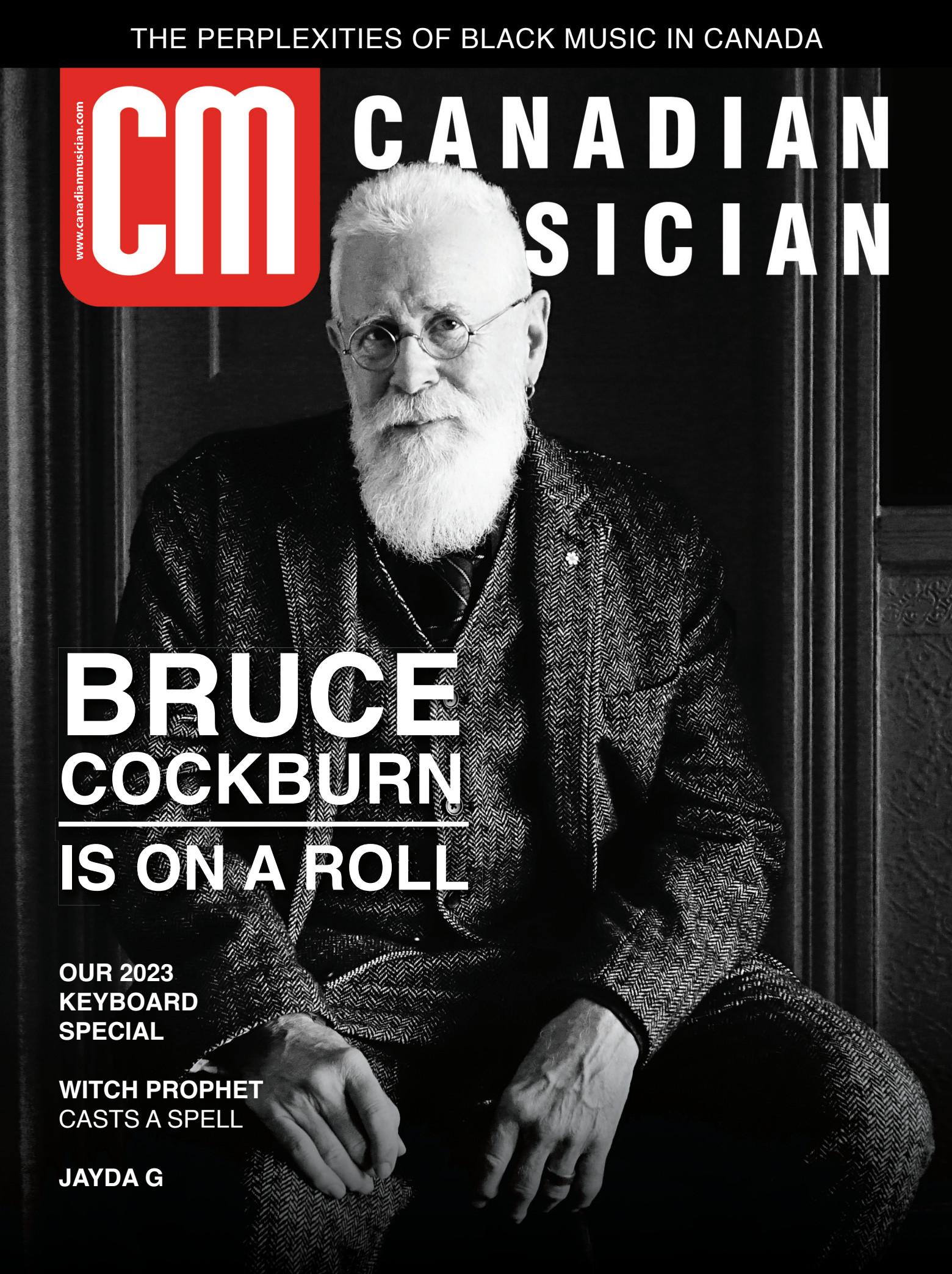


THE PERPLEXITIES OF BLACK MUSIC IN CANADA

www.canadianmusician.com

CM

**CANADIAN
MUSICIAN**



**BRUCE
COCKBURN**

IS ON A ROLL

**OUR 2023
KEYBOARD
SPECIAL**

**WITCH PROPHET
CASTS A SPELL**

JAYDA G

***CANADIAN
MUSICIAN'S
2023***

**KEYBOARDS
SPECIAL**

BY MANUS HOPKINS

In our last few issues, we've had panels of drummers, bassists, and guitarists share their gear preferences, delve into their practice routines, and offer tips for aspiring players on their instruments. Now, it's time to show the piano players of the country some love. We rounded up blues legend Kenny 'Blues Boss' Wayne, 'Canada's Prince of Piano' Martin Mayer, sought-after jazz piano instructor Adrean Farrugia, and Juno Award-winner Laila Biali to show that Canadians know their keys.

These interviews have been edited for length and clarity.

CM: Tell me about how you got into playing piano and why you fell in love with the instrument.



WAYNE: I took my lessons; we had a piano as I was coming up, and of course, I took lessons from my choir director. That was kind of my start. But you know, having the instrument around the house and sitting there banging on it... my mother and I used to do sort of a four-hand type of thing, kind of a boogie. That got me interested in the piano. And then of course, a lot of records I heard had nice piano stuff, and I wanted to be like that. Ray Charles, Fats Domino, people like that, piano players. So that was my first interest. And like I said, I was part of the youth choir. And I started playing piano for them. And that's when I started really falling in love with a piano. I tried a few other instruments but that seemed to work obviously, because I had access to one. That was my first love and still is—we fell in love and we're still in love.



MAYER: I think it was grade four or five, elementary school, I was in choir class. And I remember multiple times during those classes, just being really enamored with the accompanist and how she played and the sound that she was able to coax out of the piano, and the choir room. So, I remember going to her after one of the classes and then saying, 'Hey, you know, I'd love to learn the song that we've been singing, but I want to learn it on piano, so can I get the sheet music from you for it?' And that was my first introduction into the world of copyright. She told me she couldn't give it to me because it's copyrighted sheet music. And so that was kind of a bummer. But then later that week, she comes up to me with this manila folder. And she said, 'You didn't get this from me.' So, I open it up, and the music was in there. And I remember going home and saying to my parents that I really, really wanted to learn how to play piano and they said, 'Okay, well, let's give it a try and see what happens.' And I jumped in; I think it was maybe two or three months later, we sort of

