

# The Healing Power of Music: Clavinova Connection

By Takako Hayase ('98 BM, '06 DMA Piano)

In May 2007, the CCM Preparatory Department, along with three Cincinnati-area partners—the Council on Aging of Southwestern Ohio, Colerain Township Senior Life Journeys and the Over the Rhine Senior Center—launched a new music education program targeted to seniors: **Clavinova Connection**. The program, an innovative course developed by the Yamaha Corporation, employs state-of-the-art Yamaha Clavinova keyboards and a user-friendly educational technique to introduce the art of piano-playing to novice musicians.

Dr. Takako Hayase, CCM Prep faculty member and Clavinova Connection instructor, describes the hoped-for—and real—impact this new program has on its participants.

“What a great way to start my weekend! It lifts me up and I feel good!” exclaimed Lillie Robinson after her first Clavinova Connection experience. Depression is a common problem among retirees, but Clavinova Connection is a simple solution for many retirees like Lillie. This is an ideal program to maintain their social interactions, as well as physical and mental exercises to keep them busy and healthy.

There are 78.2 million baby boomers living in the U.S. The U.S. Census Bureau notes that the first wave of boomers reached the age of 60 in 2006, and the numbers continue to increase by 330 people every hour. What are these individuals' retirement plans? Have they already found something to fill the new space in their daily lives?

Recognizing retirees' growing need to create and connect, three organizations in Cincinnati (Colerain Township Senior Life Journeys, Over the Rhine Senior Center and CCM's Preparatory Department) have established a partnership with

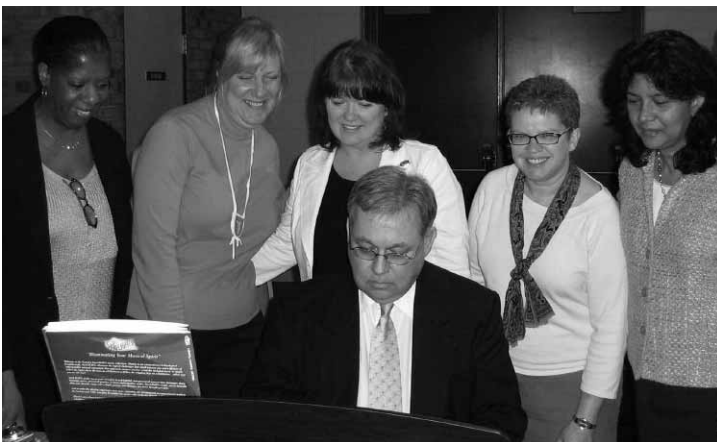


Clavinova Connection participants Lillie Robinson and Donald Withers

the Council on Aging of Southwestern Ohio. Together, they have launched Yamaha's Clavinova Connection program on a local level.

Clavinova Connection was developed by Dr. Barry Bittman, a neurologist, scientist and researcher at the Body-Mind Wellness Center in Meadville, Pennsylvania. He authored several research projects, including one that measured stress reduction levels in Clavinova Connection participants. In the 32 participants, 19 of the 45 markers within their “stress” genes were reduced. Moreover, in many cases, this program has assisted patients and medical staff to reduce everyday stress and symptoms of burnout.

Bittman's research forms the foundation of the Clavinova Connection philosophy. Each Clavinova Connection lesson consists of several components: singing, physical stretching, meditation, and drum and sound improvisation. Participants also learn a weekly “Song of the Day” on their Yamaha Clavinova digital pianos. Each section of the class is designed to build confidence and self-esteem, while enhancing relaxation and well-being. Students do not need to take the classes consecutively; different students may show up from week to week within their appropriate class level. The only requirement is to have fun.



Left to right: Cheryl Ware, Over the Rhine Senior Center director; Lori Frazer, Yamaha piano division marketing specialist; Kay Klosterman, Colerain Township Senior & Community Center director; Keith Korman, Colerain Township Senior & Community Center trustee; Amy Dennison, CCM Prep; Arlene de Silva, Council on Aging of Southwestern Ohio chief operating officer

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The highlight of the class is the “Song of the Day.” During the song, a “guide light” (or “Starlight”) above each Clavinova key lights up for students to follow, so they know which key to press. Since the keys light in the appropriate order, the students can push the key as it lights up to make familiar sounding music. This activity does not require knowledge of formal musical notation. While a music score is given to students who wish to read notes and fingering, others may simply use one finger, following the lights throughout the song. By definition, Level 1 allows only the right hand to play a single-line melody as the keyboard accompanies them with MIDI orchestration. By the time students reach the highest level (Level 3), they are able to play music using both hands.

In its local incarnation, there are currently three sections of Clavinova Connection courses offered to the students, with a maximum of six students per session. On the first day of class, I interviewed students regarding their interest in participation. Almost everyone said they have always wanted to play the piano and decided to give it a try. Most of them introduced themselves as complete beginners and showed a slight hesitation in using the computerized keyboard, playing or improvising in front of classmates, and shyness from being unable to read music. Within a few minutes, the attitude of “giving it a try” quickly changed to spontaneous smiles and confidence. After the first class the students expressed joy, satisfaction and excitement. This was evident in subsequent e-mails exchanged between the project committee members, instructors and Yamaha. Comments included:

*(They) have just completed their first session...they are all still singing and humming!*

*The participants really feel good about their potential and abilities with the Clavinova. This is such a wonderful musical program for the senior adults in Cincinnati and its surrounding communities!*

*Some of the OTR (Over the Rhine Senior Center) seniors were not feeling well today and didn't want to participate. (But, with a little encouragement that conceded.) After the class was over, they all said they were happy they did. Talk about outcomes! They were smiling, feeling better and in a much better mood. I think class took their minds off of how they were physically feeling.*

We at Cincinnati Clavinova Connection look forward to seeing more seniors join us on our musical journey. Although we are still in the beginning stages, we plan on watching the program grow in its quest to serve the senior community and to aid healthy lifestyles. Ultimately, some students may even progress to private piano lessons. Some who may have stopped and forgotten about piano playing may be able to regain their skills and even perform or teach in the foreseeable future. As we have already made a lot of people happier and the word is spreading, our community is confident in the success of the program. Clavinova Connection—the only known side effect is having fun!

*Dr. Takako Hayase is currently on the faculty of the CCM Preparatory Department. In addition to her CCM degrees, she holds a master of music degree in piano performance from the Eastman School of Music. She has studied piano pedagogy under her advisor, CCM faculty member Michelle Conda.*

