

Lara Saldanha Studio Policy

lara.saldanha1@gmail.com

282 Eldert St. Apt. 2C

Brooklyn, NY 11207

(513) 739-7725

This policy is effective for the 2024-2025 school year.

Education and Performing Background

I recently finished my doctorate at Stony Brook University, and am indebted to my teachers and mentors who have made me into the pianist I am today. My collegiate teachers include Christina Dahl at Stony Brook, Vladimir Valjarevic at Mannes, where I did my master's and artist diploma, and Alan Chow at Northwestern, where I did my undergraduate studies. My pre-college teachers were Inna Terekhov in Cincinnati, Ohio, Serguei Milstein at the Geneva Conservatory in Switzerland, and Neya Korsantia in Boston.

Apart from my teaching, I also prioritize leading an active performing life. I find that the process of practicing for performances leads to musical insights that enrich my teaching, and, conversely, the instruction I give my students provides clarity for myself on how best to prepare for performances.

Educational Philosophy

I believe that music lessons, when done right, are an invaluable contribution to the development of a young person. My lessons firstly emphasize the transferrable skills that can be taken from the practice of an instrument: love for the arts, good listening, time management, persistence, confidence, hard work, analytical thinking, problem-solving, and public presentation. I prioritize building music literacy early on, so the student has agency over their own learning process. Even the youngest student will start to build skills in reading rhythm, notes, and expressive notation. I value regular public performance both because it builds structure and motivation into lessons, and it provides a platform for even the youngest learner to experience public "speaking." I do challenge my students, because I want them to experience their fullest potential, but of course I do not believe in pushing a child to the point that they build negative associations with music. My goal is to instill a curiosity for music that the child will carry with them for the rest of their lives.

Expectations for Students and Parents

Most importantly: Students are expected to **practice** 6 days a week. Consistency is more important than duration of practice! Find a time of day that works for your child to practice every day and make it a habit. The lesson time in and of itself is not sufficient to make progress. The better the practice habit, the more rewarding of an experience piano lessons will be. Consistent failure to practice may result in termination of lessons.

Parents should **supervise the student's practice** to the degree necessary for their child. For some, it may be a simple reminder to practice, and for others it may be as involved as practicing with the child.

Parents are also responsible for **purchasing lesson materials**. Each child will need a lesson notebook in which I can write practice assignments. I will send links to other lesson books to the parent by email.

Parents are also responsible for **purchasing or renting an appropriate instrument** on which the child can practice at home. The minimum requirement is a weighted, 88-key digital keyboard, with a stand, bench, and damper pedal. However, after up to two years of lessons, I would recommend that a student transition to an acoustic instrument to develop the nuances of touch and sound.

If possible, it is my very strong preference that students play on an acoustic instrument from the beginning.

- Used pianos are often in very good condition and far more affordable than new instruments, and would be my recommendation to buy over new. They are less prone to soundboard cracks and other expensive repairs than new instruments.
- My recommendations for used piano stores, all small businesses without the markups of bigger piano shops, are Prosper Pianos, Big Wrench Piano Care, and Pianoland for uprights or grands, or NYC Piano for grands.
- There are fewer options for piano rentals, but the most commonly used is Piano Piano.
- Check Facebook Marketplace, Piano Mart, or Craigslist to buy directly from a piano owner (without the markup from a piano store.) I am happy to help you sort through listings to find an instrument in good condition. I would recommend hiring a piano technician (any of the below) to make sure there are no serious mechanical issues that would be costly to fix.

My recommendations to piano tuners/technicians are:

- Jae Han (978)766-9260
- Mikhail Lioznov (645) 533-1994
- Isaac Namias (812) 340-6161
- Alex Chudner (718) 551-4906

Very young students on acoustic instruments may need a pedal extender to be positioned correctly at the piano and be able to develop their pedal technique.