spent some time looking for a piano teacher and some recommendations. And it was just off to the races from there. I was so gung-ho with it. And [my teacher] saw that I had such potential that she basically put me through four grades of Royal Conservatory in my first year. So that was my first foray into the piano.



FARRUGIA: My dad's a musician. He's a drummer. And my grandpa on my mom's side was a fiddler. I have a couple of uncles who play guitar. So, there was definitely a lot of music around me when I was a kid. It's kind of a funny story, I guess. I used to go to church when I was a kid, and they would have these sort of hangs in the church basement after mass where all the little old ladies would make cookies and coffee, and people would just hang out and talk and stuff. They had a piano down there, and I remember, the priest sat down and played the left-hand part of 'Heart and Soul,' you know, that famous [plays left-hand part]. The old lady sat down



KENNY WAYNE



MARTIN MAYER



ADREAN FARRUGIA



LAILA BIALI

and went [plays right-hand part]. And I just remember being really fascinated; I really remember it grabbing my attention. I was about 12. I went over, and I was watching them really intently, just fascinated with the instrument. And I think there was something cool about the piano because I could see everything. It's not like the illusive saxophone or even a guitar where you just see the fingers moving around—there was something that really made sense about the piano. They stopped playing and then I just kind of sat down and started plinking around and then I started playing the left-hand part and playing the right-hand part together. And I remember the priest was like, 'Oh, Adrean, you play piano?' And he's like, 'How long have you been playing?' And I was like, 'Oh, this is my first time,' and I remember then all of a sudden, everyone made a big deal about it, that I could play that. So, I guess when you're a little kid, you're trying to find your identity. And I guess for me, I found something that felt like, maybe I'm good at this, because all these grownups are making a big deal about something. So, I got kind of excited.

