Introduction: Overview
The performing and teaching careers of disabled pianists raise productive questions about teaching opportunities and challenges in the studio, as well, as in thinking about disability as an increasingly visible and audible part of high-level pianism on the international concert circuit, and in the competitive arena.

First, it may be helpful to raise some general questions to better understand the different levels of investment in disability and piano pedagogy that each of us bring to this discussion.

Class Discussion Questions: [NB: versions of these questions can be adapted depending on class size, focus, level of students, and other relevant considerations. The course instructor (or guest speaker) can ask these questions: alternatively, these questions can be worked through in small groups of 4-5 students. The results of these group discussions can then be reported back to the entire class.]

Theme 1: Disability and Piano Performance
1) How many of you have heard a disabled pianist in performance? (Show of hands)
2) How many of you have heard recordings by a disabled pianist? (Show of hands)
3) Compare and contrast seeing and hearing disabled performers in concert, with the experience of encountering disabled musicians in recordings (including in accompanying liner notes and publicity materials, in addition to the actual recorded performances).

Theme 2: Disability in Piano Performance Pedagogy
4a) How many of you teach piano?
4b) How many of you have taught or are currently teaching disabled students?
5) What sorts of lessons might be drawn from watching and listening to performances by disabled pianists?
6) How might these lessons be applied to our expectations of disabled students in the piano studio?

Examples of Well-Known Disabled Pianists: [NB: This list of examples is partial and may be expanded depending on the specific areas of interest of the students, as well as the intended learning outcomes of a class. Both Tsujii and D’Ascoli are pianists about whom I have written previously, and in my current work, and so I have included more information about them below.]

Congenital and Permanent Disabilities
Nobuyuki Tsujii: blindness; Tsujii learns music by ear, using recordings made by his assistants as the foundation for his study of solo works, chamber music, and concerto. Tsujii finds Braille notation cumbersome (although he used Braille notation earlier in his career) and has also expressed concern that much of the repertoire is not available in Braille notation. This performance by Tsujii at the 2009 Van Cliburn competition, (Rachmaninoff’s C minor Piano
Concerto), was negatively reviewed by Benjamin Ivry in The Wall Street Journal. Ivry suggested that blind pianists should not play with orchestras in public, assuming that Tsujii, a blind pianist, rather than James Conlon, a sighted conductor, was at fault in the mishap at the beginning of the concerto.

Bernard D’Ascoli: blindness; in contrast to Tsujii, D’Ascoli has used Braille notation to learn music since the age of eleven, and has not expressed the same concerns as Tsujii about the opportunities and challenges this method of notation affords.

Acquired and Temporary Disabilities
Paul Wittgenstein: left-handed pianist; lost his right arm during WW1.
Nicholas McCarthy: left-handed pianist; born without a right hand. Following up on the class discussion, I mentioned that McCarthy has suggested that two-handed pianists do not necessarily use physical space in the most efficient manner when performing left-handed piano repertoire.
Lang Lang: recent injury to his left hand (tendonitis).
Angela Hewitt: temporary wheelchair use as the result of a fall.
Gary Graffman: focal dystonia.
Leon Fleisher: focal dystonia.

Suggested Discussion Question: How do the various textual and audiovisual resources included in these hyperlinks help us make sense of the different kinds of disabilities that these pianists have?

Disability in Pedagogy
-Private lessons, masterclasses, coaching sessions
-What kinds of questions does disability raise in each of these pedagogical contexts?

Disability in the Curriculum: University Performance Programs, and Performance-Intensive Conservatory Programs
-What kinds of support or advice are available from fellow musicians, including both teachers and students, about how to accommodate disability in performance curricula?
-How can universities support disabled students and faculty in advanced performance programs?
-How might findings from recent research on gifted opera students with learning disabilities be applied to the context of university and conservatory piano performance curricula?

Suggested Readings: Personal Experiences


**Introductory Readings on Music and Disability**


**Scholarly Research in Music and Disability Studies**

The blog hosted by the Society for Music Theory and by the American Musicological Society has a bibliography that may be useful: [https://musicdisabilitystudies.wordpress.com/reading-list-for-disability-and-music/](https://musicdisabilitystudies.wordpress.com/reading-list-for-disability-and-music/)

**Documentary Films**
