With this purchase, the Mary Pappert School of Music moved to a higher level of prestige, becoming an All-Steinway school—a status shared by only a few institutions. “Being an All-Steinway School shows our commitment to quality,” Wehr said. “It shows our willingness to commit our resources to have the best instruments in the world.”

Having the world’s finest instruments and a diverse, highly accomplished faculty underscores the piano’s department commitment to provide a superior education to their students.

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