And I think the piano was just the instrument that happened to be there, so I think I fell in love with the instrument just because it was something that maybe clicked with my brain the way my own brain works. I'm very visually oriented, and the piano keyboard is very, very visual.



BIALI: There's a little story there that my mom tells me because I don't have a recollection of this. My mom

tells me that when I was three-and-a-half, I climbed up onto the bench in front of the family piano and started to play the melody to "Sesame Street" by ear. And so, she was trying to decide at the time, do we put Laila in gymnastics, or do we put her in piano lessons? Because this was in the early 1980s, and parents were not necessarily putting their kids in everything under the sun; you had to choose one extracurricular activity. And so, she was torn, because I was also a very bouncy child. But then that happened, and so piano it was.

In terms of falling in love with it

myself, I have a big memory of my mom playing church hymns—my mom raised four daughters. My dad was the breadwinner; it was a traditional family. And so, [my mom] was a real busybody, but every now and then she would go over to the piano and just play these simple, beautiful church hymns. And there was such a feeling of peace that would just descend on the house. And it felt I could sense as a child, the pleasure that she derived from the instrument, and I think that cast a little bit of a spell for me.

CM: What is your most prized or most coveted instrument?



WAYNE: I like the Steinways; I mean, I've never owned one, but I have performed on one. Bösendorfer is another one that I've played. It seems to be the Yamaha C7 is a very popular one I enjoy. However, some of the old honky-tonk blues pianos, and it depends on what type the setting is that really helps us see, like a saloon

upright they call it, is a really nice one that's all broken in and the keys all work, but the feel of it, it's just wear and tear. It just captures the essence of the room and the era. So, I like that.

There's not really a brand that I use, but I do like Yamaha. I do like Steinways and Bösendorfer. I have played some other pianos that were actually nice where I don't remember the names of them. So sometimes, you know, the piano has been played. And [if] it's really broken in it's really a treat to play. Some of the brand-new ones are a little bit stiff, so it has to be broken in. So, I like the pianos with a nice, soft touch. Because I've been playing mostly digital piano, just at the clubs and then just moving it around; moving a piano around is a mess. A lighter touch is something I prefer, but I do like the standard grand pianos. When I was coming up, we had a smaller one, but my mom had it redone. And so that's kind of why I got my start.



MAYER: I would say right now, my most prized instrument is my Roland AX-1 bright red keytar, that is personally signed and dedicated to me by John Tesh, who's the guy that actually got me into this style of music. I had seen his PBS show, back in the 1990s, and I have not heard music like that before. I was classically trained, and I was listening to stuff by you know, John Williams, Elton John, David Foster, and those types of artists. But I'd never heard that sort of marriage of modern piano with the traditional orchestra, so that keytar is hung up in my studio and it's really cool that the guy who inspired me 30 years ago was not only kind enough

to sign it for me, but now I can actually call a friend.



FARRUGIA: I mean, I love my own instrument. I have a Bechstein Concert 8. It's actually an upright piano, but it's probably the best upright piano you can buy. And I love it because I've had the time to develop a relationship with it. So, that's always been one of the challenges as a piano player versus again, say a horn player or a bassist, is they get to take their instrument out with them. Whereas we have to typically go and play what's there. So, I do have my favorite brands. I'm a huge fan of German Bechstein pianos. The likelihood of finding one of those on a gig is incredibly rare, though, I bet, especially in North America. I do tend to like a nicely tuned Steinway that's nicely regulated. And also, I'm a big fan of Japanese Kawai Pianos. You see a lot of Yamahas and they're great instruments, but I find they don't quite have as much personality as some of the other brands, and you can kind of play on a Yamaha and it immediately gives you that nice sound, but once you start exploring there sometimes isn't a tonne of depth, whereas I definitely prize a piano that the more you play it, the more you can discover different sounds that can be coaxed out of it. The Italian Faziolis are nice, too. So that might be a coveted instrument only because I think it's the world's most expensive piano.



