

Laramie Piano Club gets its hands dirty, learns by doing
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Over 50 years ago, the Laramie Piano Club formed on the basis that getting your hands dirty was a great method of learning.

Founded in 1951 by the Laramie Piano Teachers Association, the goal of the club was to give piano teachers and other people a chance to understand music through self-expression rather than just through listening.

"You have the right (as you have with Shakespeare) to interpret it for yourself," a 1951 entry in the club's record book says.

Just under 25 members were part of the founding group, which included Fauneil Fellhauer as president, Gertrude McKay as vice president and F. L. Nussbaum as secretary and treasurer.

The club met once a month except during the summer, with the members taking turns hosting programs at their own house. The music was selected and played by some of the group members.

Dues were 50 cents when the club started, but they increased to \$1 in the 1960s. The group spent the dues mostly on postage, stationary, flowers for performances and, of course, their biggest expenditure; music.

The first meeting on March 5, 1951, garnered nearly the whole club.

"The first meeting held at the home of Mrs. F.L. Nussbaum, was devoted to music written in the very early period beginning about 1350," a March 15, 1951, Laramie Boomerang article says.

At the first meeting, Mary Evelyn Gunn played early 1350s pieces followed by the music of Frescobaldi and Turini played by Norah Willett. Fellhauer, Barbara Rodermel and Margaret McGaw completed the program by playing short numbers by early English composers Byrd and Farnaby, according to the article.

Most composition choices were always themed. The group went on a Beethoven spree from Dec. 1952 to May 1952, playing composition after composition of Beethoven pieces.

They then moved to Schubert for several months and then to Chopin and then Mendelssohn. They would not always choose a composer. They also focused on particular types of music, such as on Feb. 4, 1957, when they turned their focus to French music.

Some meetings would begin with a talk on a composer or interpretation of the music by one of the members.

They sometimes had talks on the composers or styles or interpretation.

Even to the last record of their meetings in early 1964, the group always had about 15-20 members attend.

Throughout their many meetings, their overriding goal was to find out the composer's purpose, and to do this, they must play.

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