Listening

A second crucial, often-overlooked part of a child's musical development is frequent exposure to music, both live and in recordings. My favorite pianists whose recordings can be easily found on streaming services are Sviatoslav Richter, Alfred Brendel, Martha Argerich, Arthur Rubinstein, Vladimir Horowitz, Mitsuko Uchida, Glenn Gould, Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli, Arthur Schnabel, Emil Gilels, Peter Serkin, Gilbert Kalish...I could go on.

My favorite introductory audiobooks for young students, about the lives of the composers, are the Classical Kids series—Beethoven Lives Upstairs, Mr. Bach Comes to Call, Vivaldi's Ring of Mystery, Mozart's Magic Fantasy, Hallelujah Handel, and several others. I listened to these as a child in the car and they were pivotal in developing my love for music.

Live music, in any form, is an invaluable experience. New York's institutions don't need listing, but I would point out that many offer programs specifically designed for younger listeners who may struggle with full-length concerts. Perhaps lesser known organizations that have artists of the highest caliber are: People's Symphony, 92 Street Y, Columbia's Miller Theater, and more. Local community concerts in churches, homes, such as Groupmuses are also amazing opportunities for the kids to get up close to the musicians and see what they are doing.

I will periodically update my students on concerts I am playing. There is no pressure to attend of course, but I am always happy to have my students there. If you would prefer not to receive these emails, let me know.

Lesson Format

- 60 minutes for intermediate students preparing exams and competitions, advanced students, and intermediate and advanced adults.

- 45 minutes for beginners aged 8 and up, intermediate students, and adult beginners.
- 30 minutes for beginners aged 5-7.
- 20 minutes for young beginners aged 3-4.

Lessons may be scheduled once or twice per week, online, in your home, or in my home.

Lessons will continued to be offered online if you have found virtual learning to be a benefit for your child. However, some aspects of pianism do need in-person attention so I would like to see the student live periodically, at an interval to be decided with the family.

Tuition and Billing

The **base rate** for lessons is:

- \$92 for a 60 minute lesson
- \$72 for a 45 minute lesson
- \$52 for a 30 minute lesson
- \$40 for a 20 minute lesson

If the total lesson time per family per week is more than 60 minutes, you will be billed at the rate of \$92 per hour.

Please keep in mind that this is a below-market rate! Piano teachers with a doctorate in New York City typically charge \$100-120 per hour, plus travel. I keep my rates below market because I value keeping good students. This rate depends on keeping a compact schedule with students in the same neighborhood on the same day.

New: The base rate has been increased from \$89 to 92 an hour to adjust for inflation.

New: I've resisted implementing late fees; I know how hectic things are, and that mistakes happen. However, the frequency of late payments lately has created a ton of extra administrative work for me. Starting this fall, if payment is sent over 30 days after the date I send an invoice, a \$30 late fee will be added to the bill. This will increase by \$15 for every additional 15 days late. One month's grace will be given per family per year.

Lessons that take place online or in my home will be billed at the base rate. If the lesson takes place in your home, a **travel fee** will be applied per trip. If you have more than one person in the family taking lessons, only one travel fee will be applied. The fee is calculated based on the travel time between your home and mine as shown on Google Maps and is:

- \$10 if the travel time is between 0 and 15 minutes
- \$15 if the travel time is between 15 and 25 minutes
- \$20 if the travel time is between 25 and 35 minutes
- \$25 if the travel time is between 35 and 60 minutes

No family will see more than a \$7 per week price increase at any given time, unless lesson time has increased. If you started lessons in my earlier years of teaching and have had a travel or base rate grandfathered, your weekly rate will increase by \$7 per week.

If your family takes between 2 hours and 2.5 hours of lessons, the travel fee will be reduced by 25%. If your family takes between 2.5 and 3 hours, the travel fee will be reduced by 50%. If your family takes 3 hours of lessons or more, the travel fee will be reduced by 75%.

In the month of the recital, a \$30 recital fee will be charged per child, to cover the expense of hall rental, program printing, and time spent on recital coordination.

If at any time lesson costs become a financial hardship for a family, please let me know. When I accept a student into my studio, I am committed to their musical growth, including through unexpected circumstances. I will make an arrangement so that lessons can continue uninterrupted.