BIALI: Wow, that's a great question. Oh, my gosh, and it's so interesting you should ask that, because I

have been taken to several pianos of note around the world. So, you know, I remember when Noble Street Studios here in Toronto got their first Fazioli, it was like a big deal. 'You're going to get to play this fabled Italian piano, like the Lamborghini of pianos.' And I liked it for sure. And then in Berlin, I was brought into the Bechstein showroom, kind of their global headquarters and got to try some of them out. But it's interesting, I actually am a Yamaha artist. And while in many ways, nothing beats a good Steinway, in my opinion, or Bösendorfer, I do really love a good Yamaha. And I've encountered quite a few.

I'm not answering your question [laughs]. Do I have a dream piano? No, I can't say that I do, necessarily. But if I did, it would be one that is very even from a tactile place, because you can find instruments depending on how they've been maintained over the years that feel a little bit sticky, or that are kind of a heavier action. So, I like something that's right in the middle. Nice and even and the sound has to sing; it has to have a very beautiful sound. Some people like a bright sound, especially jazz musicians. I do not—I like something that, sure, has some high end, but isn't overly broad. But then it's got to have that richness from the bottom end. Ping in the high end and richness from the bottom end.

CM: To you, what makes a great piano player?



WAYNE: One that plays piano with passion. When they have passion, there's a way that your fingers touch.



I talked to some of the old guys that play, and they say, 'play it passionately.' And not pound on it; some people pound on it to get their frustrations out on the piano, or instruments in general, actually banging on the piano, like a little kid would bang on a piano. But playing passionately, playing as if you're massaging person, that's sort of another way that I sort of use the phrase 'passionately,' that makes a great piano player. And it says things to you when you're passionate to it. I mean, it's kind of hard to explain, but it sort of works with you. And instead of struggling, trying to get it to do something for you, it will do amazing things if you have patience and passion.



MAYER: I would say emotion. Two things: emotion and playing the music. Don't play the notes, don't play what's on the page, take what's on the page as the base, like what a great recipe is. Any chef will tell you a great recipe is a base. I mean, you just take your knowledge, and you take your

expression, and you expand on that to make it yours. So, I would say my biggest thing is, the more you evoke emotion, the more you play the music as opposed to playing the notes, that is the biggest thing.



FARRUGIA: Well, I think what makes a great piano player is largely the same as just what makes a great musician. You know, it's somebody who can play from a space where you can hear that they're connected to something, connected to the music. There's a sort of a fusing that happens when a performer is connected to the music, I mean, athletes call it being in the zone. So, you know, a great musician is a person who's playing from that connected space. I think when we're young, we get excited about the things we're learning; we learn a lot of cool chords, we work on playing fast, and then when we perform we, in the beginning, we're trying to kind of show off what we can do, which is, in many ways, I think, a natural part of the ma-

turing process, but it's very ego-driven, and it doesn't have a lot of depth. And then I think, when you hear truly great artists, there's some depth in their playing that has to do with the fact that they're really connected to the music.

Piano player-specific, somebody who knows how to play the instrument. There's a lot of factors that go into playing piano. There's learning the coordination between the hands. So, there's just the technique. But then I think the rarer thing that a lot of the truly great pianists possess is the ability to make the piano sing. I mean, it seems counterintuitive to make an instrument that's percussive hammers hitting a string sing, but it's this attention and this ability to really create a wide variety of tones. So, I have heard, for instance, in my humble opinion, piano players who have a tonne of technique and a real command of the coordination between the hands, but you can tell that they haven't spent a lot of time really like sitting there studying how to coax the 50 different tones, you can get out of one note. And to me, that adds a real level of

depth. And when you hear a truly great pianist, they can get a lot of colors out of the piano. That's something I really value for sure.



