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## The Renaissance of the Piano Duet

An interview with  
**Weekley & Arganbright**

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Views Department



## The World Around Us: News & Views

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This issue's contributors:

*Weekley & Arganbright have performed more duet concerts than any other team in the history of the medium. Concerts throughout the U.S., Europe, Russia, and China have received the highest critical acclaim, and they were appointed as musical ambassadors by the governor of Wisconsin when they performed in Russia. They performed on Austrian and Russian television, and made regular appearances on the Captain Kangaroo television show, introducing millions of children to the world of fine music. Their editions, arrangements, and original compositions make up approximately 50 books published by Kjos. In addition, Kjos has published The Piano Duet: A Learning Guide and Schubert's Music For Piano Four Hands: A Comprehensive Guide to Performing and Listening to the Duet Music of Franz Schubert.*

## The Renaissance of the Piano Duet — An interview with Weekley and Arganbright

“Duetts are often associated with amateur music making, but in the hands of Weekley and Arganbright, they must be accorded unconditional concert hall status. They ably and winningly demonstrated that the piano duet is a successful medium for the widest range of musical expression.”

London Times 12/14/64

The first four-hand recital on record was in 1765 when nine-year-old Wolfgang and his sister, Nannerl, played together on a two-manual harpsichord. Four-hand music grew in popularity, and Johann Cramer and Johann Dussek convinced piano manufacturer John Broadwood to extend the piano's range from five to six octaves. By 1803, the six-octave pianos were known as “duet range” pianos. But duets went out of fashion by the early 20th century.

Almost two hundred years after that four-hand recital by the Mozart children, Dallas Weekley and Nancy Arganbright joined forces and today are credited with the renaissance of the piano duet. Weekley and Arganbright have performed more duet concerts than any other team in the history of the medium,

and they have edited and published much of the duet masterpiece literature. Married 48 years ago, their story is one of dedicated teamwork woven throughout all aspects of their life, coupled with hard work and passion for the duet literature.

As far back as their student days, Weekley and Arganbright made choices to work for the team — they decided that only Dallas would pursue a doctoral degree because they couldn't afford *two* doctorates. Nancy was part of the doctoral teamwork by typing Dallas's dissertation, offering editorial advice, and “holding down the fort.” When they were on the road, she often drove home from concerts while Dallas worked in the back seat with a flashlight held between his teeth. A year after they married, their son Lance was born, and they began making life choices in the interest of the newest family team member.

Even *speaking* with the couple reveals a well-matched team — Weekley and Arganbright seamlessly tell a story together, interjecting and even sharing sentences with the same grace and ease as they communicate at the piano. ▲



Photo by Roger Grant

## The interview

### How did you meet?

**Weekley (DW):** I always saw her in the practice rooms when we were students at Indiana University.

**Arganbright (NA):** Dallas went to I.U. from Florida, and I, from southern Indiana.

**DW:** I asked her out — we went to the movies, and the student union afterward for a coke. Then on November 16, 1956, I was invited to visit a friend in Indianapolis for the evening. I asked Nancy to join me for the drive, and she accepted. We had an hour each way to really get acquainted.

**NA:** We discovered that we had a lot in common. We both loved opera, ballet, and the same poets and authors. Dallas was excited to learn that I had read all the works of Ayn Rand, and we both loved e.e. Cummings and Thomas Wolfe.

**DW:** I was so excited. I thought to myself, "My goodness! We are *exactly* alike! There must be a lid for every pot!" I saw her almost every day after that.

### The student days and duets

#### Did you study duets while you were students?

**DW:** No. We heard only one duet recital given by two Indiana University faculty members who chose to spoof the medium. They jabbed each other with their elbows, wiggled their hips to gain advantage on the bench, even combed their hair during rest passages! Needless to say, we were *not* inspired to turn our attention to duets since we weren't interested in comedic careers. Nor did we plan to attend another piano duet recital.

#### What caused you to change your minds about duet-playing?

**NA:** My high school piano teacher, a graduate of Eastman and the New England Conservatory, gave us a Mason & Hamlin grand for a wedding gift! The morning after our wedding in 1957 we fell into our normal routine, which was to begin our day by going to the piano. But there sat only one piano! Seeking a solution to this quandary, we looked through a miscellaneous stack of music and found one duet book which my teacher had used for sight-reading. It began with Mozart, and we were hooked.

