

# Keyboard Festivals help students share their hearts through music

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Hosted at 10 churches statewide from Jan. 30 to Feb. 6, the Mississippi Baptist Area Keyboard Festivals celebrated 706 talented students, from kindergarten through 12th grade, who displayed diligence and discipline in their respective categories. From sight-reading to modulation to transposition, children learn not only to play piano but also to accompany a music minister and gain the confidence to perform any song before a congregation.

Wyndy South, Mississippi Baptist Convention Board consultant of Worship Ministries and festivals coordinator, emphasized that organizing and instructing more than 700 children would not be possible without the meticulous and passionate efforts of adjudicators, volunteers, piano teachers, and others.

“I work with people who are passionate, who see the need, the benefit, and the eternal rewards, and they help from all over Mississippi,” South said. “I could not do this without the churches or the schools who allowed me to bring this wonderful chaos into their environments, or the leaders who direct the hymns or call people’s names, or the adjudicators who drive in from all over the state to encourage these children.

“All the volunteers, the runners, the recorders, the hostesses, the security guards, the custodians, the people who bring the food – all of these people, more than 400 people statewide, I could not do it without them. So thank you for making these festivals possible.”

One piano teacher at the Senatobia festival said, "I have judged at this festival for three years and always find it a very rewarding experience. Listening to each student is a blessing in my life."

A former teacher who continues to adjudicate the youngest students wrote in her evaluation, "It is such a joy to judge every year. As a student, this festival helped to form me into the pianist I am today."

Since 1945, the annual Keyboard Festivals, formerly known as the Hymn Playing Contest, have helped children recognize their incredible God-given gifts, hone their skills, and share their hearts through music.

For 80 years, this event has encouraged students in their musical endeavors. For 26 of those years, South has coordinated the event and made an effort to memorize the name of every child, as she wholeheartedly wants each one to know they have a unique story to share – and what better way to express that journey than through music.

"I got an application from a student seeking the Ralph A. Taylor scholarship, and she said that playing the piano in church, playing the piano period, is such a joy in her life that she could not imagine never doing it," South said. "I identified with that because that's exactly how I feel. Playing piano is like breath to me.

"These Keyboard Festivals discipline the children and give them perspective about hard work. It increases their math skills, their English skills, and their communication skills. When they begin to play a song, they adventure into unknown territory and learn how to bring out the gift God gave them and just let everybody else eavesdrop on that expression."

South shared about one talented young man whom she had the honor of adjudicating at the Grenada festival. His warm-up exercises alone impressed her, yet the student could not

believe his perfect score was just from his practice.

“The humility he showed, coupled with his talent, was just amazing,” said South. “This young man is going to major in pre-med. I thought to myself, ‘But you have been in this festival since first grade!’ So I asked him what he wanted to do with these skills, and he said, ‘Well, Ms. Wyndy, I already play for my church, so I want to keep doing that.’ One day, there’s going to be a doctor out there who’s saving lives and playing the piano, all for the Lord. That’s a win.

“People’s stories, though they’re not the Gospel, are important to the measure of who they are and who they will become. And if keyboard plays a role in that, I think Jesus is pleased about that.”

Mississippi Baptist churches have no lack of students eager to learn, but they are in need of more piano teachers, South said, specifically in the areas in and around Grenada, Summit, and the Gulf Coast. Those interested in teaching piano in one of these areas or elsewhere can contact South in the Worship Ministries department for details.

Mississippi Baptist churches are also seeing a slow return of organists. In the 2025 Keyboard Festivals, two students performed in the organ category, but the hope is to have more in the future so churches with organs can continue to maintain and include the instrument in Sunday morning worship. Unlike piano, students cannot practice this skill at home, but if a student is interested in learning at a nearby church, they can contact South in the Worship Ministries department for details.

For more information on Keyboard Festivals, piano teaching positions, and more, contact South at 601-292-3272 or [wsouth@mbcb.org](mailto:wsouth@mbcb.org), or visit [mbcb.org](http://mbcb.org).