Testimonial:

My name is Ryan Tressel and I have known Alison Barr for over 15 years. I first began taking piano lessons with Mrs. Barr when I was in the sixth grade and continued until I graduated high school. During that time, Mrs. Barr became an invaluable teacher, mentor, and role model for me. She helped me build an intense appreciation for the piano and classical music in general and she helped instill a work-ethic that I have applied in numerous areas of my life. Over the years, I have remained close with Mrs. Barr and I have continued to play the piano on a fairly frequent basis. I am very grateful for having developed the skill of playing the piano; it is something I will have for the rest of my life.

During these strange and uncertain times as our communities face unprecedented challenges due to COVID-19, everyone is experiencing struggles in one way or another. For some, basic necessities are scarce. For others, highly structured routines have been disrupted. For many, social distancing and accumulating anxieties are beginning to take a toll on their well-being.

As the virus began spreading more rapidly and it became apparent that in-person meetings were going to become untenable, Mrs. Barr informed me that she was going to have to teach her students virtually. She offered for me to try a lesson over Zoom which I was thrilled about; it was my first lesson in about seven years. Since that first lesson, I have had two additional virtual lessons.

While I can say that nothing can fully replace an in-person lesson with Mrs. Barr, virtual lessons are certainly a suitable alternative for the time being. The technology required for a virtual lesson is widely accessible and I have found the quality of sound and video to be quite good. Mrs. Barr was still able to effectively critique my sound, technique, and interpretation and instruct me on ways to improve. As a result, I found myself to be improving week by week on a fairly challenging piece.

After several lessons, I firmly believe that virtual lessons are a valid way to learn the piano and for current students, it can be a powerful way to maintain continuity and sustain interest in one’s musical education. But perhaps the benefit of these virtual lessons that is most likely to be overlooked is its ability to lend a sense of productivity, normalcy, and inspiration. Having recently graduated from medical school, I am currently preparing to start working very soon as an Emergency Medicine Resident Physician. Mrs. Barr’s lessons have been a consistent source of positivity in a time when there is significant negativity and stress. She has helped to motivate me and challenge me intellectually in order to meet my goals.

As we each navigate these times in our own unique ways, I hope that everyone can find an outlet that inspires creativity and provides the necessary encouragement to keep pushing forward and remaining optimistic. For me personally, that outlet has been the piano and I am sure that can be the case for many others.