

There's a range of benefits from spending time playing the piano.

Playing the Fountain of Youth

by Scott "The Piano Guy"
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For as long as people have told stories, there have been tales of a fountain of youth — a spring that supposedly restores the youth and health of anyone who drinks or bathes in its waters. Legends of such a fountain have been recounted across the world for thousands of years, appearing in writings by Herodotus, in the *Alexander Romance*, and the stories of Prester John, just to name a few.

Similar tales were also prominent among the indigenous people of the Caribbean, who spoke of the restorative powers of the water in the mythical land of Bimini. And, of course, Ponce De Leon, the first governor of Puerto Rico, was even said to have discovered the fountain of youth somewhere in Florida.

Fantastic storytelling aside, thousands of adults and seniors have discovered their personal “fountain of youth” by taking a fun dip into learning how to play their favorite tunes on a piano. It’s been one of the greatest passions in my life to teach adults the incredible joy of becoming a music *maker* as opposed to simply a music *listener*. That distinction may seem subtle, but I’ve learned it has a transformative effect on those who give it a try. I’ve seen people truly change their lives for the better, become more active and engaged, and frankly just feel a whole lot better about themselves by simply spending some free time learning to play the keyboard.

Sharon Hubbard Grassele



Like so many people, 65-year-old Sharon Hubbard Grassele always wanted to learn to play the piano. She took piano lessons as a child but wasn't able to stick with it. Later, adult life got in the way, and she wasn't able to find the time to fulfill her dream.

"Well, I had some piano lessons in my life, but I wasn't good," Sharon confides. "Then I happened to see a short presentation from Scott online. I decided to give it a try. I was a little leery at first, but I gave it my best."

Her best was all it took, and Sharon has been feeling the positive effects ever since.

Contrary to what many people assume as they ponder learning to play, making music isn't for the special chosen few. It doesn't take some special gift or talent. Rather, it's a part of our human nature that can and should be enjoyed by everyone — everywhere.

Michael O'Halloran



"I'm John bloody Lennon!"

Australian piano student Michael O'Halloran always wanted to learn how to play the piano.

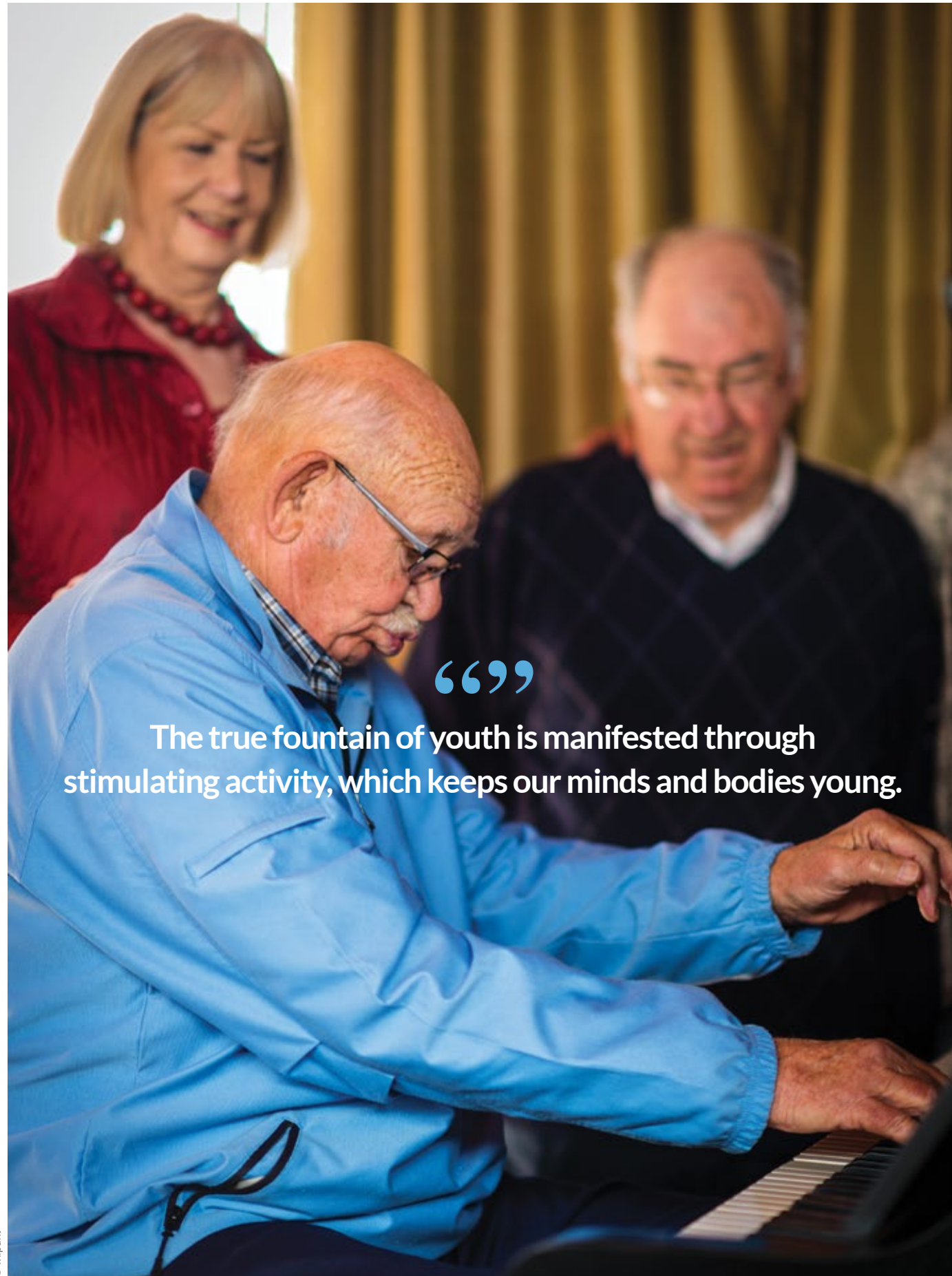
"About five years ago, I was at Lemon Jam, a monthly Sunday event in our little suburb of Lemon Tree Passage, where musicians can hop onto the little concrete stage and belt out some tunes," Michael recalls. "I've always been in awe of musicians; I called them 'magicians.' They were having such fun. I always wondered, 'What is their secret?'"