BIALI: Oh my gosh, that's such a great question. Well, it's interesting. It's interesting because of course, there are fabulous technicians out there, people who just irrefutably play the instrument in their sleep and can achieve extraordinary things from a technical place. But to me, it's almost like... there's a verse in the Bible that talks about how if you have certain things, but without love, it's like a clanging cymbal—well for me, it's like, if you're going to play piano, you can play it incredibly well and at a super high level. But if there isn't that heart, that feeling that depth of expression, and the sense that the piano is an extension of the person playing it on almost a heart and soul level, if that isn't there, then I'm left dry; I'm left cold. But I think some level of technique is always great. But some of the most connected and impactful players aren't even necessarily trained pianists, they just have a voice, and the instrument immediately cuts to the heart.

CM: Tell me about your training.



WAYNE: I went straight into gigging, because I took lessons, I started at eight years old in San Francisco, and then we moved to Los Angeles when I was 11 or 12. And that was going to continue, but I think my folks couldn't afford to keep the lessons going. And

then the person that I was referred to wasn't quite in the Central Los Angeles area. So, I stopped that. So, I will say that the gigging came in, and listening to a lot of the little groups that I played with musicians on the block, they had records, and no one had sheet music. So, it was basically listening to it and playing it for the piano. The saxophone players, for some reason, they seemed to have music [*laughs*]. But anyway, the piano players, we couldn't find the sheet music for the piano parts to it. So that's why I acquired playing by ear. Along with that, a lot of the choir didn't have the music either, especially the youth choir, who didn't want to do the traditional hymns of the book, they wanted to take the hymns and kind of update them to do their own way. So that required listening, and just picking up on stuff by ear. And that's what I do now, although I've had chord charts and stuff like that, but not really official charts.



MAYER: So, with Royal Conservatory of Music, in my first year, I did those four levels. I got up to Royal Conservatory grade nine and did grade three history and harmony. And at that point, I realized that even though I was classically trained, I was never going to be a classical musician. It was just not in my DNA. This was in Edmonton at the time, though I'm based in Vancouver now. I studied music in Edmonton even though I was born in Prague, then I went to MacEwan University and studied jazz piano in a program that was founded by Tommy Banks, who is and was one of the premier Canadian pianists.

It was while I was there, that it sort

of looked up and said, 'I have to do something to get people's attention in this industry.' So that's when I took out a \$35,000, loan and decided to produce a debut concert. And that's where the rest of the career trajectory came from. I was in university studying all this stuff. And amidst all of that, taking this big risk, but I mean, going into piano was a risk by itself. I had no idea whether I was going to be good, I had no idea whether I was going to like it. God knows there were times where I was like, 'I don't want to practice, I want to be outside.' It's those teenage years you look back on and go, 'I don't consider myself classical pianist even though I am classically trained.' And so, the benefit of that is that when I want to play pieces that are more challenging, I have the technique and the technique training in order to undertake that.



FARRUGIA: I think I started in the way that a lot of people do. There was a local lady who taught piano, and she was recommended by a friend's mom who was also studying, so I started learning with her and it was the Royal Conservatory program, which, in these parts, a lot of young pianists take. So, I got a classical foundation, which I was really grateful for, and then, after a certain time with my original teacher, I moved on to a teacher for more advanced students. I went through with the Royal Conservatory thing. I lived in Hamilton at the time, so the closest music program to home that was reputable was Mohawk College. So, I went there as a classical major. And then within the first month, I started seeing all the jazz players and



kind of thought what they were doing was a lot cooler. I would always be practicing classical music alone in a little piano cubicle, but they'd be jamming together and stuff and hanging out and laughing and cheering each other on, so I wanted to switch over to jazz. Halfway through the first semester, I asked them if I could switch to jazz and they said, 'Well, you don't really have any jazz experience.' And they said to go and learn how to play over a twelve-bar blues and then come back and talk to us. So, I went and feverishly practiced twelve-bar blues for a couple of weeks. And then I came back, and I auditioned. And they let me in, so I did the applied diploma program at Mohawk, then I went on to U of T after for undergrad, and then ultimately did a masters degree in composition at York University. Those years were amazing for meeting people, building a social network that became a professional network, and learning from amazing teachers. But I do think that the best learning I've had has been through these private lessons with, like, a visiting artist coming to Toronto