**DW:** There were so few duet books in print then, and so little demand for them.

**NA:** Shortly after our marriage, we coached with the two-piano duo Nelson and Neal, who introduced us to the world of four-hand repertoire. They gave us Liszt's own expansion of "Mephisto Waltz." Our friend Bernhard Heiden gave us his wonderful four-hand Sonata. We explored the great works of Schubert, Mozart, Brahms, Mendelssohn, and the late 19th century French composers.

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### The rise and fall of the piano duet

#### Why do you think that this great repertoire and pedagogical tool lost popularity?

**DW:** In the early 1800s, the Napoleonic Wars brought high taxes to Austria. Wealthy families who previously hired orchestras or chamber groups for gatherings in their homes could no longer afford to do so. Piano duets took over, and new symphonies and operas were transcribed into duet versions almost immediately after they were composed. The duet had become somewhat of a "poor man's orchestra."

**NA:** But radio, television, and modern transportation to concerts made it easier for people to be less concerned with making their own music in the 20th century. Probably as a result, the once popular House Concerts began to disappear, and along with them, the piano duet.

### The renaissance of duet-playing

#### What have you done to encourage the involvement of others in duet-playing?

**NA:** Of course, there are our editions of the duet repertoire. But we began by playing duet concerts. Dallas and I had played a Mozart Sonata on a concert attended by a representative from Community Concerts. She said she was interested in having duet-tists available. We were assigned a manager, and by 1960, we were on tour.

**DW:** But, we were the only ones touring and playing duets. There wasn't even a category for us with the management companies.

**NA:** So we were often listed under "special attractions," along with magicians and jugglers!

**DW:** It was uphill for a decade or so, partly because no distinction was being made between works composed for two pianos and those for four hands at one piano. Even the *Harvard Dictionary of Music* defined the piano duet as "a composition for two piano players on either one or two instruments." We needed to create an understanding that the piano duet is for four hands at *one* piano.

**NA:** When we began to tour, critics seemed somewhat surprised and delighted to hear duet repertoire presented in a concert setting, and with the same seriousness and formality as a solo piano performance. No hair grooming here!

**DW:** We felt that since solo concerts were memorized, we wanted to show the same respect for piano duets. But it's difficult, because memorizing a *part* is harder than memorizing a *whole*. The *secondo* part, for example, is usually more difficult to memorize than the *primo*, which usually carries more of the melody. And, of course, it can be difficult to get back together if one partner gets "lost."

**NA:** We began to receive letters from pianists who had heard us perform, asking if they could coach with us. We started our "Four Hand Fests" in 1980, which were gatherings of duet enthusiasts. For more than twenty years, Four Hand Fest participants studied, performed, and exchanged ideas and repertoire for one intensive week each summer.



**How did you manage to tour while teaching full time and having a family?**

**DW:** With lots of support! We performed about 40 concerts a year and were sometimes gone three weeks at a time. We had an understanding university president, and we had to do a lot of careful planning. Sometimes we would meet with our college classes three times a week (for 2-credit courses) when we were in town instead of two so that we could finish the semester early.

**NA:** We took Lance everywhere with us when he was a baby. When he started school, we were so fortunate that my parents moved nearby so that they could take care of him when we were touring.

**Making duet music available**

**How did you get started in collecting and editing for publications?**

**DW:** We knew that if duets were to gain popularity, the music had to be available. We were approached by the Neil A. Kjos Music Company to collect and edit music originally composed for piano duet. For many years we had been disappointed that piano duet scores were sometimes poorly printed and edited. Many didn't even indicate whether the piece was original or a transcription or arrangement. Most of the composers, even the best ones, were more involved in compositional techniques than in being alert to problems of awkward or "clashing" hand positions.

**NA:** We began with three volumes called *Twice as Nice*, convincing Neil Kjos that score form (*primo* and *secondo* parts on the same page) rather than the old way of parts on opposite pages would contribute greatly to a player's understanding. We wanted our students to see the whole picture, and their own parts within the whole context. With score form, it's easier to help pianists analyze. Neil believed in us and began to print duets we had edited in score form, at great cost to himself.