"I said to my wife Joelle, 'If those so-and-sos can do it, then so can I.'"

"Then I connect with this 'piano guy' who said he could teach me to play 'Imagine' by John Lennon," Michael continues. "Scott showed me a C chord. Then he said play the 3rd and 5th notes together, and play the middle C on its own. I sounded like John bloody Lennon! I was so excited."

Michael confides that his favorite time at the piano is early morning and late at night, and it's never "work" to practice.

"In the last 5 years," Michael concludes, "I have never once sat and 'practiced' piano. I play piano. Good or bad ... I don't care; I'm playing my piano for me. And I'm getting better and better. Sometimes I feel that a piece isn't working for me, and sometimes I rock the heck out of it! I listen to the radio in a different way now too. I don't hear the words, I listen to the chord progressions. So much fun!"



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The true fountain of youth is manifested through stimulating activity, which keeps our minds and bodies young.

Beyond the Music ... the Benefits of Playing

Fun — that’s what I feel playing the piano should be about. Yet without question, there’s more to it than that. Playing piano has some powerful mental and physical benefits too.

1. Music is a great stress reliever.

The fact that passively listening to music from a piano improves our mood is known and accepted by most people, while actively playing piano also acts as a big-time stress buster. Even just a few minutes a day playing the piano can lower your blood pressure, reduce stress, and make you feel much more positive. (Seinfeld et al., 2013)

2. Playing music can improve coordination.

Piano often requires using both your hands doing different things at the same time and forces you to engage parts of your brain that might otherwise not get much stimulation. This deep connection between your brain and your hands further enhances coordination and concentration. Students often report feeling cognitively sharper, even when not playing. (Collins, 2020)

3. Learning to play may ward off age-related cognitive decline.

One study found that learning to play an instrument alters the brain waves in a way that improves a person’s listening and hearing skills. (Baycrest Health Sciences, 2017) Dr. Bernhard Ross explains, “The act of playing music requires many brain systems to work together, such as the hearing, motor and perception systems. This change in brain activity demonstrates the brain’s ability to rewire itself and compensate for injuries or diseases that may hamper a person’s capacity to perform tasks.”

4. Piano playing can help hand mobility.

The simple and somewhat obvious act of using your hands and, even more so, individual fingers to move actively and independently makes your fingers, hands and arms stronger and more flexible. (Watson, 2006) I’ve found it can also help with arthritis in my students who are encouraged to “keep things moving” by their physical therapists.

5. Playing the piano may stimulate beneficial hormones.

The levels of human growth hormone have been found to be increased in adults who play the piano. (Wristen, 2007) These growth hormones basically slow the adverse effects of aging, keeping one energetic and helping to prevent issues like body aches and pains from developing as one ages.

This brings us back to our real-life fountain of youth, which is not some kind of magical water despite all the storytelling and tall tales. The true fountain of youth is manifested through stimulating activity, which keeps our minds and bodies young.

Could you use a dip in the fountain of youth right about now? If so, I’ve found that there is no better activity for adults and seniors than learning to play favorite tunes on the piano or keyboard. Come on in, the water’s warm, and it’s your turn!

For more information or to start learning, visit Scott’s website at pianoinaflash.com/livfun. ♦

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