

# Church musician finds solace and strength in playing the piano

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During the last quarter-century as volunteer pianist at Big Springs Baptist Church in Garland, Julia Roland's music has brought elation and solace to many, while at the same time ministering to her own soul—particularly during a bout with cancer.

Roland attended a couple of different churches as a child, but Big Springs was the one where she found herself most often. After she graduated from Baylor University, it became her church home.

As a child, Roland gained her first experience playing the piano in church, when the pastor asked her to play for Vacation Bible School.

"That was fun. That was a big deal to me," she recalled.



“It’s my therapy, playing the piano for myself and the church,” said Julia Roland. (Photo / George Henson) As an adult, she initially filled in as needed at the piano or organ, but her involvement in the music ministry increased after Wes Moore became minister of music at Big Springs Baptist in 1990.

About that time, the church’s former pianist decided to devote more of her time toward travel, while Roland’s work schedule was demanding less travel.

She became the congregation’s primary pianist, while also working as auditor with the Richardson Independent School District. Although music is not her vocation, it brings her great joy to serve her congregation.

“It’s just fun,” she said. “Our church is a great church. Your kids know everybody. At other bigger churches, some people only know the people in their Sunday school class, and kids only know kids.”

While her sons are now adults with their own families, she still cherishes the privilege of raising them in such a loving church.

“My kids knew the oldest people in the church and called them by name,” she said. “It is just really a great thing that here we have this multigenerational connection where you have relationships with all ages.”

### **Lots of fun, but serious business**

Although Roland insists she has fun playing the piano, she takes it seriously.

“It’s my ministry,” she said. “I can’t tell you how many weddings I’ve played for through the years, and it’s my honor to have done that.

“And funerals—if you ask me to play for a funeral, I’m going to be there. You’re helping someone out in a very difficult time.”

Roland recognizes her talent brings joy and peace to families during momentous occasions. She also found joy and peace personally in playing the piano—particularly during health setbacks, including cancer treatments.

“It’s my therapy, playing the piano for myself and the church,” she said. “During my health issues with having both knees replaced and especially while going through chemo for breast cancer, it was, ‘OK, it’s Sunday and I’m going to put on a cute dress, and I’m going to have a good time.’”

### **Worshipping as well as leading worship**

Although styles of music have changed through the years, Roland has been happy to play all types.

“When I was a little girl here and even when I first started playing, it was hymns,” she said. “But a lot of new music I also love. I also love playing for

the choir and the challenge of doing that.”

A conversation Moore and she have had over the years is making sure they are worshippers and not just worship leaders.

“We don’t want to be so focused on what’s next that we let our minds and hearts leave worship mode,” Roland said.

While acknowledging she sometimes falters in that, she feels privileged to play each week.

“We talk about this in choir, too,” she said. “We get to learn this music really well. We know the words, they’ve spoken to us, and the audience just gets to hear it one time.”

Hymns about heaven always bring joy to her heart, she said, and “In Christ Alone” has ministered to her during troublesome times.

Most of all, she is grateful for the gift God has given her.

“We all have our niche,” she said. “Music is where I plug in. We are involved in Sunday school, and my husband is a deacon, but music is where I spend my time. Music is fun, and the people I work with are fun.

“Whatever your niche is, you’re they one who gets the biggest blessing. We all just need to use the gift God has given us.”