If a switch from in-person to online lessons becomes necessary, because of illness or inclement weather, the travel fee will be credited to the next month in full.

For ease of bookkeeping, students will be **billed monthly**. An invoice will be sent at the beginning of the month for the upcoming month, **and is due upon receipt**. Please make every effort to remit payments in a timely manner, so I don't have to waste time tracking down late payments. Payment may be made by:

- Venmo: @lara-saldanha
- Zelle: is linked to my phone number and email address

If I have made a mistake in my invoice, please let me know! I am usually writing 20 invoices at a time on Google Sheets on the train, so mistakes happen.

Calendar, Cancellations, and Make-Up Lessons

Piano lessons run year-round, including during the summer and holidays.

If I have a conflict, you will be informed at the time of the billing for the next month. We can decide collectively on either a make-up lesson, online lessons, or to cancel it outright.

If you need to cancel a lesson, please notify me before the billing for the next month. If a lesson has already been paid but you need to miss a lesson (for last-minute conflicts,) please notify me at least 24 hours before the scheduled lesson time. If proper notice is given, a make-up lesson may be scheduled, schedule permitting.

If inclement weather or sickness makes it inadvisable for the student or teacher to travel, a make-up lesson can be scheduled, or a switch to an online lesson can be made and the travel fee refunded.

Students are highly encouraged to continue lessons during their school summer holidays, either in-person or virtually—summer can be a period of great growth without the stress of school. If you are travelling and that is not a possibility, students at the minimum need to have some contact with the instrument over the summer. **A three-month break from playing will often result in students forgetting much of what they learned the previous year, and the very frustrating situation of having to spend a portion of the fall relearning.** If you are in a second home for the summer, please make sure they have access to a keyboard or piano for at least part of the summer. If no contact is made with the piano over the summer, your lesson spot is not guaranteed in the fall. If you are in a second home for a summer and prefer not to have virtual lessons, I would ask you arrange for a local teacher.

Performance Opportunities

All students (except adults) are **required to perform in at least one recital per semester**. Music performed should be memorized, except for chamber music and adult students. Students are encouraged to perform as much as possible, at all stages of preparation. Performing is a skill—regular “practice” of performing along with good preparation are both needed for success!

Students may not cancel their lessons during the two weeks before a performance. This is to ensure the student has a positive performing experience as is prepared enough to receive the full benefit of the performing opportunity!

Monthly Zoom studio classes will continue this year, typically the last Sunday of the month at 9:00 a.m. Studio recitals will be offered in December and June.

In addition, external recital opportunities will be offered periodically, such as recitals organized by the Piano Teacher's Congress of New York or by other colleagues of mine.

For students who are particularly motivated, higher-level performance opportunities are available such as:

- Royal Conservatory of Music Piano Examinations
- Local competitions, such as Rondo, Little Mozarts, etc.

Termination of Lessons

Should the student and parents decide to terminate lessons, the studio requires at least two weeks of notice in writing.

If the unfortunate situation arises in which I need to terminate lessons, I will provide at least two weeks of notice in writing. Reasons for termination include:

- Failure to pay for lessons in full and in a timely fashion
- Inappropriate behavior from students, parents, or other people present in the teaching environment
- Extreme inconsistency in attending lessons, at the discretion of the teacher
- Extreme inconsistency in practicing for lessons, at the discretion of the teacher
- Schedule overload, at the discretion of the teacher. I will try my very best to avoid this situation as I know it is very hard on the students. I will recommend an appropriate teacher with which the students can continue his or her studies.

Referrals

Thank you to all of you who have referred me! While the studio is quite full, it is possible I may be able to fit in a few more kids. If not, I will do my best to match them with a kind and experienced teacher who I think would be a good fit for their family. I have also opened a wait list for the studio.

If any of your kids or their friends show interest in another instrument, I am all for having a broad music education, but **would not recommend learning more than two instruments at once**, as more than that comes at the expense of practice time for their instruments. Quality over quantity! I am also happy to make referrals for high-quality teachers of other instruments.

Thank you, and I look forward to working together!