**Your large collection of first editions and photocopies of manuscripts is quite impressive. How did you obtain these?**

**NA:** We lived in Vienna in 1964. Duets were seldom played at that time, so one could find first editions of the earlier duet composers for sale at reasonable prices. Since they were hand-engraved, the publishers often printed only 100 copies. It's good that we bought them, as we seldom find any for sale nowadays. We have first editions of all the Schubert, Mozart, and Beethoven duets. We have only one original manuscript, and photocopies of some others. The manuscripts of Mozart are largely lost; Nannerl, for example, gave pages of the D Major Sonata as gifts to friends.

**DW:** We were so upset about a Schubert score we wish we could have afforded. A man had received it as a gift from a relative, and in 1964, he sold it page by page. That was blasphemous — like cutting up a Picasso and selling it by the inch!

**You refer to your collection in your own editing, don't you?**

**DW:** We certainly do. For example, in Schubert's "Fantasy in F minor, Op. 103," Schubert wrote "Andante molto" in the first sketch at the *Largo* section later crossing out the "molto" (see excerpt 1a on p. 55). In the final manuscript used by Diabelli in 1829 for the first edition, we see that Schubert has written "Andante moderato." An editor crossed that out and has written "Largo." Yet someone else added "ben marcato" (see excerpt 1b on p. 55). All of these are from distinctively different pens. We, after much consideration, decided to use the term "Largo" for our edition.



*Weekley and Arganbright teaching with manuscripts and first editions.*

**Excerpts 1a and 1b:** Editorial changes made in the early edited manuscripts of Schubert's "Fantasy in F minor, Op. 103"

Excerpt 1a



Excerpt 1b



**It's interesting to see how revealing those manuscripts can be. It seems that those first editors took great liberties.**

**NA:** Yes, they did. For another example: At the fugue of the "Fantasy in F minor," Schubert wrote "piu mosso," and someone deleted that for the first edition (see excerpt 2). But, in performing that fugue, it seems natural to press forward with ever increasing intensity. While effective to play the beginning of the fugue in a stately, controlled manner, the numerous appearances of the subject become labored and pedantic if a steady tempo is maintained throughout the whole section. We returned the "piu mosso" to the fugue in our edition and hope that Schubert smiles.

**Excerpt 2:** Editorial tempo change made in the fugue of Schubert's "Fantasy in F Minor, Op. 103"

Excerpt 2



### The European experiences

**Please tell us about some of your memorable experiences when you lived in Vienna, and then when you went back to do more research for your new Schubert book. What took you to Vienna in the first place?**

**NA:** We played a concert at Carnegie Hall and figured that we had really *arrived*. However, our manager told us that we must play all over Europe, that we must be established abroad! So we figured, "OK, round two for concert touring..." We moved to Europe for a year with three purposes in mind: to meet the goal set by our manager of a European tour, to do research on Schubert, and to absorb another culture.

The first memory of our European experience is financial shock when we stepped off the plane! We had set out armed with the Frommer *Europe on \$5 a Day*, and, based on that title, enough money and some cushion to get us through a year. We immediately discovered that the \$5 was *per person*! That meant that we now had to multiply our costs at the Bed & Breakfast by *three*. We had our next surprise: Vienna had not yet recovered from the war, and there simply were not many places to rent. Then Dallas developed a serious condition, a blood clot in his leg. We checked a directory to see if we could find an English-speaking doctor. We found ourselves with Von Karejan's doctor. The cost was about what one would expect for the physician of such a celebrity, and Dallas had to go for treatment once or twice a week!

**DW:** We were nearly out of money in almost no time at all. One day Nancy lay across the bed, sobbing, saying that she thought we should probably go home. My mother came to the rescue with a loan which we paid back as soon as we could. We watched our pennies *very* carefully.

As our research progressed, it became apparent that we would need photo copies (*two* words in those days) of the Schubert scores for further study in the U.S. The originals had to be transported to us in armored trucks, and at *our* expense!

With fifty books of duet music published, it's surprising that you continue to find material.

**NA:** We do occasionally find new material, and sometimes we create arrangements such as our new six-hand arrangement of "The Stars & Stripes Forever" by Sousa (published by Kjos). I sometimes write my own material as well, such as my fairly recent book for the young set, *East Meets West* (Kjos).

### On teaching and performing duets

Can you offer some general guidelines for introducing, teaching, and performing duets?

**DW:** First, it's important to understand that playing duets well is not just about staying together. Duettists must listen carefully to layers of sound when they practice, to think orchestrally with different colors for different instruments. They must listen carefully for balance and voicing, and how to respond to each other for a good conversational effect.