to perform. I'd go there, to their gig, and then I'd yank at their sleeve and say, 'Can I get a lesson with you while you're here?' That was huge. And then also, I used to visit this legendary drum teacher. His name is Jim Blackley. Many of the greatest drummers in Canada have studied with him. And he used to have jam sessions every Friday at his house, and I would go every week and get to play with this master in his 70s, who would completely obliterate us on the drums. It felt like that kind of learning where if you want to learn to swim, somebody just throws you in the water. I wouldn't do that to a kid. I think it could traumatize them. So, that's the crux of my education. And then of course, I think the cornerstone of good education is teaching somebody how to teach themselves. So, a lot of years of listening and transcribing music off albums, Herbie Hancock, and Keith Jarrett and Bill Evans, transcribing what they're playing, and really trying to understand it and internalize it, thinking about it like trying to learn a language. That's my training in a nutshell.



BIALI: I was raised through the conservatory method, Royal Conservatory of Music. And I started at three-and-a-half. And when I was four, I officially started lessons and kind of made my way up the ranks through grade 10, and actually wanted to be a concert pianist. And I had a very devoted classical piano teacher in West Vancouver. So, then I was actually in a car accident when I was 15. And I did get injured enough that I was no longer able to pursue classical music at the level that I had dreamed of. And that was when I happened to switch high schools and ended up at high school in North Vancouver that had a really great jazz band. And my teacher introduced me to some incredible jazz pianists—Chick Corea, Keith Jarrett, Herbie Hancock, and Renee Rosnes, who's Canadian, now living in New York City. And she'd actually gone to the same high school and studied with him a couple decades before me. And that started to pull me towards jazz, but at that time, I was playing mostly with my left hand, which felt really

awkward. You see, it's like 50 percent of your facility if you're only using one hand. So, it was a tough time to be transitioning and using it and learning a new language and a new genre. But it was definitely a formative part of my training. And then I went to Humber College, and because I was still dealing with my arm injury, I went as a singer and as a composer, but continued to explore my voice as a piano player.

CM: Do you have a typical practice routine these days?



WAYNE: No, actually, I don't. I get more into song-writing. So, I like the songs. I mean, I would say probably

twice, three, or four times a week, I probably would just play the piano without thinking about writing a song. But mostly when I sit at the piano, and when I start doing that, a song kind of comes up. So, in writing a song myself, I'm just doodling on the piano, just running scales or just keeping my fingers limber. A song comes up. And so, I don't concentrate and then get a piece of paper and start writing. And I do allow the parts in a band for it, like the bass, and then put a rhythm to it, and chord changes and lyrics. I spend a lot more time writing a song that I do practicing just piano.



MAYER: The strange thing is that it's been four years since my last tour. And that is the longest time I've been

in between projects. When I think about practicing and warm up, obviously, I run scales and those types of

things to make sure that everything is moving, and, you're not going full head-on into something without warming up, because that's just a killer on the hands.

If you don't listen to the body, it can be very detrimental. So, my warm-up, I would say, would consist of the usual scales and scale progressions and all that sort of stuff, and then going into songs that I'm either currently playing and seeing if there's something I can do in terms of adjusting my interpretations or finding some different expressions here and there or going back into something that I might not have played in years, or finding a new piece of music that is challenging. One thing that is also fun to do sometimes, is just to go back to some of those very early days of classical pieces in Royal Conservatory because with that, you almost have to stick to what is there and you can still interpret it. But even something as simple as [Beethoven's] "Moonlight Sonata" is such a beautiful piece, but you have to have a certain depth, a certain patience; you can't rush through it, you have to actually sit and play with intention. I think that type of warm up and practice to me, is more beneficial than just sitting and doing scales for four hours.



