

10 years in biz

Getting started

In 1997 Ms Tranchina, was attempting to make a transition in her life. Having come from Germany some years prior with a teaching degree from J.W. Goethe University in Frankfurt/M., she decided that she now would like to supplement her income as a Jazz Vocalist by teaching music to children.

In a telephone conversation with her friend Arleen Kestenbaum, she learned about a music and movement program for toddlers and preschoolers called Music Together®. Arleen had taken her oldest daughter to class and she thought it would be perfect for Gabriele. Within a month Ms Tranchina attended the initial 3-day training course and was eager to teach. It turned out that the existing Music Together centers didn't need any additional teachers. Talking to another friend, Silvia Meo, Gabriele found there was a way to teach, by opening up her own center. Sylvia had, at that time, 2 children that were of the MT age and helped putting together the first class, consisting of 7 parents. The Morningside Heights area was given to Ms Tranchina by MT headquarters and the first class was born. Within the years that followed, Ms Tranchina continued to work 2 other jobs in order to build up her classes. Many helping hands made it possible to establish 12 classes within 2 years.

Fun-filled classes on the weekends

In 1999, Ms Tiana Norgren approached Ms Tranchina with an offer to teach Music Together classes at the Morningside Gardens complex on Saturdays. Ms Norgren and a group of families that lived in this complex were trying to create activities for their children. They formed the Children's Play Club and the Music Together classes became part of the offerings. Since that time, we have held two classes on Saturdays for families that wished to do a fun filled activity on the weekend with their children.

The business side of running a business

In 2000 Ms Tranchina finally bought a computer and paper class lists became past tense. It was always easy for Ms Tranchina to teach and manage the office work, but to run a business successfully was something she had to work on very hard. The reason learning about marketing and advertising was so important, was due to the fact that the area was thriving with other competing programs for this age group, including another large MT center just 12 blocks away.

In that same year, two new teachers were added: Antje Zumbansen, who taught on two days, and Jim Mc Nickle, who came to assist and learn. That meant the teachers had to be supervised and trained in order to be on the highest standard and to match the expectations of the neighborhood. So, when it seemed that things were finally coming together, another crisis was on the way.

9/11 and the years that followed

2001 was an enormously strenuous time for Gabriele, personally as well as professionally.

In March of that year, her husband was diagnosed with prostate cancer.

In June, she went through the rigors of forming a corporation with the name Sol La Ti Music, Inc.

On 9/11 the apartment in Battery Park City that the Tranchina's called their home for 8 years was destroyed. Just when free trial classes were supposed to be starting, Ms Tranchina had no access to her home. Her phone lines were disconnected for 6 weeks. Her computer files inaccessible, the key to the storage closet for her instruments at BPC were left at home and the song material for the upcoming semester was completely destroyed by debris from the World Trade Center collapse.

In addition to having no place to live, she had no way of starting her semester or getting in touch with families. When the authorities finally allowed ten minutes of access to her apartment, she somehow managed to pull it all together within a week's time. A new cell phone made it possible to finally get in touch with the families that had already signed up. Everybody helped and classes started magically on time.

The way the families helped during that time was beyond any expectations and it made her grow even closer to her community in Morningside Heights. Many friendships deepened even more.

The Tranchina's lived for 3 months with the generous and loving jazz vocalist, Sheila Jordan. During that time, the big decision to move out of the city was made.

While the winter semester was approaching, Gabriele had no way of getting into the city on the weekends, and hence Jim Mc Nickle took over the Saturday morning classes, which he is still teaching today.

Enrollment didn't plunge immediately but in the years that followed 9/11, many families lost their jobs, others moved away from the city, and still others cut their budget for classes in order to get by. Many scholarships were given out to families that wanted to continue.

The financial strain for the Tranchina's was enormous, especially with her husband, a jazz pianist, losing a 5 night a week gig due to the venue closing because of lack of tourism, and then being basically out of work and going through cancer treatment. In addition, there was the expense of replacing things destroyed by 9/11, the move and the purchase of a new car. All this accompanied by the drop in enrollment.

In order to keep her teachers employed, Ms Tranchina again took on other jobs to keep the business alive.

It took years to finally get back on track.

Harlem going strong

In 2003, several families of the Harlem community were very active in making changes in their community and with the help of Ms Judith Insell, a third location was added, the Harlem School of the Arts. As the area around the HSA was still in a transitional state, it was very difficult to establish Music Together classes there, even with the enthusiasm of so many families. It took years until Sol La Ti Music could finally run 2 classes successfully at this location.

Back on Track

By 2005 Sol La Ti Music was finally back to its old enrollment status. In 2006 it even experienced an increase in classes, due to 2 new buildings that were completed on 110 Street and Broadway.

Afternoon classes for older children and working parents

In the last couple of years, the demand for afternoon classes has grown. Many families with older children wanted to come back to Music Together. Other families wanted to take their children to class after work, so they could enjoy the class instead of sending a nanny during the morning times.

Sol La Ti has now 2 afternoon classes geared to older children and a 5:30pm class for working families. In the planning stage is a class for 5 and 6 year olds.

The teachers of Sol La Ti Music present and past

Over the past 10 years Ms Tranchina has trained many teachers. What became of them? Antje Zumbansen led her own center in Brooklyn. She left New York 2 years ago and is now running 28 classes in Berlin, Germany. Amanda Hsieh had a baby called Abigail and started her own centers in Queens and Long Island. Seunghee Han is running her own center in Queens and also teaches MT in Brooklyn. Nicky went back to Switzerland to perform Musical Theatre. Jeff is teaching in Brooklyn and Queens. Sivan opened up centers for a competing music program in Brooklyn. Betsy Lind directed her energies in several other fields.

Jim Mc Nickle, Manana Ninua and Sabrina Francis are still with Gabriele. Jim still works in Television, Manana runs a church choir and also teaches MT and music for preschoolers in Brooklyn. Sabrina is currently singing with NYC Opera.

Assisting in office work are former parents Jeannie Lee and Petra Dielewicz. Petra also helps assisting in class. Long time friend, dancer Naoko Moriyama has assisted for the past 2 years so she can open up MT in Japan. She is currently teaching dance for children at the 92 Y and Peridance and is a gyrotonics master teacher. New assistants are Mike Butler and Jessie Murphy.

Ms Tranchina is still performing as a jazz vocalist, but has discontinued her work in dance.

20 Years of Music Together headquarters

Music Together headquarters has grown much over their 20 years. Starting with just mixed age classes in a few cities in the U.S., now they are present all over the world.

Last year, the headquarters completed and opened the doors to their new, most beautiful building in Princeton. In addition to teaching regular MT classes and MT in Preschools, they are running their laboratory school.

Baby classes

MT added baby classes to the curriculum in 2000. The pilot version was completed in 1998.

Classes for older children

In the last few years, MT led much of their attention to older children and also started to offer MT in preschools. They now have developed a class geared to 5 and 6 year olds, which Ms Tranchina is planning to offer in the future. They are also working on Outreach programs.

The future

The team of Sol La Ti Music, Inc. hopes to continue with their good work. They desire to grow with the new ideas, programs and research offered by the headquarters, and to continue to give their gift of love through music to many children and adults to come.