**NA:** Beethoven believed duets were so important to music education that he asked Czerny, who was teaching Beethoven's nephew, Karl, to be sure that Karl practiced duets every day. Schumann instructed his students to do the same.

Teachers should begin duets very early in a student's lessons. Students must learn about listening carefully for exact rhythm and balance, and in their individual practicing, they must be instructed to sit as they will when they play with the partner as opposed to sit-

ting in the center of the keyboard. We like to sit on separate benches angled slightly inward because this provides more elbow room and freedom.

### Editorial concerns

**DW:** We are very concerned about how far one goes in editing, hoping to strike a balance between scholarship and practicality. In our editions, we sometimes redistribute the notes to avoid uncomfortable hand positions or to assist with voicing. For instance, in "Slavonic Dance, Op. 72, No. 2," Dvorak notated mm. 33 and 34 as shown in excerpt 3a. In our edition of this piece, we have divided this passage between the hands (see excerpt 3b). Because the left hand of the primo part is unoccupied, doesn't it seem logical to divide the thirds for the sake of a faster, crisper trill and better voicing on the upper note?

**Excerpt 3a:** Dvorak's notation of mm. 33-34 in the "Slavonic Dance, Op. 72, No. 2"

Excerpt 3a



**Excerpt 3b:** W & A's redistribution of notes in mm. 33-34 of the Dvorak "Slavonic Dance, Op. 72, No. 2"

Excerpt 3b



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We also edit our music to avoid awkward hand positions and leaps. For example, in the Mozart "Sonata in D, K. 381," we redistributed the notes between the hands in our edition to avoid the primo RH leaps which appear in earlier editions (see excerpts 4a and 4b on p. 57). When seated at the upper half of the keyboard, the notation as shown in excerpt 4a is not only uncomfortable but also difficult to voice. Our way (excerpt 4b) is more likely to be accurate. Jumps are chancey!



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Weekley and Arganbright appearing on Russian television.

**Excerpt 4a:** From Mozart's "Sonata in D, K. 381" — the composer's notation

Excerpt 4a



**Excerpt 4b:** From Mozart's "Sonata in D, K. 381" — W & A's redistribution of notes

Excerpt 4b



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**NA:** In duets, there are times when one simply must omit a note written in the score. For example, in the Brahms "Waltz, Op. 39, No. 1," in mm. 7 and 8, the *secondo* must omit the upper right hand note on beat 2. We place such notes in parentheses to make them optional, another example in which score form triumphs. (See excerpt 5.)

**Excerpt 5:** "Waltz, Op. 39, No. 1" by Brahms

Excerpt 5



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Sometimes, as in Debussy's "Ballet" from *Petite Suite*, if a note or chord is impractical or impossible to play (see excerpt 6a), we redistribute the notes between the *primo* and *secondo* parts (see excerpt 6b).

**Excerpt 6a:** "Ballet" from *Petite Suite* by Debussy as notated by the composer

Excerpt 6a



**Excerpt 6b:** "Ballet" from *Petite Suite* by Debussy as notated by W & A

Excerpt 6b



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## Pedaling concerns

DW: The *primo* player should control the pedals. We learned this from Nelson and Neal, Demus and Badura-Skoda, and Vronsky and Babin. Pedals were not marked in the early manuscripts of Mozart and Schu-

bert. Mendelssohn was the first to write pedal marks and since there was no precedent, he placed them above the *primo RH!* (see excerpt 7).

**Excerpt 7:** Pedal marks in a handwritten Mendelssohn score

Excerpt 7



Editors even experimented with pedal marks between the staves, as in Liszt's "Mephisto Waltz." (see excerpt 8).

**Excerpt 8:** "Mephisto Waltz" by Liszt

Excerpt 8



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## New Products & Publications News & Views

### Hal Leonard

**Christmas For Two: Medley Duets** arr. Dan Fox. Perfect for church or studio, these four delightful medleys incorporate 13 Christmas classics. Includes: Angels We Have Heard On High; The First Noel; Joy To The World; Silent Night; more. (1P, 4H) Early Intermediate \$6.95

**Christmas Cheer: Seasonal Songs for One Piano/Four Hands** arr. Phillip Keveren. Six holiday favorites arranged for piano duet. Includes: Caroling, Car-

oling; The Christmas Song; It Must Have Been The Mistletoe; and more. (1P, 4H) Early Intermediate \$6.95

**Christmas Time Is Here: Seasonal Duets for One Piano/Four Hands** arr. Eugene Rocherolle. Arrangements to delight both young and old! Includes: Christmas Time Is Here; Feliz Navidad; Here Comes Santa Claus; Little Saint Nick. (1P, 4H) Intermediate \$6.95 ▲

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The pedal markings eventually found their way under the *secondo* part out of convenience for the printer. Unfortunately, this has long been interpreted to mean that the *secondo* player must pedal. Clara Schumann's grandson wrote in his memoirs about how often Clara played duets with her daughter, always playing *primo* and always doing the pedaling.