FARRUGIA: I've got kind of an evolving warmup that's been evolving over the years. I guess my attitude is

practicing can be trying to strengthen something or keep something where it needs to be, but it's also about developing new skills. So obviously, there's certain things I practiced 10 years ago that I don't really feel are a useful use of my time to practice now, certain

scales and things like that. I have sort of a warmup that involves using all the fingers across a rhythmic grid exercise. So, you're sort of practicing moving your fingers, but you're also practicing with time against the metronome. Sometimes I'll get into playing some Johann Sebastian Bach; I just find it's one of the best ways to get the brain and the fingers working. And then largely practicing for me involves some repertoire that I'm working on. Often, it's a jazz standard that's just a single page. But it's really about exploring it, really sitting inside of it, trying to explore it harmonically, improvising over it, maybe exploring some cool arranging ideas, like if I were playing this on a gig, I might want to do it this way, you know. And then some time spent trying to get into the zone of composition. So, I'm always trying to write. That often involves just a bit of free improv, until I stumble on something that sounds kind of cool. And then I'll isolate it and start to play around with it. That's a real practical approach to composition. And then I'm always trying to do listening and transcribing, so I'm always trying to look for recordings that there's something intriguing about.

I like the old saying 'humans are like plants; you're either growing or you're dying, but there's nothing in between.' Instead of just trying to maintain, looking at paths for growth. My playing, my practicing is a lot less organized than it was when I was younger. I used to do this, then do this, then do that, but a lot of the time now I might just sit down and play. And sometimes I'll be playing and then I'll stumble on something, I'll be like, 'Oh, why did I stumble on that? Oh, that feels uncomfortable,' and then I'll isolate it, and then I'll come up with some



little exercise to work on. So, it's a real practical approach.



BIALI: It's what happens onstage! So, I always say that I'm largely on the wrong keyboard most of the time: my computer keyboard. Now that I kind of run my own business as it were, and lead a band, and I book my own tours. I have an agency but I'm essentially the tour manager and I'm always applying for grants and trying to drum up funding and I'm in front of my computer far more than I am the piano. So, I have to really take advantage of times when we're on the road. Working things out during soundcheck and then I also try to about once a year get out to the Banff Centre, which to me, is like my happy creative place. And that's when I'll finally get some focused time at the instrument. Usually, I'll write or arrange music for a new project. But you know, that's the real beautiful focus time of reconnection with the piano. I used to have exercises that I would do daily

back in my 20s, but now as a mom and radio host and businesswoman and with all these things going on, it takes a lot of discipline and focus to get to get to the instrument and to clear everything else out of the way so I can get to the instrument, which is probably what I should be doing first. Go to the instrument first!

CM: What tips would you give to aspiring players starting out on the piano?



WAYNE: I think there's basically, for me, two types of piano players: there's one that wants to write a song, which is a different approach, and then there's one that just wants to be an instrumentalist, another different approach. So, if you want to be an instrumentalist, then obviously you should know the scales, but you should also know, which I learned years ago, is that when you perform a song, a lot of piano players want to

think about a solo. You think about melodies, so you're not just playing scales. You think about melody and being able to hum your solos. So, I would suggest as an instrumentalist, I think you'd probably want to do some reading and that way you can learn from others' techniques. If you're a songwriter, you want to pick up things from your feet yourself. You don't have to be technical to be a songwriter. If you're an instrumentalist, you probably need to be a little bit more of a technician. And that depends on what genre of music you're in. If you're going to be involved in pop music, you probably don't, jazz you definitely do, blues you don't. So, you follow the genre of music and then you sort of go that direction, you listen to other piano players playing that type of music and see and learn some techniques and tricks from them. So, when we all started, we heard different people play. I think listening to other records, and if you're a reader, find some techniques from other piano players, and if you just want to go by feel then

I think listening to records and listening to people that you would like to play like, those are my tips.



MAYER: I can just see parents would hate me for this... I say that jokingly, of course, but the passion and the interest have to come from the player. No questions asked. If you have a parent saying, 'Well, yeah, I think you'd be really cool with this,' that's one thing. If you have a parent that tried piano when they were younger, and it didn't work for them, and that's the reason that they want you to do it, it's not going to work. I've seen so many people that have gone into trying play piano, trying to learn piano, and you can just see it, you can just feel it. And the problem with that is that feeling of 'I really don't want to be doing this,' then translates and goes into the music. And that's hard. Because when I say feel the music, express the music, it has to come from the place of passion. Play the music, don't play the notes.

