

Keys to *S*uccess

BY ANNA CATHERINE GREENE • PHOTOGRAPHY BY DJAMEL RAMOUL



PROMOTIONAL FEATURE



Justin Encienzo holds his winning trophy which he earned as a 5 year old.



Sisters Carolyn and Susan Imes rehearse a duet for a concert at The Villages.



Students call me "Madame Tough." I tell them, "if I'm tough on you now, you'll be good to yourself in a performance."

FIVE YEAR OLD Justin Encienzo held his breath as he awaited the evening's announcement as to who the winning pianists would be. One of the youngest — and smallest — in his division, Justin had competed against 38 other young pianists that morning some from as far away as Tampa and Miami, in the "Primary I" level at the Florida State Federation of Music Clubs Festival held in Jacksonville.

Justin studies at The Ocala Piano Conservatory with Leslie Hammes. Hammes, a pianist herself since age 5 and a piano teacher for more than 25 years has clearly demonstrated her ability to produce excellence in piano performers. Still an active pianist, she holds both a Baccalaureate degree and Artist's Diploma as well as an Ed. M. from Harvard. Prior to opening the Conservatory in Ocala, a student of hers earned runner up in the American Music Scholarship Competition in Cincinnati, Ohio, where she herself, had been runner up in 1968.

Passionate about teaching, Hammes opened the Ocala Piano Conservatory in 2002. The program of study at the Ocala Piano Conservatory differs from the way most other piano lessons work. Based on a model of teaching principles and techniques learned while studying at Wasson Studio in Dayton, Ohio, her rigorously comprehensive program requires a commitment that, in addition to one private lesson a week, students attend bi-weekly Master Classes and at least two classical recitals a year. In the Master Classes, students learn to perform and listen to other perform. They also learn theory, history, sight-reading, and ear training. Also required is participation in two nationally sponsored graded events where student performance is judged only against a standard of excellence. Typically, all earn a superior or superior plus. "I want them to

learn to play the piano — not just take piano lessons," Hammes said of her program, "and this is the best way I know how to make that happen." Her results have been impressive: Three years ago, Conservatory student Ryan Pagels won several awards locally including the Central Florida Symphony Guild scholarship and a piano performance scholarship to Stetson University. Two years ago, in his first Federation State Finals competition Michael Jennings won "Honorable Mention" in his category. This was especially remarkable as he was up against many seasoned performers who already won or placed for six or more years.

And now it was Justin's turn. Tired from the long day that followed the morning competition, Justin occupied himself with a computer game and didn't even hear his name announced as the winning performer. Of course his ecstatic parents did! Amidst spontaneous applause and cheering, Justin took the stage to receive his winning trophy. ■

For more information call the Ocala Piano Conservatory, LLC 352.207.1461