

# The Anatomy of an Academy

Harmony Road piano method comes to Eugene

In this economy, opening a business of any nature is a courageous act. Opening a business dedicated to the arts is even bolder. But opening a business devoted solely to the teaching of an art form may be one of the most intrepid endeavors a person can undertake in this country right now. *EW* caught up with Susanne Reis, director of the Eugene Piano Academy, to discuss what it's like to truly invest in the arts.

**How far back does your history with piano go?**

I started playing when I was five years old, and I took lessons until the end of high school. I became a business major in college and after the first year figured out that I really didn't like it. I started taking piano classes again, and then I knew. I didn't know what I was going to do but I knew that it was going to be with piano.

**How did you decide you wanted to open a piano academy?**

After working with children and seeing the lights go on in their minds when they really learn, I was really inspired to do something like this. The teaching I do now is the kind of teaching



PHOTO BY DANTE ZUÑIGA-WEST

I wish I'd had as a kid. I knew I wanted to make a music school and a school solely dedicated to teaching piano. I came to Oregon to study pedagogy and get my masters at the university, and that was all part of the plan.

The harmony-based music program

(Harmony Roads Music), which is a program based out of Clackamas, Oregon, also helped me with my vision and the methods I use here. It's a wonderful curriculum and when I found it, I knew that that was the exact thing I would be using in my academy.

**Can you describe the method?**

It's somewhat based on the Yamaha method. It involves a lot of aural training. A lot of singing and a lot of experiencing music before actually playing it, so that your ears are what guide you. If someone starts at the age of two, by the time they are six or seven, there's a ninety percent chance they will have developed perfect pitch.

Really, what the method does is create all-around pianists and not just someone who needs to read the notes to play.

**Why did you choose to build your academy in Eugene?**

That's a really good question. I noticed that there was a niche for it here. Eugene has a really big appreciation for the arts. It is one of the few smaller cities that has a really big support group for the arts. I saw that there were a few music schools but not really a lot that cater to toddlers or young kids. I saw that opening and it made sense to start up here.

There's not a whole lot of places using Harmony Road method, either. Most schools are very traditional and this is an alternative to that.

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