So obviously, the first thing is, make sure it's something that you want to do 100 percent, and take your time and do it properly. I always recommend Royal Conservatory of Music. Yes, there are videos online that can show you. But for the love of God, or whomever you might believe in, do not fall prey to those courses where they say, 'You think you need years to learn how to play piano? I can teach you piano in 10 hours.' That just doesn't work. That's like suggesting a brain surgeon can be trained in 10 hours. So, passion for it is key, and for it to be your

own passion. Encouragement is one thing, but doing it for somebody else won't work during Royal Conservatory, and that's the training and doing it in the sort of old school approach. When you think of driving cars, you learn how to drive on a stick shift, because if you learn how to drive on a stick shift, you can drive an automatic, and if you're classically trained, you can either continue being a classical pianist or you can then have the foundation to go and play pop and jazz and whatnot. It's more challenging to say, 'I'm going to learn pop and jazz,' and then all of a sudden go, 'Well I want to learn classical music.' That's a bit backwards step that doesn't always work. That's not to say that it couldn't for somebody, but it doesn't always.



FARRUGIA: I think there's some cliché things. I could say that they're clichés because they're timeless

truths. If you want to be good at something, you have to work at it. Patience is a powerful mental state, because patience allows us to work on things in such a way where we're looking at what we're doing in the now instead of focused on the outcome. I'm a huge believer that your mindset is by far the most important part of any process; it's not just doing the work, it's also how you're how you're dealing with it. For example, student A is practicing, and they're excited, because they're really envisioning this future for themselves where they're going to be a successful musician, and they're going to have all these amazing adventures and experiences. And they're focused on

that. And their practicing is driven by that desire, and that belief, and that makes it a joyous process. Student B is practicing, and they're like, 'I really suck. I don't want to suck. I have to practice so I don't suck. If I don't practice, I'm going to be terrible, and people are going to laugh at me and think I'm a loser.' That's motivating practice through fear of an undesired outcome. So really spending time thinking about how to relate to this thing, do I believe it can be fulfilling for me, do I believe I can do well at it, do I look at someone that I see as successful and go, 'Why not me, I could be that'—so, start out on the instrument and do all the things that you need to do. Because it's pretty standard stuff, learning chords, learning scales, learning repertoire. But also, really focus on your mindset. Look at how you're relating to the process. Anybody who ever became great at something became great, because they believed they could. And that's one of the hardest things in the world to do is just actually believe you can be great. And so, start working on that from the beginning too, so that you don't get to the point where you've done all the work, you've got so much together and you're going 'I don't get it. Why am I still not fulfilled by this?' Well, it's because now you have to go and address your mindset, you know. So, I think that's a really huge part of the process, too. It's something I work on a lot with my own students just getting there, getting their head in a place where their thoughts are driving the process in a positive way, rather than slowing them down or even stopping them.



BIALI: Transcribe—check out the music that you love. If there’s a piano in there, in the mix, great.

See if you can pick out with the piano is playing, no matter what the genre. Obviously with classical, you’re not going to transcribe; there’s written music out there that you can purchase and learn, depending on your level of training. But I have found that one of the greatest ways to grow as a as a pianist to listen to what some of my favorite players are doing. And it can take a lot of time. But it’s a beautiful way to

discover new techniques and new voicings and new ways of expressing oneself with the piano.

I watch my son who’s 13, and he plays piano. And it’s fascinating to watch his evolution. And one of the things he does a lot is go on YouTube. And he loves gaming. And so, we’ll find YouTube channel videos, and some of them are slowed down hit songs or songs from the games that he loves that he’s playing, and he loves the music. And somebody will just sort of break it all down. And so, he will learn it that way. And so, I guess what’s so beautiful about this

day and age is that there’s no one right path. There are so many different ways to grow and achieve your goals as a player. So don’t get caught up in what you might think is the right way. There are many, many ways to get there. And at the end of the day, I think you have to find what most connects with you and keeps your joy and satisfaction alive in terms of your connection to the instrument.

Manus Hopkins is the Assistant Editor of Canadian Musician. He can be reached at mhopkins@nwcworld.com.