



MEI-CHUN JAU/Staff Photographer

Norah Jones' former piano and voice teacher, Julie Bonk, instructs Mark Meadows, 14, of Richardson.

Key influence

Piano teacher started Norah Jones on road to fame

By LORI PRICE
Staff Writer

Norah Jones arrived at Julie Bonk's house as a seventh-grader who had lost her love for the piano. She hadn't even played in two years.

"She walks in, and the first thing I played her was the blues," recalls Ms. Bonk, sitting at one of two pianos in the Lewisville home where she still gives lessons.

Ms. Bonk played what young Norah wanted to play. Plus, Ms. Bonk was a girl-talk pal. "She's very mellow, and she's got this crazy '70s hair down to her knees. And she was a woman, too, so she was a good role model for me," says Ms. Jones, now 24.

POP MUSIC

Jones isn't buckling under sophomore-album pressure, 1A

Four years of lessons with Ms. Bonk gave Ms. Jones the grounding in blues, folk and jazz that led to multiple Grammy Awards for her first album. A highly anticipated sophomore disc, *Feels Like Home*, is set for release Tuesday.

Ms. Bonk also coached Ms. Jones' singing, which has evolved into a velvet crooning style. Ms. Jones calls Ms. Bonk her inspiration.

"I have this paper that I wrote when I was a senior in high school," she says. "Our teacher

asked us to write about one of our idols, and I wrote the whole paper on Julie Bonk."

She gave Ms. Bonk a platinum album when *Come Away With Me* sold 1 million copies. "I cried for two days when she gave it to me," says Ms. Bonk, who's working on an album of her own. "It just makes me feel like I've done something right with my life."

Ms. Bonk's musical life began when she started playing the piano at age 5 in Saginaw, Mich., where her mother was a music teacher. "I hated piano growing up, because my mother made me practice all the time," Ms. Bonk says.

She discovered rock and jazz as a teen and joined a garage band in 10th grade. Two years later, Ms. Bonk enrolled in the Interlochen Arts Academy in Michigan, where she played with the school's jazz quartet.

Ms. Bonk encourages her students to go to Interlochen camps or enroll in Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts in Dallas. Ms. Jones attended both.

Another of Ms. Bonk's students, 14-year-old Mark Meadows, is auditioning for Booker T.'s music program Saturday, also because of Ms. Bonk. "She's everything you can ask for in a teacher," says Mark, a freshman at Richardson North Junior High School.

Ms. Bonk says she assigns blues, jazz and folk to the 35 children, teens and adults she teaches to help them "feel the music and visualize" a message.

"With classical, I was just picking up the music and playing what's on the page," Mark says. "But with Julie, you learn to love the actual music."