



In the summer of 2013 I received a grant from the AAAPTGF to undertake intensive private study with local pianist Michele Cooker. Ms. Cooker performs widely as an accompanist and she teaches students of all ages.

I knew that by studying with her, I would enhance my own accompaniment and teaching skills. I had already taken a few lessons with her, so I knew that we had a good teacher-student fit. She was receptive to the idea that some of the repertoire we worked on would be “just for me,” and some would be with an eye toward teaching my intermediate- to advanced-level students.

To put it plainly, Ms. Cooker whipped my technique into shape. I learned a huge amount about using hand, wrist, and arm motions to deploy speed and weight in order to create the sound called for by each piece of music. Whether it was articulation in Bach, pedaling in Debussy, or balance between hands in Chopin, each piece provided challenges that turned out to have common-sense solutions. During my time with Ms. Cooker, she answered dozens of questions and helped me solve problems that I had thought insoluble.

Our work together culminated in a recital I presented at Kerrytown Concert House in June, 2014, where I played solo piano repertoire as well as a piano-flute duet with a colleague. Throughout the process, Ms. Cooker provided not only top-notch instruction, but also personal support as I took on the challenge of performing publicly. All that I have learned continues to benefit me and my students. In this way, the Foundation grant continues to do good—I take greater pleasure in playing, and dozens of students in Ann Arbor now have better technique and an easier time achieving their goals because of the knowledge I am able to pass on.

—*Rebecca Biber*