**DW:** A final and often overlooked point about duet-playing: *each partner must have his or her part as polished as possible before rehearsing together.*

**You seem to have accomplished what you set out to do back in 1960. Duets are heard everywhere, and there are now student events dedicated to duet-playing in many teacher associations. I, like many teachers today, find that duets are a highlight and a strong learning tool in my studio. We are so grateful for Weekley and Arganbright's valuable contributions to the field of piano duet-teaching and performance.**

#### Back to the editor

Although retired from the full-time concert tour circuit and the University of Wisconsin at La Crosse, Weekley and Arganbright maintain a schedule immersed in the arts. They serve on several arts boards, and they continue to teach and perform as guest artists for teacher association conferences and fundraiser events. Even in "retirement," they continue to develop their teamwork, from publishing new editions of duets to their newest hobby, ballroom dancing. I think we can look forward to many more years of contributions from Weekley and Arganbright — Dallas's mother lived to age 102, and Nancy's mother turns 101 this year!

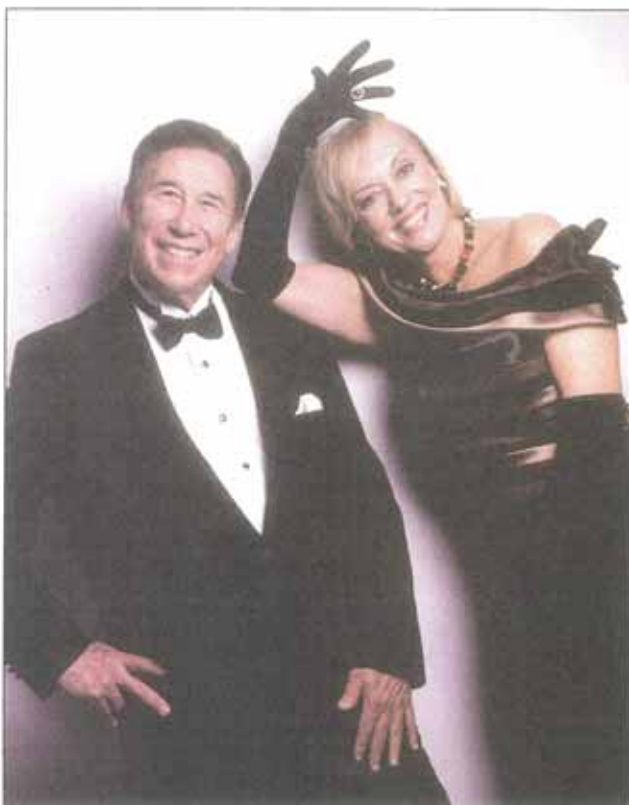


Photo by Jack Mitchell

While living in Wisconsin, Weekley and Arganbright managed a detailed historic restoration of their Victorian home. They say that the project was exciting, but "never-ending." Today they enjoy a simpler life in their smaller Daytona Beach seaside condo. Surrounded in their home by beautiful artwork, a large collection of first editions, an original manuscript by Rossini, photocopies of other originals, and historic

letters, they enjoy rehearsing at their piano overlooking the beach. Daily walks on the beach, travel with family and friends, and preparing gourmet meals for arts fundraiser events in their condo's breathtaking rooftop clubroom are favorite activities when they are not working.

One of their proudest moments was when Walter Robert, one of their professors from Indiana University wrote: "Nancy Arganbright and Dallas Weekley have elevated an entire branch of keyboard music from pleasant amateurism to thrilling professional music making. By their researches and exemplary public performances they have enlarged the field of piano music and delighted audiences all over the world."

For more information about Weekley & Arganbright's publications and recordings, go to [www.kjos.com](http://www.kjos.com) or to [www.weekleyarganbright.com](http://www.weekleyarganbright.com). ▲

*In the next issue:*

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